

**SERVANT OF GOD  
ISAAC HECKER:**

**19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PASTOR,**

**21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SAINT**

O God,  
you called Isaac Hecker to preach the Gospel  
to the people of North America  
and to know the peace and the power of your indwelling Holy Spirit.

Like Saint Paul the Apostle,  
he spoke your Word with a zeal for souls  
and a burning love for all who came to him in need.  
Hear our prayer and, through the intercession of Father Hecker,  
grant  
*[state the request]*.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God,  
forever and ever.  
Amen.

## FR. ISAAC HECKER: 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PASTOR, 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SAINT

On May 23, 2006, the Paulist Fathers General Assembly, “conscious of the need for contemporary models of holiness,” resolved to promote the canonization cause of Paulist Founder, Father Isaac Hecker, declaring his life and teaching “truly a valuable resource that needs to be widely recognized and communicated,” that he “can inspire others beyond ourselves towards holiness of life, heroic virtue and personal faithfulness to Christ,” and that “the time has come” for Father Hecker’s story “to be disseminated throughout the larger church.”

*This is the will of God*, said Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, *your holiness* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). According to the Second Vatican Council, “all in the Church ... are called to holiness” and “to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love”.<sup>1</sup> In the Apostles Creed, we profess our faith in what we call “the Communion of Saints.” This Communion of Saints unites us, who are still on earth, with those saints whose salvation and ultimate sanctity are already assured. Of this multitude *from every race, nation, people, and tongue* (Revelation 7:9), a certain number have been canonized by the Church to be venerated as “Saints.” Canonization is, thus, the Church’s solemn and definitive declaration that a specific person is now in the glory of heaven, intercedes for us before the Lord, and is therefore to be publicly venerated by the Church. Canonized saints are seen as visible examples of the effects of God’s gifts of grace and as models of sanctity, of whose friendship and intercession we are beneficiaries. So, the Church, citing Saint Augustine, prays in her liturgy:

For you are praised in the company of your Saints  
And, in crowning their merits, you crown your own gifts.  
By their way of life you offer us an example,  
by communion with them, you give us their companionship,  
by their intercession, sure support,  
so that, encouraged by so great a cloud of witnesses,  
we may run as victors in the race before us  
and win with them the imperishable crown of glory,  
through Christ our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

So what warrants proposing Isaac Hecker, founder of the Paulist Fathers for canonization as a saint, by conducting a formal inquiry into his life, virtues, and reputation for holiness and intercessory power?<sup>3</sup>

In a November 9, 2006, *Catholic New York* column, Edward Cardinal Egan, then the Archbishop of New York, wrote that, as a saint, Hecker would “be an inspiration for us all.” His Eminence described Hecker’s life as “nothing less than an adventure in faith.” Indeed, it is to the adventure story that was Isaac Hecker’s life that we should look to answer this question.

Isaac Hecker was born on December 18, 1819, and died on December 22, 1888. His story can be considered in four identifiable (if at times also overlapping) stages. The first comprises his early life and spiritual search, culminating in his baptism as a Catholic in 1844. The second spans his years as an enthusiastic new Catholic, a Redemptorist seminarian and then priest, culminating in the crisis which led to his formal separation from the Redemptorists in 1857-1858. The third includes the period of Hecker's most extensive public pastoral and missionary activity, beginning with the founding of the Paulist Fathers in 1858, through the American Civil War and the First Vatican Council, until the onset of an apparently debilitating illness in 1871. The fourth is the experience of his final years, still very productive but characterized increasingly by physical illness and emotional suffering. Each period can help highlight distinctive aspects of his sanctity that remain especially relevant for the Catholic Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To say that, of course, is not to suggest that Hecker's thoroughly 19<sup>th</sup> century experience automatically addresses – without any further filtering - our own 21<sup>st</sup> century situation. To suggest that Hecker in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century exemplified a heroic sanctity that is exemplary for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century obviously does not mean that one should be asking what Hecker would say or do in this or that specific situation today (an unanswerable question in any case), but rather to ask what someone inspired and motivated by Hecker's heroic sanctity should say or do today. Hecker himself, commenting on the significance of Saint Francis of Assisi, warned that what the age called for was not individuals attempting to relive the Saint Francis's life, but individuals filled with his genius who could freshly address their age as Francis had his.<sup>4</sup> That, of course, is always the challenge presented by the life of any saint.

## **The First Stage: The Search (1819-1844)**

### *Childhood and Youth*

Isaac Hecker was born in New York City on December 18, 1819. His father, John Jonas Hecker, a skilled metalworker of German-Dutch descent, had immigrated in 1798 and married another German immigrant, Caroline Friend, at New York's Old Dutch Church in 1811. The couple had five children, of whom four survived infancy: John (1812), Elizabeth (1816), George (1818), and Isaac. Isaac's father deserted the family in the late 1820s, and so it was Isaac's mother who became the principal figure in Hecker's childhood. According to Josephine Hecker, the wife of Isaac's brother George, "the influence of his mother was of the most powerful kind."<sup>5</sup> Early in Isaac's life, she became a Methodist and remained a devout Methodist the rest of her life. In an account of his life, which Hecker wrote in Rome in 1858, however, he stated that he received no religious instruction in his youth, religious belief being left for him to decide later on his own – a state of affairs he characterized as typical in the United States at that time.<sup>6</sup>

With or without formal religious instruction, however, he probably attended Sunday services with his Methodist mother – enough to demonstrate familiarity years later with Methodist worship.<sup>7</sup> Methodism, then the largest religious group in the country, "was a religion of the upward aspiring at a time when 'self improvement' was itself almost a religion."<sup>8</sup> And, from an early age, Hecker believed in God's special providence – that God had a providential plan for his life. This is reflected in the first of the six images at the base of Fr. Hecker's sarcophagus in St. Paul the Apostle Church, which shows Isaac as a sick child, in danger of death from smallpox, reassuring his mother: "No, mother, I shall not die now; God has work for me to do in the world, and I shall live to do it."<sup>9</sup>

Hecker survived the smallpox, but it left his face permanently scarred and affected his eyesight, requiring him to wear eyeglasses from age twenty. In 1826, he began his formal education at the local New York City Public School 7. The next year, however, his maternal grandfather died. Isaac's formal education ended, and he went to work as an apprentice at the office of a local Methodist newspaper, where he folded newspapers for mailing. His limited education hardly suggested the profundity of his future thinking. Meanwhile, Isaac's father's failure to provide for his family had effectively transferred that responsibility to Isaac's two older brothers, John and George. They became bakers and eventually owned four shops and their own flour mill. By 1834, Isaac had joined his brothers as baker and delivery boy. Thus, the second image at the base of Hecker's sarcophagus shows him as a young man along the Hudson River wharves delivering bread from his brothers' bakery.

"How hard I used to work carrying the bread around in my baker's cart. How often I got stuck in the gutters and in the snow,"<sup>10</sup> Hecker later recalled. "I have had the blood spurt out of my arm carrying bread when I was a baker."<sup>11</sup> Even

then, however, Hecker was asking big picture questions about the direction of his life.

Often in my boyhood, when lying at night on the shavings before the oven in the bake house, I would start up, roused in spite of myself, by some great thought ... What does God desire from me? What shall I attain unto Him? What is it He has sent me into the world to do? These were the ceaseless questions of my heart, that rested, meanwhile, in an unshaken confidence that time would bring the answer.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately for Isaac's ceaselessly questioning heart, "Hecker and Brothers, Makers of Hecker Flour" had become a successful, quite prosperous business, and the Hecker brothers became sufficiently wealthy to be able to support him in his increasing attention to his spiritual interests.

### *From Politics to Religion*

The Hecker brothers were also very actively involved in Jacksonian-era New York Democratic Party politics, and John Hecker was one of the leaders of the Locofocos, a pro-reform faction. Their background "was perfect soil for the democratic radicalism of the Workingmen's movement within Jacksonian democracy." They "saw political solutions in terms of radical democracy, and focused their activity on reform movements."<sup>13</sup> In his 1858 narrative of his life, Isaac described his own youthful political interests:

At the early age of twelve years my mind began to seek after the truth, and my heart was moved with the desire of doing good to others. The first channel in which my mind was directed in the discovery of the truth and of the means of benefiting my fellow men, was that of politics, a subject which is one of the earliest that occupies the thoughts of everyone born in a republic. Political reform was the first, therefore, to present itself as the remedy for existing evils and of rendering mankind happy.<sup>14</sup>

After their defeat in the 1837 election, the Locofocos disappeared from the New York political scene, but John Hecker remained active in Democratic party politics all his life. His younger brother Isaac would remain committed to the tenets of Jacksonian democracy until his death.<sup>15</sup> "The ominous outlook of popular politics at the present moment," he wrote in 1887, "plainly shows that legislation such as we then proposed, and such as was then within the easy reach of State and national authority, would have forestalled difficulties whose settlement at this day threatens a dangerous disturbance of public order."<sup>16</sup>

Gradually, however, his priorities evolved from political to social to religious concerns. "The many miseries and the great wretchedness that exist in modern society, sprung," he concluded, "from the want of the practical application of the moral principles of Christianity to the social relations between men."<sup>17</sup>

In American religious history, this was the era known as the Second Great Awakening, which aimed, according to Robert Bellah, “not only to convert individuals but to inspire communities so that they might establish and transform institutions.”<sup>18</sup> In his 1858 summary account, Hecker simply said that he took some years examining the principal Protestant sects. Like Saint Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Hecker took time, sampling as many as possible of the leading contemporary religious ideas, none of which, however, answered the demands of his reason or proved satisfactory to his conscience. Confident that “it is not reasonable to suppose that [God] would implant in the soul such an ardent thirst for truth and not reveal it,” he eventually continued his search for the truth in the Catholic Church, “the place,” as he put it, “where it is supposed among Protestants the least to exist.”<sup>19</sup>

According to his 1858 account:

The Catholic Church burst upon my vision as the object to which all my efforts had been unintentionally directed. It was not a change, but a sudden realization of all that had hitherto obscurely captivated my mind, and secretly attracted my heart.<sup>20</sup>

In thus describing his spiritual quest and its seemingly surprising outcome, Hecker wanted to emphasize what would become his lifelong conviction that Catholicism was consistent with and indeed the true fulfillment of the aspirations of human nature – a 19<sup>th</sup> century version of the theme of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Orestes Brownson and the Transcendentalists*

Meanwhile, in 1841, he had his first contact with Orestes Brownson (1803-1876). Toward the end of his life, Hecker recalled: “He [Brownson] was the master, I the disciple. God alone knows how much I am indebted to him.”<sup>22</sup> Hecker “was interested in ideas and enjoyed extended discussions with Brownson,” while the older, more intellectual Brownson, although somewhat way of Hecker’s mystical tendencies, “was drawn to what he criticized in Hecker and knew, instinctively, that Hecker possessed something that he did not.”<sup>23</sup> Importantly, Brownson also “always had an emphasis on the social dimension of Christianity, an emphasis that evolved into his stress upon the church.”<sup>24</sup>

Hecker and Brownson would become perhaps the two most influential 19<sup>th</sup> century American converts to Catholicism. When Hecker first heard Brownson lecture in New York in early 1841, he was a prominent Unitarian minister, journalist, and active social reformer. Later that year, thanks to the initiative of the Hecker brothers, Brownson was back in New York to give more lectures and stayed with them at their home. At the time, besides being an intellectual influence, Brownson also became a personal friend and a help to Isaac and his

family as they struggled to come to terms with the increasing intensity of his spiritual experience - experience that was leading him away not only from the family business, but also from marriage and other preoccupations. As he wrote in an 1843 *Diary* entry, “the actual around me has lost its hold.”<sup>25</sup>

The third image at the base of Hecker’s sarcophagus shows him searching for God at Brook Farm – a transcendentalist, utopian community, founded in West Roxbury, Massachusetts by Brownson’s friend George Ripley in 1841. New England Transcendentalism had its roots in the Unitarian rejection of classical Calvinist doctrine and orthodox Christianity in general – what Hecker later characterized as “a gradual loosening of the Christian principles in men’s minds and a falling away into general scepticism.”<sup>26</sup> According to Brook Farm’s founder, the Transcendentalists maintained “that the truth of religion does not depend on tradition, nor on historical facts, but has an infallible witness in the soul,” and that “the ultimate appeal on all moral questions, is not to a jury of scholars, a hierarchy of divines, or the prescriptions of the Creed, but to the commonsense of the human race.”<sup>27</sup> But, whereas “Unitarianism was a religion without energy or passion” (a religion, in Emerson’s words, of “pale negations”), “the transcendentalists sought to bring awe and ecstasy back to religion – and beyond that to everyday life.”<sup>28</sup>

Such was the circle Hecker associated with in 1843 – first at Brook Farm and then at Bronson Alcott’s short-lived, somewhat more ascetic Fruitlands community. A smart, if formally relatively uneducated, working-class young man, Hecker was excited to enter this elite community and its intellectual life. This transcendentalist environment was quite conducive to Hecker’s intense preoccupation with exploring his inner life, and his companions nicknamed him “Ernest the Seeker,” the name of a character in a contemporary short story by William Henry Channing. Hecker certainly absorbed the Transcendentalists’ critique of mainline New England Protestantism. “Against Calvinism we had a particular grudge,” he later recalled.<sup>29</sup> To the end, he would critique “the Calvinistic error that nature and man are totally corrupt.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet, while benefiting from an environment that encouraged him to value and explore his inner life, Hecker (in part, perhaps, because of the class difference) consistently maintained a certain intellectual independence from the beliefs of the Transcendentalists, thus enabling his exploration of his soul to lead to conclusions quite different from what the Transcendentalists believed. “I don’t know,” he wrote in 1843, “but that I will be unable to become one of the Community. In their life it is clear that they commune with different kind of objects from what I do.”<sup>31</sup>

As he came to understand his inner spiritual experience in terms of the action of the Holy Spirit, he found himself more and more drawn to institutional Christianity. His early identification of Divine Providence with the indwelling Holy Spirit made theological sense of the continuity between nature and grace, which



he felt from his own experience, thus easing his way into the Church and laying the groundwork for his mature thought about the relationship between Church and society and the evangelization of the latter by the former.

Fortunately for us, during this period from January 1842 to July 1845 as his spiritual search intensified, Hecker kept a remarkable *Diary* - an exploration of Hecker's intensely personal experience of being drawn by God's grace, in which we can follow his spiritual quest almost day-by-day. Many of the earlier entries reflect his association with the New England Transcendentalists and his 1843 sojourns at Brook Farm and Fruitlands, while the later entries recount his final journey into the Church and his first steps to discern his vocation within it. Hecker's "cluttered and ungrammatical diary, packed with obsessive self-observation and moments of manic high spirits followed by bouts of gloom, shows a soul in perpetual amazement at the existence of the universe and of himself in it, and frantic to make sense of these mysteries of existence."<sup>32</sup> That said, it remains the "cluttered and ungrammatical" reflections of a young seeker being drawn by God's grace into the Church. While this *Diary* is of great use in understanding the young Hecker's spiritual journey as he experienced it at the time, it obviously does not represent the fully formed religious beliefs and teachings of the mature Hecker.

### *Becoming a Catholic*

In 1843, one week after attending Easter Mass in a Roman Catholic Church, Hecker wrote in his diary:

The Catholic Church alone seems to satisfy my wants ... my soul is catholic and that faith answers responds to my soul in its religious aspirations and its longings. I have not wished to make myself catholic but it answers to the wants of my soul. It is so rich full.<sup>33</sup>

Still, for another year, Hecker continued his inner exploration and comparative study of different churches. He studied the Catechism of the Council of Trent (*The Roman Catechism*) and was especially impressed by Article IX on the doctrine of the communion of saints. Writing in the Paulist magazine, *The Catholic World*, one year before his death, Hecker recalled:

When, in 1843, I first read in the catechism of the Council of Trent the doctrine of the communion of saints, it went right home. It alone was to me a heavier weight on the Catholic side of the scales than the best historical argument which could be presented. ... The body made alive by such truths ought to be of divine life and its origin traceable to a divine establishment: it ought to be the true church. The certainty of the distinctively Catholic doctrine of the union of God and men made the institution of the church by Christ exceedingly probable.<sup>34</sup>

Then, in June 1844, Orestes Brownson suddenly informed him of his intention to become a Catholic. A few days later, Hecker visited the Bishop of Boston and his coadjutor bishop, who in turn gave him a letter of introduction to the Coadjutor Bishop of New York, John McCloskey, who received Hecker into the Roman Catholic Church on August 1, 1844. Subsequently, Hecker and his brother George, who had followed Isaac into the Church, were both confirmed on May 18, 1845.

Like Christian history's most famous seeker, Saint Augustine, Hecker had examined the leading intellectual and religious currents of his time, paying intense attention to his own inner spiritual sensibility, before finally finding a permanent home in the Roman Catholic Church. In our contemporary idiom, Hecker was "spiritual but not religious" for much of the first 25 years of his life. The very personal story of his spiritual search, of his intense attention to his own inner spiritual sense, eloquently exemplifies the perennially human appeal of such a spiritual search and certainly speaks to the spiritual longings of some in our own (admittedly more secular) society today. What was significant about Hecker's "spiritual but not religious" period, however, was that he did not remain that way. For Hecker, seeking was never an end in itself. The point of seeking was finding. Once the object was found, the search ended. Having found fulfillment in the Catholic Church, he never desired to look farther. Rather, he desired to devote his life to helping others – especially other seekers, such as he himself had been – to find the truth in the Catholic Church. Hecker's enthusiasm for his new faith and his commitment to the Church would permeate all his subsequent activities – from his initial conversion experience as recorded in his *Diary*, through his active ministry as a priest and missionary preacher, to his final mature exposition in his last book, *The Church and the Age*.

Fundamental to this first stage of his life was his recognition of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God acting to call him out of himself and into the Church. "Hecker's own intense internal experience" had taught him "that the origin and goal of all dimensions of life was personal union with God," and he "converted to Catholicism because he believed that the Church was the place where that purpose was and could be accomplished."<sup>35</sup> The sanctity specifically characteristic of this first period found expression in this conscious recognition of God's providential presence and providential action in his life and his personal submission to the presence and providential action of the Holy Spirit.

Reflecting upon his experience many years later, Hecker wrote that he "not only became a most firm believer in the mysteries of the Christian religion, but a priest and a religious, hopes thus to die."<sup>36</sup>

## **The Second Stage: The Church (1844-1858)**

### *A Vocation in the Church*

On June 13, 1844, Hecker wrote in his diary:

I feel very cheerful & at ease and in perfect peace since I have consented to join the Catholic Church. Never have I felt the quietness, the immovableness and the permanent rest that I now feel. It is inexpressible. I feel that essential and interior permanence which nothing exterior can disturb and that no act that it calls upon me to perform will in the least cause me to be moved by it. ... No exterior events relations or objects can disturb this unreachable quietness nor no event can break this deep repose I am in. I feel centered deeper than any kind of action can penetrate feel or reach.<sup>37</sup>

By the end of July, however, just days before his reception into the Church, this contemplative tone was being balanced by a new emphasis: "I have commenced acting. My union with the Catholic Church is my first real, true act. And it is no doubt the forerunner of many more – of an active life."<sup>38</sup>

If Hecker's first quarter century had been characterized predominantly by his "Ernest the Seeker" spiritual search, the second significant stage of his life – from his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1844 through his separation from the Redemptorists in 1858 – was characterized above all by his enthusiastic embrace of the Church to which his search had so earnestly led him, transforming the contemplative mystic into an active missionary.

After his conversion, the pace of Hecker's religious journey suddenly quickened – almost as if he were making up for lost time. On his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, he wrote in his Diary:

Here let me offer myself to Thee for Thy service oh Lord. Is it not what I should? Am I not Thine? Thou didst create me and ever hast sustained me. Thine I am. Accept me oh my God as Thine, a child who needs most Thy love and protection. O let me offer myself in a greater degree than I have ever done for the Good of the Kind of which I am a part.<sup>39</sup>

Hecker's immediate practical task as a new Catholic was to discern his vocation within the Church, how to live this new experience not just for himself but for others. For him, this quickly became a question of whether to become a diocesan priest or to join what he believed to be the more challenging vocation of religious life. Already in 1843, more than a year before his becoming a Catholic, he had committed himself to a celibate vocation.<sup>40</sup> He had done so, as his first biographer, Paulist Father Walter Elliott, observed, "even before entering the Church or arriving at any clear understanding of his duty to do so."<sup>41</sup> In 1845,

however, Hecker met two other new Catholics, James McMaster and Clarence Walworth, both former Episcopalians, who were planning to travel to Europe to enter the Redemptorist novitiate in Belgium. Hecker decided to join them. He took an overnight train to Baltimore, showed up at the Redemptorist house at 4:00 a.m., and met with the Provincial after morning Mass. Having demonstrated to the Provincial that he knew enough Latin, he was accepted. Taking the morning train back to New York, he said a quick goodbye to his family, and set sail for his new life in Europe. In the words of one recent biographer, “at the most crucial moments of his life, leaving home, entering the church, joining a religious order, Hecker acted suddenly and decisively and never turned back.”<sup>42</sup>

In a letter to Brownson a week earlier, Hecker had expressed “the need of being under stronger Catholic influences than are so far as my experience goes, in this country.”<sup>43</sup> It has been suggested that the Redemptorists had multiple attractions for Hecker. In addition to providing the needed immersion experience in European Catholicism, the Redemptorists seemed to provide him the right balance between contemplative prayer and active ministry, and their German-ness seemed at the time a naturally good fit for a German-American convert.<sup>44</sup>

Thanks to his Redemptorist formation, his spirituality “underwent a thorough catholicizing process.”<sup>45</sup> Despite difficulties with his studies, what he himself described as a “helpless inactivity of mind in matters of study” that made him “a puzzle” both to himself and to superiors,<sup>46</sup> Hecker found in Redemptorist religious routine and ascetical practices and in his reading of Catholic spiritual writers “a conceptual structure to make sense of his own experience.”<sup>47</sup> In the Ignatian spirituality of, for example, Louis Lallement (1578-1635), he found confirmed his sense of the presence of God in his daily life. “I was one day looking over the books in the library and I came across Lallement’s *Spiritual Doctrine*. Getting leave to read it, I was overjoyed to find it a full statement of the principles by which I had been interiorly guided.”<sup>48</sup> His Novice Master “appeared to recognize the hand of God in my direction in a special manner, conceived a great esteem, and placed an unusual confidence in me, and allowed me, without asking it, though greatly desired, daily communion.”<sup>49</sup>

His academic difficulties continued to present a problem: “all ability to pursue my studies had altogether departed.”<sup>50</sup> Convinced, nonetheless, that he had a vocation to labor for the conversion of his non-Catholic fellow countrymen, he successfully persuaded his superiors that, if left to study at his own pace, he could yet “acquire sufficient knowledge to be ordained a priest.”<sup>51</sup> (Years later, Hecker associated his experience with that of Saint John Vianney, whose incapacity for study he ascribed to “the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit.” He interpreted his own academic troubles in terms of “the relation between infused knowledge and acquired knowledge; how much one’s education should be by prayer and how much by study; the relation between the Holy Ghost and professors.”)<sup>52</sup>

Thus, after Novitiate in Belgium and the Redemptorist House of Studies in the Netherlands, he went to England to finish his formation and was ordained a priest on October 23, 1849. Three years earlier, on October 16, 1846, the day he and Walworth took their Redemptorist vows, Hecker had written to Bishop McCloskey:

I have passed my novitiate without any doubt or temptations against my vocation as a religious, and during this time our Lord has blessed me with much and many graces. ... Perhaps it is not simply for the salvation and sanctification of my soul that our Blessed Lord has bestowed upon me so many favors over my friends and fellow countrymen, and should it be His will, it would be my greatest delight to be with His grace and in His time, an aid to you, Rt. Rev. Father, in converting our country to the Holy Church of our Lord and the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>53</sup>

After a brief ministry as a priest in London, Hecker was sent back to the United States as part of a new English-speaking, Redemptorist mission band, which included Clarence Walworth and two other American ex-Protestants, Augustine Hewit and Francis Baker. On March 19, 1851, the 31-year old Father Hecker was back home in New York – in his old neighborhood, at the Redemptorist house on East 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.

### *Redemptorist Priest in America*

The missionaries conducted 14 parish missions their first season. The first was at St. Joseph's in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. Hecker reported that 6000 went to confession and communion, while sobbing filled the church during the renewal of baptismal vows.<sup>54</sup> Clarence Walworth was widely regarded as the nation's foremost Catholic preacher. He and Augustine Hewit generally gave the principal mission sermons. Hecker's role was hearing confessions and giving the catechetical instructions after morning Mass and the evening instruction on the rosary, which he delivered with such passion that his colleagues called him "Fr. Mary."<sup>55</sup>

Parish missions were intended as a periodic parish renewal experience (in American terms, a sort of Catholic revival, focused, however, on the sacraments), which sought to elevate the spiritual life of the faithful and reconcile back to the sacraments those who had lapsed or become alienated. By challenging Catholics to a higher standard of moral behavior – for example, by reducing alcohol abuse – missions contributed to what Hecker, in a letter to Brownson, called "a higher tone of Catholic life in our country," one consequence of which would be to make the Church more attractive to non-Catholics. Clearly, Hecker already understood that any successful mission to non-Catholic America presupposed an effective mission and ministry within the American Catholic community. "The Catholic faith alone, Hecker wrote to Brownson, is capable of giving to people a true permanent and burning enthusiasm fraught with the

greatest of deeds. But to enkindle this in others we must be possessed of it first ourselves.<sup>56</sup>

The next step in Hecker's spiritual journey was to discern how to put into practice his particular vocation in regard to evangelizing American society. It was while working on the missions that Hecker first addressed non-Catholic America in print, producing two books, apologetic in purpose but irenic in argument, *Questions of the Soul* (1855) and *Aspirations of Nature* (1857). His purpose in those books, according to his own account, "was to explain the Catholic religion in such a manner as to reach and attract the minds of the non-Catholics of the American people." He hoped that "many of the great body of the American people," if shown the way Divine Providence had led him to the Church, "might in this way be led also to see the truth." *Questions of the Soul* aimed to show "that the sacraments of the Catholic Church satisfy fully all the wants of the heart," while *Aspirations of Nature* aimed "to show that the truths of the Catholic faith answer completely to the demands of reason."<sup>57</sup> *Questions of the Soul* also articulated a key component of Hecker's long-term critique of Protestantism. "The supremacy of private judgment was, and still continues to be, the generative and distinctive principle of Protestantism."<sup>58</sup>

Selling some 3000 copies in 1855, *Questions of the Soul* established Hecker as one of the leading spokesmen for Roman Catholicism in the United States. Brownson's review of *Questions of the Soul* "demonstrated a thoroughly positive assessment of Hecker's achievement and an acknowledgment that his own previous polemical style of apologetics was neither effective nor what the times demanded."<sup>59</sup> According to his own 1858 account, after a presentation Hecker gave based on his second book, Clarence Walworth, the Superior of the Mission Band, endorsed Hecker's approach, while "secular priests who were present remarked that if ever the Catholic faith were to be brought before the American people, it would have to be done in the style and way of my conference."<sup>60</sup>

In such esteem was Hecker held in the 1850s that he was included on the *terna* as one of the candidates considered for the vacant See of Natchez, Mississippi (now the Diocese of Jackson). Meanwhile, from 1852 until 1860, Hecker also served as spiritual director for a very active community of Sisters of Mercy in New York, conducting their retreats and promoting the community's spiritual welfare. "God does not confine his grace to the chapel, to the Blessed Sacrament, to prayer and meditation; no, it is always being offered to us, and great graces are received from God even when least expected."<sup>61</sup>

### *Crisis and Recovery*

The fourth image at the base of Hecker's sarcophagus depicts his ordeal in Rome after his expulsion from the Redemptorists. How Hecker went from successful Catholic author and prominent spokesman for the Church to being expelled from his religious community involved a debate within the

Redemptorists about the Order's priorities, ethnic tensions between the community's German-born and American-born members, and canonical questions concerning the correct interpretation of the Redemptorist Constitution – specifically, whether or not an individual member had the right to travel to Rome to make a direct appeal to the General Superior and his council. The dispute highlighted contemporary Redemptorist concerns about governance, American anxieties about centralization, and Roman worries about yet another division of the community. There were also inevitable cultural misunderstandings between Europeans and Americans – rooted in their very different experiences of religion and religion's relationship with 19<sup>th</sup> century society.

In 1857, Hecker with four other American-born, ex-Protestant Redemptorists – Augustine Hewit, George Deshon, Francis Baker, and Clarence Walworth - decided to appeal directly to the Redemptorist authorities in Rome for an English-speaking American house primarily focused on missionary work, an idea which had originated with a previous Provincial, but about which his successor now had reservations. His expenses paid for by his brother George, and armed (fortunately as it turned out) with supportive letters from leading U.S. bishops, Hecker traveled to Rome in the summer of 1857. One of those letters was from the Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, who described Hecker as a “laborious, edifying, zealous and truly apostolic priest.”<sup>62</sup>

By the time of Hecker's arrival in Rome on August 26, the Redemptorist Rector Major, Nicholas Mauron, had already received from the Provincial a letter critical of Hecker, which ironically had crossed the ocean on the same ship as Hecker himself. The Provincial's letter reported on the negotiations for an English-speaking house in a way which cast doubt on the motives and the character of Hecker and his colleagues, and warned Mauron about Hecker's “enthusiasm,” his “eccentric ideas,” and his supposedly divisive concern for non-Catholic Americans.”<sup>63</sup>

On August 30, the Redemptorist General Council met and decided that Hecker's unauthorized trip was in itself grounds for dismissal. The decree of dismissal accused him of ignoring the established prohibition of such trips to Rome, of having “procured money from outsiders without permission,” and finally of “a way of acting and thinking in general ... by no means in harmony with the laws and spirit of our Institute.”<sup>64</sup>

In a statement sent to the secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in 1858, Mauron referred to “convert Protestants,” who “propose to facilitate a return of their fellow Americans to the faith by pointing out the agreement of the Catholic Religion with the democratic ideas that predominate in the United States.”<sup>65</sup> The Bishop of Pittsburgh, Michael O'Connor (1810-1872), in contrast, made this assessment: “As to his alleged Native Americanism, I do not believe that he had it to any improper extent nor more than is proper for anyone to have

for his native country.” O’Connor also observed that “all persons and things in this country Americanize themselves sooner or later.”<sup>66</sup>

Under the circumstances, Hecker’s reaction can only be described as extraordinarily calm and spiritually confident. In a letter to his brother George, written just days after his expulsion, he wrote:

This morning I said Mass in St. Peter’s. Our affairs are in the hands of God. I hope no one will feel discouraged, nor fear for me. All that is needed to bring the interests of God to a successful issue is grace, grace, grace, and this is obtained by prayer, and if the American Fathers will only pray, and get others to pray, and not let anyone have the slightest reason to bring a word against them in our present crisis, God will be with us, and Our Lady will take good care of us.

So far, no step that has been taken on our part need be regretted; if it were to be done over again it would have my consent; the blow given to me I have endeavored to receive with humility in view of God; it has not produced any trouble in my soul, nor made me waver in the slightest degree in my confidence in God or in my duty towards Him. Let us not be impatient; God is with us, and will lead us if we confide in him.<sup>67</sup>

Hecker remained in Rome for another eight months. Armed with his supportive letters from leading U.S. bishops, he took his case to the Congregation of Propaganda, which, as the curial body in charge of the Church in mission territories, then had jurisdiction over the U.S. Church. According to one of Hecker’s recent biographers, his behavior following his expulsion and throughout the period of his appeal “suggested that he was enthusiastic about his program of evangelization ... confident that a way would be open for the work, and at ease with the uncertainty about the exact form that way would take.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, by September 8, he had already had his first interview with Alessandro Cardinal Barnabò, Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda, and had begun his eventually successful appeal to the Holy See. Awaiting the outcome, Hecker actively promoted his case in every available way – including writing two articles in the important Jesuit journal *Civiltà Cattolica*, optimistically assessing the Catholic Church’s prospects in the United States. According to his first biographer, Hecker in Rome “caused himself and the American Fathers to be viewed by men generally through the medium of the great question of the relation of religion to the young Republic of the Western World.”<sup>69</sup>

On March 6, 1858, the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued the Decree *Nuper Nonnulli*. At their request, it dispensed Fathers Walworth, Hewit, Deshon, and Baker from their Redemptorist vows. It joined Hecker to their petition in respect to the dispensation, thereby in effect (but without actually saying so) setting aside the original dismissal. And it directed the five of them to work “under the direction and jurisdiction of the local bishops.”<sup>70</sup> A few days later, Hecker wrote to the other four:



We are left in entire liberty to act in the future as God and our intelligence shall point the way. Let us be thankful to God, humble towards each other and everyone else, and more than ever in earnest to do the work God demands at our hands.<sup>71</sup>

That summer, Hecker, Hewit, Deshon, and Baker went on to found the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle, commonly known as the Paulist Fathers, and began their work at the new St. Paul the Apostle Parish in New York, bringing Hecker's spiritual journey to fulfillment in an active and effective apostolic ministry that continues to this day.

No doubt, Hecker owed some of his success in Rome to his personality. "Clearly his personal warmth, sincerity and piety were impressive and, in Rome, as everywhere he went in life, he made friends quickly and easily."<sup>72</sup> The Belgian Redemptorist (and future Cardinal Archbishop of Malines) Victor Deschamps said of Hecker: "Here is a man who has been able to leave our Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer without committing even a venial sin."<sup>73</sup>

Yet, over and above whatever natural advantages his personality gave him, what most characterized this second stage of Hecker's life was his enthusiastic embrace of the Church to which the first, searching period of his life had so earnestly led him, and to which he now so wholeheartedly devoted himself. This commitment to the Church as the institutional expression for the presence and providential action of the Holy Spirit sustained him in his priestly ministry, even through the suffering inflicted upon him by his religious superiors. While his dismissal had been "the source of the deepest affliction" to him, he believed "that these things were permitted by Divine Providence" to position him "to further the work of God."<sup>74</sup> He was truly, as Cardinal Egan wrote, "a man of the Church."

### **The Third Stage: The Mission (1858-1871)**

#### *The Paulist Fathers*

In September 1857, already anticipating the outcome of his case, Hecker asked the other four to consider forming “an independent band of missionaries, to be devoted to the great wants of the country.”<sup>75</sup> While he would continue promoting his ideas in writing until the end of his life, this third period (beginning with the founding of the Paulist Fathers and Saint Paul the Apostle Parish in 1858 and continuing until the onset of serious illness in 1871) was undoubtedly the period of Hecker’s most extensive pastoral and missionary activity.

Encouraged by his success and armed with Blessed Pope Pius IX’s personal blessing, Hecker returned to New York on May 10, 1858, and joined the other four ex-Redemptorists at George Hecker’s house. Four of the five would soon emerge as the Paulist Fathers. The fifth, Clarence Walworth, who had been acting-superior for the group prior to Hecker’s return and was very much a leader in his own right, was dedicated to the missions and one of the early promoters of the idea of an English-speaking house. However, he felt that the others were moving too far from the Redemptorist model, most seriously in their decision not to take religious vows. Some have speculated “that his envy of the less privileged but more naturally gifted Hecker played a part.”<sup>76</sup> Whatever the case, Walworth withdrew from the group and returned to his home diocese, Albany, where he became a successful parish priest.

Regarding the question of vows, Hecker wrote: “Our aim is to lead a strictly religious life in community, starting with the voluntary principle; leaving the question of vows to further experience, counsel, and indications of divine Providence.”<sup>77</sup> The most influential traditional precedent for a religious society of priests living together in community but without religious vows came from Saint Philip Neri, the 16<sup>th</sup> century founder of the Oratorians. As Pope Leo XIII later noted, a community without vows was “not new in the Church, nor in any way censurable.”<sup>78</sup> Having just gone through the harrowing experience of dismissal from his previous religious community and the complicated process of dispensation from religious vows, and not yet knowing what the future had in store, Hecker may perhaps have wanted to keep the whole project as open-ended as possible. According to Joseph McSorley, Hecker “reasoned that the community should facilitate the exit of dissatisfied members, since in a small group such men seriously hamper the activities of their companions.”<sup>79</sup> In any case, although without vows, Hecker would later write, “yet we are none the less wholly given up to the divine service. The true Paulist should be a man fitted to take the solemn vows at any moment.”<sup>80</sup>

Thus, in their *Programme of Rule & Constitution*, which they and New York’s Archbishop John Hughes signed on July 7, 1858, thus forming *The Congregation of Miss. Priests of S. Paul the Apostle* (now named *The Missionary Society of*

*Saint Paul the Apostle*), the four remaining collaborators committed themselves “to promote their own sanctification by leading a life in all essential respects similar to that which is observed in a religious congregation” and “to practice the three religious virtues of chastity, poverty, and obedience.”<sup>81</sup> Three days later, the Archbishop signed another agreement, creating a new parish in Manhattan for the new community’s ministry. A year later, the new parish got off to a rousing start with its first Paulist mission, which began on December 18, 1859 (Hecker’s 40<sup>th</sup> birthday), and was attended by 725 adults and 75 children. In those early years, Hecker appears to have been a very hands-on pastor - checking that the altar cloths were changed weekly and the candles trimmed evenly, that fresh flowers were put on the altar daily, and that the pew doors were all shut after Mass.<sup>82</sup>

### *A Higher Tone of Catholic Life*

Hecker’s priorities during this period were primarily pastoral and missionary work. Given his early interest in politics, it is noteworthy how little he had to say on the two dominant political issues of the period – slavery and secession. When the first volume of sermons preached at Saint Paul’s was published in 1861, a reviewer noted that they made no reference to the “exciting topics of the day.”<sup>83</sup> In a sermon preached at Saint Paul the Apostle in 1863, Hecker asserted: “I have nothing to do with those causes which lie in the mercantile or political world; for the sanctuary is not the place for the discussion of these questions.”<sup>84</sup>

That, of course, was during the American Civil War, when the consequences of those “exciting topics of the day” could hardly be easily avoided. In fact, in that same sermon, he continued:

If you mean ... that the earth is hateful and the world nothing but sin; that the soul is wholly depraved, and life is only another word for misery; then we reply, no; a thousand times, no! The Gospel we preach is not one of gloom and despair, but of glad tidings and great joy. The Creed we hold teaches us to “believe in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and all things visible and invisible.”<sup>85</sup>

That same year, in his famous sermon on Saint Joseph, the doctrine contained in which he later described as “the groundwork of all my thoughts, actions & plans,”<sup>86</sup> he said:

Our age lives in its busy marts, in counting-rooms, in work-shops, in homes, and in the varied relations that form human society, and it is into these that sanctity is to be introduced. ... For it is the difficulties and hindrances that Christians find in their age which give the form to their character and habits, and when mastered, become the means of divine grace and their titles of glory.<sup>87</sup>

Through such sermons and in his speaking and writing generally, Hecker self-consciously sought and promoted images and models of holiness which he believed resonated well within the new context created by what he saw happening in the changing world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Far from being a simplistic accommodation to the secularizing spirit of the modern age, Hecker's efforts represented a renewed missionary commitment to his contemporary time and place.

The fifth image at the base of Hecker's sarcophagus illustrates his preaching as a missionary. Although parish missions were suspended during the Civil War, Hecker continued to lecture widely. His popular topics and common lecture titles included *Why Did I Become a Catholic?*, *A Search for Rational Christianity*, *The Necessity for an Unerring Guide*, *Confession: Its Necessity and Objections Against It*, *Invocation of Saints*, and *What Shall I do to be Saved?*

Obviously, lectures – for all their popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – were limited in how many they could reach. So, in April 1865, a new monthly magazine, *Catholic World*, made its debut. The final image at the base of Hecker's sarcophagus shows his establishment of the *Catholic World* magazine and the beginnings of the *Paulist Press*. “The *Catholic World* was designed to simultaneously rebut Protestant and secular attacks, carry on intelligent dialogues with non-Catholics of goodwill, offer reasonable Catholic commentary on religion and public affairs, and improve the intellectual quality and cultural tone of American Catholic life.”<sup>88</sup> Since such publications were inevitably read more by Catholics than by non-Catholics, they were effectively part of Hecker's project to build up the Roman Catholic community in the United States to make it an effective evangelizing community.

Perhaps the highpoint of that effort and of his entire public ministry in this period was his address on “The Future Triumph of the Church” at the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866.

Hecker was “gratified and encouraged” by Blessed Pope Pius IX's approval and effusive praise for his efforts:

Undoubtedly those thronged assemblies where you have set forth the Catholic doctrine, and have thereby excited in others such a desire to hear you, that you are invited to address audience still larger and more notable; the esteem which your periodical *The Catholic World*, has, through its erudition and perspicuity, acquired, even among those who differ from us; the eagerness with which the tracts and books of The Catholic Publication Society, established by you, are everywhere sought for, the new associates who enroll themselves in your congregation to extend more widely the good work you have undertaken; finally, the students who offer themselves to you to be educated for the same work, all these are so

many abundant fruits and eloquent witnesses of your zeal and skill, and of the divine favor through which your undertakings are made fruitful.<sup>89</sup>

Looking back on Hecker's ideas from the vantage point of the present, we can appreciate his consistent commitment to call American Catholics to the fullness of their mission to evangelize their society and – to that end - to enhance the quality of Church life, to build up the Catholic Church in the United States. Saint Paul the Apostle Parish's early emphases on liturgy and preaching were clear examples of that commitment to the qualitative enhancement of American Catholic communal life. We may be even more apt to appreciate today the importance of internal Church community life for the effectiveness of its mission outward to society. As Rodney Stark, for example, has argued in his analysis of the growth of early Christianity, "social networks are the basic mechanism through which conversion takes place", and most religions "draw their converts mainly from the ranks of the religiously inactive or alienated." Stark has also shown how a religion "is more likely to grow to the degree that it sustains continuity with the religious culture of those being missionized."<sup>90</sup> Hence, Hecker's constant preoccupation with emphasizing the compatibility of Roman Catholicism and American values and institutions and his invitation to his colleagues "to adapt ourselves to accept what is good in our social and political customs and institutions."<sup>91</sup> Rather than a call for conformity to secular culture, this was, for Hecker, a definite evangelizing strategy. He was convinced that the same Holy Spirit who spoke in his own heart and in human hearts in general simultaneously spoke through the Church, and that the evangelization of American society through missionary action aimed at the conversion of citizens would benefit both Church and civil society.

### *Oil on Troubled Waters*

Like the 19<sup>th</sup> century's most famous foreign observer and analyst of Jacksonian American society and institutions, the French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), Hecker appreciated the problem posed by the fundamentally fragmented character of American society with its fragile connections among individuals, and the dilemma of how to create a community capable of uniting individuals consistent with their freedoms. De Toqueville and Hecker came from completely different backgrounds, had very different experiences in the Catholic Church, and arrived at their conclusions by very different means. But, already in the 1830s, de Tocqueville had famously described American democracy's utterly unexpected compatibility with Catholicism:

These Catholics are faithful to the observances of their religion; they are fervent and zealous in the support and belief of their doctrines. Nevertheless they constitute the most republican and the most democratic class of citizens which exists in the United States; and although this fact may surprise the observer at first, the causes by which it is occasioned may easily be discovered upon reflection.<sup>92</sup>

De Tocqueville recognized “that the Catholic religion has erroneously been looked upon as the natural enemy of democracy,” but he argued that “Catholicism seems to me, on the contrary, to be one of those most favourable to the equality of conditions. ... Thus the Catholics of the United States are at the same time the most faithful believers and the most zealous citizens.”<sup>93</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the Catholic Church was struggling to survive as an institution against an increasingly liberal political order that sought to constrain it. Classical liberalism’s privatization of religion “discarded a potentially democratic element while deepening the rift between liberalism and democracy, a rift with political consequences.”<sup>94</sup> In reaction, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Church sought to counteract the social fragmentation associated with liberalism and to reconnect increasingly isolated individuals into a community by preserving, repairing, or restoring religious bonds. One approach was to assert the Church’s claims to authority as vigorously as possible and to insist upon the Church’s political privileges and institutional rights in relation to the state and upon the traditional constitutional arrangements (for example, the union of throne and altar) that appeared most compatible with the Church’s social and political position, if only because of the security this seemingly offered in the face of frightening and unpredictable change. Hecker’s American alternative to that primarily political approach enthusiastically supported the Church’s full spiritual authority over its own members but envisaged a social solution in which individuals, converted to Catholicism as the answer to their deepest human aspirations and thus opened to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their lives, would be empowered, by combining true religion and democratic political institutions, to develop their consensually based society along Catholic lines. His was a thoroughly religious form of discourse, uniquely capable of addressing social and political concerns.

Prescinding from direct politics, Hecker anticipated overcoming the adverse consequences of liberal individualism at a social level through personal conversion and the consequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a recovery of the communal possibilities of democracy through the overcoming of the fragmenting force of Protestant individualism.

Thus, at his very first audience with Blessed Pope Pius IX, on December 22, 1857, in response to the Pope’s concern about factional strife in the United States, “in which parties get each other by the hair,” Hecker had confidently replied that “the Catholic truth,” once known, “would come between” parties and act like oil on troubled waters.”<sup>95</sup> For Hecker, therefore, the Roman Catholic Church, which he would later call “the organ and expression of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>96</sup> was a powerfully unifying force, binding citizens together, and thus blunting the dangerously sharp cutting edges of conflict and dissension, fusing the private interests of individuals and factions into a common social and civic unity.

In one of his last *Catholic World* articles, published in the year he died, Hecker, quoting an anonymous acquaintance, said “he didn’t care for union of church and state if he could have union of church and people.”<sup>97</sup> Such comments convey how he continued to conceptualize religion’s role in the transformation of society through the conversion of its citizens, and how he confidently expected this to accomplish more effectively what others hoped for from politics.

Like de Tocqueville, Hecker was well aware that his spiritual insights into American democracy’s compatibility with Catholicism and what Catholicism had to offer to America hardly corresponded to conventional wisdom – on either side of the Atlantic. In 2005, discussing the historically contingent character of 19<sup>th</sup> century magisterial treatments of Church-state issues, Pope Benedict XVI said:

We must understand more clearly than we did before that the judgments of the Church concerning contingent fact – for example, certain particular forms of liberalism or the literal interpretation of the Bible – necessarily had to be themselves contingent, precisely because they referred to a particular reality that is by its nature mutable. It was necessary to learn to recognize that in such judgments only the principles express a durable aspect, often remaining in the background and motivating the judgment from the interior. The concrete forms of expression, on the other hand, are not as permanent. They are dependent on the historical situation and thus may be subject to change.<sup>98</sup>

Hecker never wavered in his conviction that what he had found in Catholicism – and what he had been able to find only in Catholicism – could and would be America’s answer as well. He was confident “that neither Calvinism nor Unitarianism or Transcendentalism would ultimately have much appeal to the moderate American mind.” For Hecker, “Catholicism presented a fundamentally balanced religious option,” which “asserted the necessity of revelation and grace while insisting upon the permanence and value of nature and reason.”<sup>99</sup>

Hecker combined Catholic universalism and a distinctly American self-understanding of the relationship between religion and society in a providential perspective, which could work politically within the framework bequeathed by Lockean liberalism’s separation of society and state and the priority liberalism accords the former while limiting the latter. Hence, Hecker could prudentially judge the American arrangement of Church and State as more beneficial than problematic. He was “content with the organic law of the republic as it stands” and opposed those who “under the plea of ‘christianizing’ the constitution,” would “make it sectarian.”<sup>100</sup>

While he recognized “that the church prescribes no specific form of government,”<sup>101</sup> he was not unwilling to recommend it to others who were not yet disposed to see the situation the same way he saw it. Years later, writing about the Church-State situation in the newly unified German Empire, he asserted:

Would to God that the Catholic Church everywhere in Europe enjoyed liberty to preach her holy faith and exercise her salutary discipline, as she does in these United States! Religion reigns most worthily, in an age tempered like ours, when she rules by the voluntary force of the intelligent convictions of conscience, and finds in these alone her sufficient support.<sup>102</sup>

A lifelong proponent of democracy in the United States, he nonetheless readily acknowledged that “Democracy by itself does not make a man godlike; and to be godlike is the great, one, radical need of mankind,”<sup>103</sup> and would concede that it was not the American Catholic’s mission “to propagate his form of government in any other country.”<sup>104</sup>

### *American Protestantism*

Hecker’s prudential judgments about the optimal relationship between Church and State reflected his assessment of the relationship between religion and society. His American alternative was not a political solution to the problems posed by liberalism, but a social solution to the underlying religious problem that he believed afflicted Lockean liberalism – namely, Protestantism. Hecker’s curious conviction about the compatibility of Catholicism and American institutions, surprising as it seemed to so many at the time, was paralleled by what must have seemed even more surprising, his even more curious conviction (in an American context) about the incompatibility of Protestantism and American institutions, a continuous theme in his writings for the rest of his life.

On the one hand, as already noted, Hecker’s

understanding of Protestantism was deeply colored by his encounter with the Transcendentalists at Brook Farm, and though he gained many positive things from this experience, he did tend to see Protestantism too much from this radical perspective and so misjudge the whole. From that angle he could judge that Protestantism was disappearing, a view he never quite overcame ...<sup>105</sup>

Much as the traditional U.S. founding narratives typically privilege the influence of New England over the Spanish settlements and even over the other English colonies with different variants of Protestantism, Hecker’s narrative of American religion regularly privileged New England Protestantism and its historical variants over other American religious experiences.

Thus, Hecker reiterated his extremely confident analysis of Protestantism’s decline in the United States in his presentation, “The Religious situation in the United States of America,” at a conference in Malines, Belgium, in 1867. As even so sympathetic an account as that of Paulist Father James McVann



acknowledges, however, Hecker's "facts and figures mostly took account of a decline in Eastern Massachusetts, without considering the strong roots of Protestantism in other parts of America, which his travels South and West should have shown him."<sup>106</sup> Indeed, already in his 1857 review of *Aspirations of Nature*, Brownson had highlighted how Evangelical Protestantism was the more dominant U.S. religious tradition, one reason for Brownson becoming less confident in the conversion of America.<sup>107</sup>

On the other hand, Hecker followed the Transcendentalists in his critique of Protestantism understood as Calvinism, in turn understood as a doctrine of "total depravity." This became the cornerstone of his novel apologetic approach, which highlighted Catholicism's compatibility with human nature – in contrast to Protestantism as he understood it.

Already in *Aspirations of Nature*, he had warned:

If our nature be wholly bad, desires nothing, and can do nothing, but sin, of course, we cannot be expected to desire the truth, to love the good, to crave religion, to reverence God, or to wish for any virtue or goodness whatever. Human nature and Religion are once and for all eternally separated and divorced. How they ever can be united again is beyond comprehension.<sup>108</sup>

Of course, Hecker's actual analyses and empirical predictions were not always correct – dramatically so in his insistence that American Protestantism was inevitably doomed to disappear. While so-called "Mainline Protestantism" is today obviously in even more serious decline in the United States, Hecker's narrow picture of American Protestantism dramatically failed to appreciate Protestantism's capacity to revitalize itself precisely at its own evangelical roots. An added irony, of course, is that in religion's contemporary competition with increasing secularism in the United States, those Protestant evangelicals are often perceived as allied with Roman Catholics. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "southerners and Catholics, the two large population groups in America that had been left out of the Puritan narrative (unless portrayed as enemies), were playing major roles within it."<sup>109</sup> These historical developments within both American Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism simultaneously affirm and challenge Hecker's interpretations and expectations.

### *Nature, Grace, and Providence*

Although Hecker had assimilated Transcendentalist stereotypes about Calvinism, he apparently had little or no direct familiarity with classical Calvinism or with the writings of Calvin himself. This highlights the perennial problem of how to understand, interpret, and evaluate the largely self-educated Hecker's anthropological assumptions and his imprecise use of language. (As one of his

European admirers acknowledged, "certain lacunae made one aware that he had not made regular studies.")<sup>110</sup>

For historical as well as theological reasons - in particular because of its relevance for the later Americanist controversy - this issue cannot be passed over.<sup>111</sup>

Here, Hecker's theology may be best interpreted, as William Portier has proposed, as "a pioneering Catholic form of American empirical theology rooted in the doctrine of providence."<sup>112</sup> Portier argues that "Nature," for Hecker, "remains primarily a theological term which refers to the historical order of grace," and that he "should be interpreted as presupposing the order of providence, i.e., creation and redemption."<sup>113</sup> As Hecker himself later wrote, "Even though unperceived, though indistinguishable from impulses of natural virtue, though imperceptibly multiplied as the instants are, yet each movement of heaven-winning virtue, and especially love, hope, faith, and repentance is made because the Holy Spirit has acted upon the soul in an efficacious manner."<sup>114</sup> Portier calls Hecker's providential theory of history a form of "moderate traditionalism," involving "an inchoate notion of a historically graced nature."<sup>115</sup> "There is no one rational being ever born of the human race who is not in the covenanted graces of God," Hecker wrote toward the end of his life, "It is the glory of the Catholic Church that she exists from the beginning, and in some true sense embraces in her fold all the members of the human race."<sup>116</sup>

### *The First Vatican Council*

The last major episode of Hecker's very productive third period was his journey to Europe at the time of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870). Eager to be in Rome for the Council, he secured an appointment first as "procurator" on behalf of one American bishop and then as "theologian" for another. Consistent with his continued conviction that the Holy Spirit is providentially present and active in the Church, Hecker expressed his confidence in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the forthcoming Council and assured his New York parishioners that, rather than choose between faith and reason, grace and nature, liberty and authority, the Church would "embrace and reconcile them all, giving to each one of them all that is justly due to it."<sup>117</sup>

In fact, the Council and, in particular, its debate on papal infallibility generated considerable intra-Church controversy (as well as additional post-conciliar controversy from outside the Church). Before and during the Council, there were those who advocated a conciliar dogmatic definition of papal infallibility and others who were opposed to such a definition. Among the former, there were disagreements regarding the definition's scope and rationale. Among the latter, there were anxieties about concentration of authority, about the role of bishops and councils, and about the impact on the Church's relation with the modern world.<sup>118</sup> On their part, the U.S. bishops were largely "concerned to obviate any

movement in the council that would damage church-state relations in their country or incite more anti-Catholic bigotry there.”<sup>119</sup>

From the historian’s perspective,

the council was a remarkably modern happening. The participation of bishops from the remotest parts of the world became possible only through modern means of transportation. On a deeper level, the centralization of authority that *Pastor Aeternus* promoted was a phenomenon that in the secular sphere had greatly accelerated in the nineteenth century. It resulted in a very modern standardization of procedures on a worldwide basis, as is most obvious in the church in the gradual elimination or significant diminution of local liturgical practices. At the same time it called people out of their provincialism and nationalism and forced them into a more expansive vision of the church and, consequently, of the world. It unwittingly further eroded the confessional-state model.<sup>120</sup>

Viewed thus, the Council both affirmed and challenged Hecker’s hopes and expectations. That said, with regard to the theological and historical arguments being advanced both before and at the Council, Hecker himself was probably somewhat out of his element; and, while he had acquaintances on both sides, he seems to have found the overall experience somewhat dispiriting, given his pastoral and missionary priorities.<sup>121</sup> It is arguable that the Church may be less effective in her pastoral ministry and her missionary outreach to the wider world than might otherwise be the case, whenever more energy is directed to internal battles between and among factions and interest groups within the Church. Revealingly, one of Hecker’s “Rules for the Guidance of Writers, Lecturers, and Others Engaged in Public Life,” written late in his life, was “To keep our minds and hearts free from all attachments to schools, parties, or persons in the Church, so that nothing within us may hinder the light and direction of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>122</sup>

Once the contentious issue of infallibility had been definitively resolved by the Council, however, Hecker wholeheartedly accepted the Council’s teaching as it had been defined. As John Farina has written: “To do otherwise would have been out of line with his spirituality grounded on the belief that the ideal church, which was the channel for Christ’s graces to humanity, was in fact the real, historical Roman Catholic church and that God’s providential dealings in the world must be seen as a revelation of his will.”<sup>123</sup> Put simply, his own conversion experience had “convinced him of the truth that the Roman Catholic Church embodied the fullness of the life of the Spirit in its magisterium and hierarchical organization, and he had never questioned this position.”<sup>124</sup>

His thinking in the aftermath of the Council was illustrative of his long-term evangelizing priorities:

...the Church has been prepared for a movement of this nature by the decrees of the Vatican Council on Papal authority, which have settled its rightful position, defined its exercise, and declared these decisions to articles of the Catholic Faith. This elevation and settlement of the spiritual authority of the Church gave the main stroke to the task of the Tridentine epoch and has prepared the Church for a fresh start.<sup>126</sup>

Having himself experienced the divided and fragmented character of American Protestantism, Hecker always appreciated the importance of authority in the Church, as the divinely sanctioned providential alternative to the Protestant principle of individual interpretation. The internal order of the visible institutional Church was, for Hecker, the divinely sanctioned means for the fulfillment of Christ's life and mission on earth, pouring the oil of the Holy Spirit on the troubled waters of the world. Hecker's simultaneously uncompromising affirmation of Church authority and his equally clear commitment to the providential purpose for that authority are, one might suggest, even more relevant in this similarly religiously fragmented century, in which the Church is constantly being challenged not just to proclaim its authoritative answers but also to incarnate a communal experience of the Body of Christ in the world, which responds to the deepest desires and questions of people both outside and inside the Church.

## The Fourth Stage: The Cross (1871-1888)

### *The Church and the Age*

In the present ordination rite, the bishop instructs the newly ordained priest to conform his life to the mystery of the Lord's cross.<sup>126</sup> This instruction is connected with the presentation of the people's gifts to be offered to God. Sometimes, however, the challenge of the cross comes in such a way as to take one away from a more active ministry with people. Thus, not unlike the experience of some other religious founders - Saint Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787), the founder of the Redemptorists, in the 18<sup>th</sup>, and Saint Jeanne Jugan (1792-1879), the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, in Hecker's own 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hecker's last years saw a radical reduction in ministerial activity that challenged him to surrender himself totally to the Lord. Although he is listed as Paulist General Superior and parish pastor from 1858 through his death in 1888, the last period of Hecker's life was dominated by physical illness and emotional suffering, with one of the other Paulists effectively serving as acting pastor of the parish, while Augustine Hewit bore the burden of shepherding the fledgling Paulist community.

Yet Hecker was hardly inactive during this final period. He was actively involved in the design and construction of the present Saint Paul the Apostle parish church in New York City. He insisted, for example, that the nave be at least 60 feet wide, that there be no seats in the side aisles (thus assuring an unobstructed view of the High Altar from all the pews), and that the only outside light to enter the church come from above.<sup>127</sup> In his last years, he had a small oratory built between the Paulist house and the new church, with a window opening into the sanctuary, so that he could assist at High Mass on Sundays and feast days.<sup>128</sup>

Hecker also continued to contribute to the *Catholic World*, for example, and even briefly attended the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884. At that Council, the assembled American bishops echoed one of Hecker's main preoccupations:

We repudiate with equal earnestness the assertion that we need to lay aside any of our devotedness to our Church, to be true Americans; the insinuation that we need to abate any of our love for our country's principles and institutions, to be faithful Catholics.<sup>129</sup>

Throughout the 1880s, Hecker engaged in written polemics on issues of great contemporary importance to the Catholic community. For example, he pressed forcefully for Catholics' right to run their own separate school system. And, in conspicuous contrast to the secular press, he strongly supported the Papacy in its ongoing dispute with the Kingdom of Italy ("the Roman Question").

Every day my admiration increases at the attitude of the Holy Father [Bl. Pius IX] in his defense of those principles which underlie the political order

and natural morality. ... He is resisting the destruction of all human society. The only power on earth that has had the courage to stand up against violence and injustice in the political order. Wonderful mission for God's Church!<sup>130</sup>

The late 19<sup>th</sup> century was also an era of widespread, if ultimately erroneous, race-based theorizing, which influenced both intellectuals and policymakers, and which increasingly influenced Hecker as well. While convalescing in Europe in the 1870s in the wake of Vatican I, he began his essay *An Exposition of the Church in view of recent Difficulties and Controversies and the Present Needs of the Church*, which eventually became the basis for the first chapter of Hecker's final book, *The Church and the Age*, published in the year before his death. It was in this period that he expressed his controversial views on the differences between what he called the "Latin and Celtic" races, whose influence he believed was passing, and the "Anglo-Saxon" races now rising in importance. Needless to say, this was not universally well received. The Belgian Redemptorist Cardinal Deschamps, who, it should be recalled, considered Hecker as having left the Redemptorists without committing even a venial sin, reacted strongly. Deschamps declared:

I cannot share the opinion of the author in regard to races, progress, and the march of empires. It is not strictly true nor is it a strong argument. The author should distinguish more carefully in these matters the role of the Church and the role of man – this will bring out the truth.<sup>131</sup>

That said, *The Church and the Age*, published the year before Hecker's death, remains the most comprehensive summary of his most mature thought on the themes that had preoccupied him for most of his life. It offers Hecker's mature insights on his lifelong faith in the simultaneously interior action of the Holy Spirit within the individual and the Holy Spirit's exterior action in the authority of the Church. It also represents Hecker's final and mature formulation of his core convictions about the Church and the contemporary world in general and in particular the vexing question of Church and State in the United States, Italy, and France (the latter two being the countries where Church-State relations were persistently neuralgic at the time and where such issues had the most immediate impact on the government of the Universal Church). Finally, it articulates again Hecker's interpretation and critique of Protestantism. Repeating in his admittedly unsystematic way themes long prominent in his earlier speaking and writing, *The Church and the Age* can confidently be turned to as a summary and synthesis of his most fully developed and mature spiritual theology.

### *A Broadening Vision*

Much of what Hecker admired about America, including the egalitarianism and sociability which de Tocqueville analyzed and which Jacksonian democracy celebrated, no longer characterizes the post-industrial, corporate, centralized

state which the United States has become. Hecker's America is gone forever. And, of course, American Catholicism - the religious remedy he posited for the social fragmentation which the United States still experiences - has changed as well. While conversions continued both during and after Hecker's lifetime, they have never been in the numbers necessary to make the kind of impact on society Hecker had hoped for. What did make an impact, then and now, has been immigration. As a New Yorker, born and bred in a city of immigrants and pastor of a parish of immigrants, Hecker could hardly ignore this. In spite of his aforementioned susceptibility to then fashionable theories about "races, progress, and the march of empires," his more spiritually mature thinking nonetheless incorporated immigration into his faith in America's providential significance.

But the discerning mind will not fail to see that the republic and the Catholic Church are working together under the same divine guidance, forming the various races of men and nationalities into a homogeneous people, and by their united action giving a bright promise of a broader and higher development of man than has been heretofore accomplished.<sup>132</sup>

Likewise, while Hecker always adamantly opposed Protestantism, he was also respectful of Protestants as people and quite comfortable with the "friendly and familiar" outreach to non-Catholics, the propriety of which Pope Leo XII would later affirm.<sup>133</sup>

In our intercourse with Protestants, were we to dwell more on the truths which they hold in common with us, & less on those in which they differ from us, the opposite course from that which is commonly taken, we should open the way for the more speedy return of many of them to the fold of the Church, and embrace all that she teaches. Is not this the course pointed out by Holy Scripture when it says: "Study those things which make for peace."<sup>134</sup>

### *Physical and Institutional Challenges*

By late 1871, however, Hecker was increasingly ill. He himself at times ascribed his physical decline in part to the excessive austerity of his younger years when, he said, "I practiced frightful penances, and now I fear that much of my physical helplessness is due to that cause."<sup>135</sup> Hecker, however, had been ill, although not so seriously, on other occasions in his life. One recent biographer has noted that recurrent periods of illness "always came when his vision was clear but his practical alternatives uncertain."<sup>136</sup> Certainly, his last years were characterized by the inevitable human tension – not unique to Hecker among saintly religious founders – between the vision of the founder and the burden of implementing it in viable human institutions. Thus, for example, Hecker had ambitious ideas about a possible Paulist role in what today would be termed the "new evangelization" of Europe. "The past was for the United States, the future, for the world," he wrote,

calling himself “An International Catholic.”<sup>137</sup> But the reality competing with such bold visions was, in the words of one recent biographer:

the struggling life of the Catholic Publication Society, the modest success of its Sunday School paper, the tiny improvement in Paulist affairs evidenced by the resumption of the missions, and the growth of the parish, where Deshon and Young were trying to find the money to build a scaled down version of the “basilica” Hecker had planned earlier.<sup>138</sup>

Not for the first time in the history of religious life in the Church, it would fall to others – notably Augustine Hewit and George Deshon – to translate Hecker’s religious vision into lasting human institutions, among them the Paulist Fathers and their many ministries.

On his way home from Europe in 1870, Hecker had written that he did “not wish to cross the Atlantic ever again.”<sup>139</sup> From 1873 to 1875, however, he sought relief from his illness in travel - to Europe, Egypt, the Holy Land, and back to Europe, managing to be in Rome to celebrate Archbishop John McCloskey’s elevation as the first American Cardinal in March 1875.

It was while traveling in Europe that Hecker first met Abbe Xavier Dufresne of Geneva, in whose opinion he “was, after Pere Lacordaire, the most remarkable sacred orator of the century.” After Hecker’s death, Dufresne wrote, “I have never failed a single day to invoke him in my prayers, and to his intercession I attribute many graces obtained, some of them very important.”<sup>140</sup>

Hecker’s two years abroad apparently accomplished little by way of his physical recovery, but they were very significant spiritually; and he was profoundly impressed by his experience of the Holy Land.

In reciting the Gloria and the Credo, after having been in the localities where the great mysteries which they express took place, one is impressed in a wonderful manner with their actuality. The truths of our holy faith seem to saturate one’s blood, enter into one’s flesh, and penetrate even to the marrow of one’s bones.<sup>141</sup>

Preaching to pilgrims in the Garden of Gethsemane that April, Hecker, physically ill and suffering spiritually, broke into tears as he spoke of Christ’s sufferings.<sup>142</sup>

Earlier, in Egypt in December 1873, he had taken a trip up the Nile River in a boat named after the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrating Mass at missionary stations along the river. He was particularly impressed and spiritually moved by the prominent part played by prayer in the daily lives of ordinary Muslims, and wrote to his brother: “We Christians might learn from them a lesson on this point and not a small one either. For prayer is the beginning of all other graces.”<sup>143</sup>



By 1875, Hecker had been away already two years, and Hewit wrote Hecker that it was his duty to return and entrust his future to Providence and “to those of your brethren who have the right to determine what your duty is.” Hewit further reminded him that “it would be contrary to the spirit of a religious state to prolong such an enjoyment of privileges which only rich men can afford.”<sup>144</sup> Hecker accepted his community’s judgment and dutifully returned to New York that fall. In December 1875, he was unanimously reelected Superior for another nine years. Later, he wrote, “I am willing to continue to wait on Divine Providence as things are, with constant prayer for light and strength, and continue to do as I am now doing, all I can for the Community.”<sup>145</sup> In 1884, Hecker was reelected Superior one final time, but on this occasion the election was contested and required 11 ballots over the course of five days.

Obedient to his religious community, he also “preserved to a high degree all the family feelings. He venerated his mother, he talked voluntarily of his nieces when staying with intimate friends, and showed towards his brother George so profound an affection that he regarded him as a second self.”<sup>146</sup>

### *The Mission of the Holy Spirit*

In the first period of his life, animated by a self-conscious appreciation of God’s Providence, Hecker had discerned the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in God’s providential care for him and had identified his own inner aspirations and longings with the action of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Thereafter, one of his strikingly distinctive emphases as a Catholic - in his own personal spiritual life, in his reflections regarding his Paulist religious community, and in his general spiritual teaching – would be his intense personal devotion to the Holy Spirit and his desire to foster among the faithful an increased appreciation of and openness to the fundamental activity and inspiration of the Holy Spirit operating in each individual and in the life of the Church. Throughout his Catholic life, his unfailing commitment to the Church’s mission remained rooted in a deeply felt, intensely lived personal experience of the indwelling presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

An act of entire faith in the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit, and complete confidence in its action in all things – in its infinite love, wisdom, power; that it is under its influence and promptings up to now my life has been led. Though not clearly seen or known, He has directed every step. On this faith, on this principle, promised to act now and in time to come. To be above fear, doubt, hesitation, or timidity, but patient, obedient, and stable.<sup>147</sup>

One can discern early anticipations of Hecker’s appreciation of the mission of the Holy Spirit already in his pre-conversion period as a young spiritual seeker, searching for God among the multiple religious and cultural expressions existing in his time, most famously among the Transcendentalists and at Brook Farm. At that time, however, his search preoccupied him primarily with Christological and

ecclesiological questions, and Hecker's more properly developed reflections on the Holy Spirit were most fully expressed later in his life, largely in somewhat scattered form in mostly unpublished essays written in the 1870s and 1880s in the aftermath of the First Vatican Council and then in *The Church and the Age*, a collection of twelve articles published as a book in the year before his death.<sup>148</sup>

Hecker was no systematic theologian and did not write as one. What he wrote was not some "theology" of the Holy Spirit but an appreciation of how the activity of the Holy Spirit is experienced in the Church and of the individual, ecclesial, and social effects which flow from openness to that divine activity in the world.

Thus, in proposing the Catholic Church as "the radical remedy of all our evils," Hecker immediately pivoted to an exposition of the Mission of the Holy Spirit.

It cannot be too deeply and firmly impressed on the mind that the Church is actuated by the instinct of the Holy Spirit, and to discern clearly its action, and to cooperate with it effectually, is the highest employment of our faculties, and at the same time the primary source of the greatest good to society. ... The essential and universal principle which saves and sanctifies souls is the Holy Spirit. ... The actual and habitual guidance of the soul by the Holy Spirit is the essential principle of all divine life. ... Christ's mission was to give the Holy Spirit more abundantly. ...

In accordance with the Sacred Scriptures, the Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Spirit is infused, with all his gifts, into our souls by the sacrament of baptism, and that without His actual prompting or inspiration, and aid, no thought or act or even wish, tending directly towards our true destiny, is possible.<sup>149</sup>

On this basis, therefore, Hecker proposed his essential program, first, for personal Christian perfection:

The whole aim of the science of Christian perfection is to instruct men how to remove the hindrances in the way of the action of the Holy Spirit, and how to cultivate those virtues which are most favorable to His sollicitations and inspirations. Thus the sum of spiritual life consists in observing and yielding to the movements of the Spirit of God in our soul, employing for this purpose all the exercises of prayer, spiritual readings, sacraments, the practice of virtues, and good works.<sup>150</sup>

And inseparably then the social renewal the world needs:

The light the age requires for its renewal can come only from the same source. The renewal of the age depends on the renewal of religion. The renewal of religion depends upon a greater effusion of the creative and renewing power of the Holy Spirit. The greater effusion of the Holy Spirit depends on the giving of increased attention to His movements and

inspirations in the soul. The radical and adequate remedy for all the evils of our age and the source of all true progress, consist in increased attention and fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul.<sup>151</sup>

Here Hecker has effectively posited three renewals: that of the age (the world, society), dependent on that of religion (the Church), itself inseparable from that of the individual.

In a diary begun in Egypt, he deepened his lifelong reflection on the mission of the Holy Spirit within the life of the Church:

To wish to enlarge the action of the Holy Spirit in the Soul, independently of, or without the knowledge & appreciation of the necessity of the external authority of the Church, her discipline, her laws, her worship, etc. & the spirit of obedience, would only be opening the door to eccentricity, schism, heresy, & spiritual death.

He who does not see the external authority of the Church, and the internal action of the Holy Spirit in an inseparable synthesis, has not a right or just conception of either.<sup>152</sup>

With that in mind, Hecker suggested:

Suppose the time has come for a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit in the Church & her members, and thus a great increase of the sanctity with all that flows from sanctity takes place, will not this be the means best adapted, most efficacious in the conversion of those races which are not yet Christians? <sup>153</sup>

Lest there be any ambiguity about how Hecker understood “a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit in the Church,” Hecker himself wrote to Hewit: “I anticipate no special outpouring of the Holy Spirit – in the miraculous sense, no more than the present action, or the action of the Church in any age was miraculous.”<sup>154</sup> Through the Church and its sacraments and its worship, “the object of Christ in the church is,” wrote Hecker in his later years, “to come in personal contact with the soul, and by the power of his grace to wash away its sins, communicate to it fellowship with God as the heavenly Father, and thereby to sanctify it.”<sup>155</sup>

### *The Shadow of Death*

That there was something more than the merely physical about Hecker’s suffering seemed clear enough to his closest collaborators. While he was still in Europe in 1874, Hewit wrote him that he was “in no danger of dying for some time” and that he was suffering from a “sentiment in the soul, not a symptom of bodily disease.”<sup>156</sup> That same year, his 78-year old Methodist mother advised him: “I cannot help you, but you know where to go. The Lord is all sufficient.”<sup>157</sup>

Indeed, his illness intensely focused Hecker on the one thing most important – his relationship with God – ultimately a greater and more important thing than anything one does in life. In sentiments that recall Saint Thomas Aquinas' famous experience shortly before his death, Hecker expressed his own experience:

There was once a priest who had been very active for God, until at last God gave him a knowledge of the Divine Majesty. After seeing the majesty of God that priest felt very strange and was much humbled, and knew how little a thing he was in comparison with God.<sup>158</sup>

Commenting on this, his closest companion in those years wrote that his

inner trouble was a perpetual facing of his Divine Accuser and Judge, a trembling woe at the sight of Infinite Majesty on the part of one for whom the Divine love was the one necessary of life for soul and body. Yet he knew that this was really a higher form of prayer than any he had yet enjoyed, that it steadily purified his understanding by compelling ceaselessly repeated acts of faith in God's love, purified his will by constant resignation of every joy except God alone – God received by any mode in which it might please the Divine Majesty to reveal Himself.<sup>159</sup>

In those final years, Hecker lived what one of his favorite spiritual authors, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, called “the sacrament of the present moment.” Caussade had written: “To be satisfied with the present moment is to relish and adore the divine will moving through all we have to do and suffer as events crowd in upon us.”<sup>160</sup>

On December 22, 1888, Isaac Hecker died. In his eulogy at the funeral four days later, the Jesuit Provincial recounted the scene at Hecker's deathbed, when his fellow Paulists asked for his final blessing. Hecker

roused himself from the depth of pain and exhaustion, and his ashen lips which death was sealing pronounced the singular words ... “I will give it in the shadow of death.” His feeble hands were raised, and like a soldier dying on the field of battle he reconsecrated his followers in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for the struggle in which they had chosen him as Leader.<sup>161</sup>

Eulogizing Hecker after his death, Bishop John J. Keane wrote:

He has planted germs of thought, of aspiration, of life-purpose in many and many a soul, in every rank of the church, in every corner of our country; and they will go on fructifying, to his honor, as well as for the glory of God and the welfare of the world.<sup>162</sup>

## Conclusion

In a letter to Paulist Father Walter Elliott, ten years after Hecker's death, James Cardinal Gibbons expressed his appreciation:

He was undoubtedly a providential agent for the spread of the Catholic faith in our country, and did immense good by drawing non-Catholics nearer to us, allaying prejudice, obtaining a fair hearing for our holy religion, besides directly and indirectly making a multitude of converts. His spirit was that of a faithful child of Holy Church, every way Catholic in the fullest meaning of the term, and his life adorned with the fruits of personal piety; but especially he was inspired with a zeal for souls of the true apostolic order, aggressive and yet prudent, attracting Protestants and yet entirely orthodox. Divine Providence associated with him a body of men animated by the same noble spirit.<sup>163</sup>

In the first phase of his life, Hecker, animated by an increasingly conscious appreciation of God's Providence, had opened himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, whose presence and action he discerned in God's care for him, and through that experience he recognized the grace to attach himself to the Roman Catholic Church for the rest of his life. Himself a product of the religious fragmentation of American society, but drawn by God's providential grace to seek the light of truth and find it in the unity of the Catholic Church, he then committed himself completely to share what he had found with others similarly inspired to seek and to find, and to whom his story continues to speak. All his diverse pastoral and missionary efforts and accomplishments would remain rooted in his abiding trust in God's presence and action in his own life and in the world in which he lived.

Thus, in the second stage of his life, his enthusiastic embrace of the Church led him to an active vocation as a priest and religious, giving his all to cooperate with God's grace in serving God, the Church, and his contemporaries.

I believe that providence calls me to an active life; further, that he calls me to America to convert a certain class of persons amongst whom I found myself before my own conversion ... But to convince me that this work will not be mine, and that I shall be only the mean instrument for the accomplishment of His designs, He wills me to be deprived of all human means, so that I shall not attribute his glory to myself. Contrary to my first provisions, He has unmistakably shown me that it is by neither learning nor eloquence that he calls me to convert others but solely by His grace and power.<sup>164</sup>

Formed by Providence through the crucible of contradictory experience into a thoroughly committed "man of the Church," he lived a consecrated life of priestly mission as a parish pastor, a preacher of missions, a public speaker lecturing to

Catholic and non-Catholic audiences, an author and apologist, and the founder of a religious community, which, as a canonically approved clerical Society of Apostolic Life in the contemporary Church, continues his charism “to be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and a prophetic instrument for His sanctifying action.”<sup>165</sup> It was precisely his love of his newly found faith, explains the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, “that led Isaac Hecker to dedicate his life to serving Christ and Catholic Americans.”<sup>166</sup>

In the third (and continuing into the final) period of his life, this “man of the Church” concentrated on the Church’s perennially essential mission of evangelization, both within the Church and outward to the world – founding “a congregation of priests whose ministry reflects even today the spirit which he breathed into it”<sup>167</sup> and planting his vision in the solid soil of the first American men’s religious community’s expanding mission and their growing parish in Manhattan. What he lacked in formal philosophical formation and theological precision was abundantly compensated for by “the knowledge of a super natural order of things which cannot be acquired by unaided reason, but only by the help of divine grace and contemplation,”<sup>168</sup> and by his “filial obedience to the divine external authority of the Church.”<sup>169</sup> Whereas for Hecker’s famous contemporary Karl Marx (1818-1883), religion meant alienation and its survival in society showed the inadequacy of its purely political separation from the state,<sup>170</sup> for Hecker Roman Catholicism was the providential fulfillment of the most authentic aspirations of human nature; and its power to transform society through the conversion of citizens more than compensated for the Church’s loss of political power thanks to its separation from the State.

Finally, in the fourth phase of his life, immersed in his own experience of physical and spiritual struggle, he “learned from the example of his Lord how to draw redemptive value from suffering.”<sup>171</sup> He surrendered himself and all his activities to the call to conform his life to the mystery of Christ’s Cross – *filling up*, in the words of his patron, St. Paul, *what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, on behalf of his body, which is the church* (Colossians 1:24).

Through it all, Hecker lived a life of recognizable holiness. His reputation for sanctity was evident in his own lifetime and has continued to inspire pastoral and missionary zeal in the Church down to today. Summarizing Hecker’s legacy, one of his 20<sup>th</sup>-century successors as Superior General of the Paulist Fathers, Joseph McSorley, wrote that Hecker manifested “a magnetic power commonly associated with personal holiness.”<sup>172</sup>

In his life as a Catholic convert and a priest, Isaac Hecker practiced the theological and moral virtues to an heroic degree, confident that he was “living and working in the dawn of light of an approaching, brighter, more glorious future for God’s Holy Church.”<sup>173</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Lumen Gentium*, 39-40.
2. Preface I of Saints. Cf. Augustine, En. Ps., 102.7 *Ergo coronat te, quia dona sua coronat, non merita tua*.
3. "The reputation of holiness is the opinion that has spread about the purity and integrity of life of the Servant of God and about the virtues practiced by him to an heroic degree." Congregation of the Causes of Saints, *Sanctorum Mater* (2007), 5.
4. John Farina, *An American Experience of God: The Spirituality of Isaac Hecker* (Paulist Press, 1981) p. 140.
5. Farina, p. 11.
6. "Document submitted by Father Hecker to his director and others, in Rome, 1858, *The Paulist Vocation* (Paulist Press, 2000), p. 49. Walter Elliott, however, claims that Hecker's "mother taught him his prayers," and that he had been baptized as an infant "as the children of orthodox Protestants more commonly were at that period." *The Life of Father Hecker* (The Columbus Press, 1891), pp. 9-10. "Though he never thought of himself as a Methodist, the evangelistic tradition strongly influenced him." Lincoln A. Mullen, "The Contours of Conversion to Catholicism in the Nineteenth Century," *U.S. Catholic Historian* (2014), p. 17. In any case, cultural changes in the U.S. and in American religious affiliation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries may be recreating a situation somewhat similar to what Hecker claimed for his time, as "increasing numbers of Americans will never have experienced religion firsthand, even as children." Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 148.
7. Letter to his Family, January 19, 1943, Paulist Fathers Archives; cf. Farina, p. 16.
8. George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 82. "By 1800 there were more Methodists than followers of any other religious group in America, and the middle years of the nineteenth century have been dubbed 'the Methodist age' by those who have studied the influence of the movement." McKenna, p. 81. "Wesley had retrieved from the post-Augustinian Catholic tradition the doctrine of prevenient grace. ... The idea became a commonplace in the scholastic theology of the twelfth century, and the Catholic Council of Trent (145-63) later affirmed prevenient grace as an aid to a weakened though not extinguished free will." E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2003), p. 264.
9. "From statements made by Fr. Hecker towards the end of his life," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 3. "Methodism also presented Hecker with a doctrine of God's special providence. ... From an early age he believed that he was called by God to do a work. But just as for the Methodists fulfilling one's individual calling was never to be done in isolation, so also was Hecker, as he grew, unwilling to do without the community of believers." Farina, pp. 16-17.
10. Elliott, p. 14. "Untrained as an historian, Elliott's method was to use Hecker's own words and the words of others who had known him as much as possible." Patrick Allitt, "The Meanings of Isaac Hecker's Conversion," *Journal of Paulist Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1994), p. 19. "The original edition, which no one attacked, appeared in 1891 in New York with the imprimatur of Archbishop Corrigan, who said Hecker's funeral Mass." Florence D. Cohalan, *A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York* (United States Historical Society, 1983), p. 170.
11. Elliott, p. 27.
12. "From statements made by Fr. Hecker towards the end of his life," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 3.
13. Edward Raymond Langlois, *The Formation of American Catholic Political Thought: Isaac Hecker's Political Theory* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Cornell University, 1977), p. 22].
14. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 49.

15. Cf. Joseph P. Chinnici, OFM, *Devotion to the Holy Spirit in American Catholicism* (Paulist Press, 1985), p. 26.
16. "Dr. Brownson and the Workingman's Party Fifty Years Ago," *Catholic World* 45 (1887), pp. 205-208.
17. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 51.
18. *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Crossroad, 1975), p. 47.
19. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 52.
20. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 53.
21. *Confessions*, I, 1. "This Augustinian apologetic of the restless heart, key to such works as Isaac Hecker's *Questions of the Soul* (1855) and *Aspirations of Nature* (1857), had been at the literary center of French religious sensibility since the time of Pascal in the seventeenth century." William L. Portier, *Divided Friends: Portraits of the Roman Catholic Modernist Crisis in the United States* (The Catholic University of Press, 2013), p. 17.
22. "Dr. Brownson and Catholicity," *Catholic World*, 45 (1887), p. 235.
23. Patrick W. Carey, *Orestes A. Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (Eerdmans, 2004), p. 138.
24. Carey, p. 135.
25. June 17, 1843, *Isaac T. Hecker The Diary: Romantic Rebellion in Ante-Bellum America*, ed. John Farina, Paulist Press, 1988, p. 6.
26. "Dr. Brownson in Boston," *Catholic World* 45 (1887), p. 469.
27. David J. O'Brien, *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic*, Paulist Press, 1992, p. 27. "For all its individualism, anti-Trinitarianism, and denial of dogma, the environment at Brook Farm encouraged conversion to Catholicism; its emphasis on spirituality led to Catholic devotional practice and its valuing of universal brotherhood led to catholicity. Hecker was not alone: Sophia Ripley (1803-1861) also converted. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) went to Rome after Brook Farm and considered Catholicism, while his daughter Rose (1851-1926) became a Dominican sister (Mother Alphonsa of the Servants of Relief for Incurable Cancer)," Mullen, p. 17.
28. McKenna, pp. 120-121.
29. "Dr. Brownson and Catholicity," *Catholic World*, 46 (1887), p. 231.
30. *Catholic World*, 45 (1887), p. 712.
31. *Diary*, p. 91. "A transcendentalist is one who has a keen sight but little warmth of heart: Fine conceits but destitute of the rich glow of love." *Diary*, p. 206. "Unlike most other residents, [Hecker] had come from relative poverty, he had already a considerable working life for a man of his age, and yet he had the native intelligence and intellectual independence to participate in the conversations with considerable insight." O'Brien, p. 43.
32. Allitt, p. 13. The editor of the recently published edition of Hecker's *Diary* would seem to agree. On the one hand, it is "the fledgling prose of a man in his early twenties who had little formal education and had not, by the time of his first diary entries, mastered the mechanics of the English language." Farina, *Diary*, "General Introduction," p. 3. "He simply does not have a clue on how to spell ... nor any firm sense of grammar." Farina, *Diary*, "General Introduction," p. 8. On the other hand, he highlights how Hecker's "undisciplined diary musings" are "an emotional record of the moment, one that constantly is talking about a critical reaction to his surroundings. His sentiments are repeatedly dialoguing with his surroundings." Farina, *Diary*, "General Introduction," pp. 70-71.
33. April 24, 1843, *Diary*, p. 97.
34. "Dr. Brownson and Catholicity," *Catholic World*, November 1887, p. 225. The Communion of Saints "teaches the practical spiritual purpose of the Creed as a whole." Article 9, 23, tr. Robert I. Bradley and Eugene Kevane (*Daughters of St. Paul*, 1985), p. 111.
35. Chinnici, p. 32.
36. "Dr. Brownson and the Workingman's Party Fifty Years Ago," *Catholic World* 45 (1887), p. 203. "It is remarkable that once he converted, he never uttered a word of disagreement over doctrine or practice. ... Rather than criticize Catholicism, he becomes one of its most energetic defenders in the nineteenth century. ... His devotion to the Redeemer



- was deep and almost as pervasive as his love of the Spirit. It was linked with a fidelity to the church and a conviction of its necessity both for the saving of the individual and the society." Farina, *Diary*, "General Introduction," p. 72.
37. June 13, 1844, *Diary*, p. 206.
  38. July 28, 1844, *Diary*, p. 231.
  39. December 18, 1844, *Diary*, p. 272.
  40. May 17, 1843, *Diary*, pp. 105-106.
  41. *The Life of Father Hecker*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Columbus Press, 1898, p. 70.
  42. O'Brien, p. 81.
  43. Farina, p. 88.
  44. Farina, pp. 87-88.
  45. Farina, p. 91. "The doctrine of grace as formally impressed on the soul by a certain internal gift which is united and intrinsic to it appealed immediately to him." Farina, p. 92.
  46. "From statements made by Fr. Hecker towards the end of his life," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 23.
  47. O'Brien, p. 88. On the lifelong influence of the Ignatian tradition on Hecker, see Farina, *Diary*, p. 378, n. 235.
  48. Elliott, p. 311. "Lallemant he returned to ever and again," added Elliott.
  49. "Document, *The Paulist Vocation*, pp. 53-54. Redemptorist practice at the time was for non-priests to receive Communion three times weekly. In an 1848 "account of conscience" written to his Redemptorist Superior in England, Hecker wrote: "I have a constant hunger and thirst for Our Lord in the sacrament of His body and blood. If it were possible I would desire to receive no other food than this, for it is the only nourishment that I have a real appetite for. I cannot consider it other than the source and substance of my whole spiritual and interior life." Quoted in Elliott, p. 224.
  50. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 54. "Yet his mental processes were quite normal in other lines. He could and did write long, logically coherent letters to his family in defense of the Catholic religion. The keenness of his intelligence was essentially unimpaired, but his work in the classroom made him seem a fool." James M. Gillis, *The Paulists* (1932), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Paulist Press, 2004), p.70.
  51. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, pp. 55-56.
  52. *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 160.
  53. Quoted in John Cardinal Farley, *The Life of John Cardinal McCloskey: First Prince of the Church in America 1810-1885* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1918), pp.156-257.
  54. O'Brien, p. 101.
  55. James McVann, *The Paulists, 1858-1970: Volume One*, (unpublished).
  56. "Letter to Brownson, September 5, 1851," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 265.
  57. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 58.
  58. *Questions of the Soul* (D. Appleton and Company), p. 129.
  59. Carey, p. 230. Brownson wrote, "This is the book I would have written if God had given me the genius and ability," quoted in Holifield, p. 492. Both Brownson and Hecker "represented the turn toward new arguments for the reasonableness of Catholicity. To both of them the Catholic tradition was the voice of reason against a Protestantism that claimed to be rational but subverted rationality. And both agreed that the older evidentialism, in both its Protestant and its Catholic forms, no longer sufficed as the primary mode of apologetic for Christian faith." Holifield, p. 482.
  60. *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 60.
  61. Quoted in "The Sisters of Mercy in New York," *Catholic World*, 50 (1889), p. 389.
  62. Richard Shaw, *Dagger John: The Unquiet Life and Times of Archbishop John Hughes of New York* (Paulist Press, 1977), p. 319. Hughes also wrote asking Hecker "to make known to your Superior how desirous I am that there should be another house of your Order in New York for the spiritual benefit of the Catholics who do not speak German," Holden, p, 242.
  63. O'Brien, pp. 129, 133; see also Holden, pp. 233 ff.

64. Holden, pp. 259-260; O'Brien, p. 134. For a full treatment of the then applicable Redemptorist policy on travelling to Rome without explicit authorization, see Holden, chapter XII.
65. William LeRoy Portier, *Providential Nation: An Historical-Theological Study of Isaac Hecker's Americanism* (Pd.D. Dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology, 1980), pp. 308-309.
66. Dolores Liptak, *Immigrants and Their Church* (Macmillan, 1989), p. 43.
67. "From a letter of Father Hecker to his brother George V. Hecker, September 2, 1857, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 31.
68. O'Brien, p. 134.
69. Elliott, p. 261.
70. "Decree of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars," *Nuper nonnulli*, Translation, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 77.
71. "From a letter to the American Fathers," dated Rome, March 9, 1858, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 66.
72. O'Brien, p. 161.
73. L'Abbe Dufresne, "Personal Recollections of Father Hecker," *Catholic World*, 67, 1898, p. 329. ["Recollections of Father Hecker by the Abbe Xavier Dufresne, in Elliott, p. 424].
74. "Document," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 61; "From a letter to George V. Hecker, dated Rome, February 13, 1858," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 65. For the most comprehensive and detailed account of Hecker's travel to and sojourn in Rome, his expulsion from the Redemptorists, and his successful appeal to the Holy See, see Vincent Holden, *The Yankee Paul: Isaac Thomas Hecker* (Bruce, 1958), chapters 11-19.
75. "From a letter to the American Fathers, dated Rome, September 1857," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 36.
76. Geoffrey O'Brien, *The Fall of the House of Walworth: A Tale of Madness and Murder in Gilded Age America* (Henry Holt, 2010), p. 112. McSorley suggests the possibility of "an inner conflict in Walworth, springing from an unconscious rivalry with Hecker," in comparison with whom "Walworth was a first magnitude star." McSorley, pp. 113-114. According to Gillis, Walworth "was the most polished and forceful orator of the group," *The Paulists*, p. 78.
77. "From a letter to a friend, written after returning from Rome to New York, 1858," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 81.
78. *Testem Benevolentiae* (1899).
79. McSorley, p. 95.
80. "Personal Sanctification of the Paulist and His Standard of Perfection," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 124.
81. McSorley, p. 190. Hecker was actually elected Superior three weeks earlier on June 13. "The fact that the first Paulists elected Hecker before they defined themselves as a congregation is significant. Not only was it a triumph for Hecker's vision for the mission of the community, but it allowed him to play a defining role in the community's very creation." Paul Robichaud, "The Very Reverend Superior: A History of Paulist Leadership from Isaac Hecker to Thomas Stransky," *Paulist History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (May 1994), p. 8.
82. James McVann, *The Paulists, 1858-1970: Volume One*, 54 (unpublished). "In the eyes and mind of Isaac Hecker, St. Paul's was always to be a missionary church, the starting place for a missionary outreach to America. As such, its boundaries were the shores of an expanding nation, its operating center at the heart of that nation's busiest and most important city." Joseph Scott, CSP, *A Century and More of Reaching Out: An Historical Sketch of the Parish of St. Paul the Apostle* (1983), p. 7.
83. O'Brien, p. 193. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, "Americans overwhelmingly disapprove of political persuasion by religious leaders," but "certain forms of political activity are more common in some religious traditions than others." Putnam and Campbell, pp. 420-423. On the other hand, contemporary Americans are more likely to resolve any perceived inconsistency between their religious and their political identifications more "by changing their religion than by changing their politics." Putnam and Campbell, p. 145.

84. "How to Be Happy," in *Sermons Preached at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle, New York, During the Year 1863* (Sadlier, 1864), p. 59.
85. "How To Be Happy," p. 60.
86. *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 207.
87. "The Saint of Our Day," in *Sermons Preached at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle, New York, During the Year 1863* (Sadlier, 1864), p. 102. "When Hecker preached 'The Saint of Our Day,' in 1863, he was flying at the top of his game." *Divided Friends*, p. 313. It also "gives a good notion of Hecker's simple, winning style, free of dramatic flights and rhythmic periods." McSorley, p. 160.
88. O'Brien, pp. 294-295. The *Catholic World* "remained one of the two or three principal journals for American Catholic intellectuals until it closed down in 1996." Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 71.
89. Apostolic Letter, *Dilecte Fili*, (December 30, 1868), CW, 48 (1869), pp. 722-723.
90. *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*, HarperCollins, 2006, pp. 13, 12, 127. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, once again, "religious identity in America has become less inherited and fixed and more chosen and changeable." Putnam and Campbell, p. 135.
91. "From a letter to the American Fathers, dated Rome, November 20, 1857," *The Paulist Vocation*, pp. 41-42.
92. *Democracy in America*, Volume 1 (1835), tr. Henry Reeve (Schocken, 2961), p. 356.
93. *Democracy in America*, Volume 1 (1835), pp. 356-357. In Volume 2 (1840), de Tocqueville further argued along similar lines which Hecker would embrace: "America is the most democratic country in the world, and it is at the same time (according to reports worthy of belief,) the country in which the Roman Catholic religion makes most progress. At first sight this is surprising. ... The men of our days are naturally little disposed to believe; but, as soon as they have any religion, they immediately find in themselves a latent propensity which urges them unconsciously towards Catholicism. Many of the doctrines and the practices of the Romish church astonish them; but they feel a secret admiration for its discipline, and its great unity attracts them. ... I am inclined to believe ... that our posterity will tend more and more to a single division into two parts, - some relinquishing Christianity entirely and others returning to the bosom of the Church of Rome. Tr. Henry Reeve (Schocken, 1961), pp. 33-34.
94. Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (expanded edition, Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 542.
95. "From a letter to the American Fathers, dated Rome, December 22, 1857," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 46.
96. *The Church and the Age*, p. 30.
97. "The Mission of Leo XIII," *Catholic World*, 48, 1888, p. 9.
98. Allocution to the Roman Curia, December 22, 2005, translated by Gilles Routhier, "Vatican II: Relevance and Future," *Theological Studies*, vol. 74, no. 3 September 3013), pp. 538-539, n. 4. Benedict identified "a new definition of the relationship between church and the modern state" as one of the "three circles of questions" that required a response at Vatican II; cf. Routhier, p. 543.
99. Carey, p. 242.
100. *The Church and the Age*, p. 90.
101. "The Catholic of the Nineteenth Century," *Catholic World*, 64 (1870), p. 435.
102. "The German Problem," *Catholic World*, 34 (1881), p. 296.
103. "The Mission of Leo XIII," *Catholic World*, 48 (1888), p. 5.
104. *The Church and the Age*, p. 109.
105. Robert T. Handy, "Father Hecker, a Bridge Between Catholic and Protestant Thought," *Catholic World*, 202 (1965), pp. 162-163.
106. McVann, p. 144.
107. Carey, p. 242. Thus, "the three most religious groups in [21<sup>st</sup> century] America are Mormons, Black Protestants, and evangelicals, in that order." Robert D. Putnam and

- David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 23.
108. Catholic Publication House, p. 145.
  109. McKenna, p. 290.
  110. Abbe Dufresne, "Personal Recollections of Father Hecker," *Catholic World*, 67 (1898), p. 326. "The American converts Orestes Augustus Brownson (1803-76) and Isaac Thomas Hecker (1819-88) were the only self-educated theologians in the group" that contributed to Catholic theology in the U.S. during this period. Holifield, p. 417.
  111. "The postulator is obliged to act for the greater good of the Church and, therefore, to seek the truth conscientiously and honestly. He is to indicate eventual difficulties so as to avoid also the necessity of further investigations that will delay the progress of the cause." *Sanctorum Mater*, 17, 3. In a 1953 letter, McSorley listed the supposed difficulties: "Hecker stressed the cultivation of natural virtues; he enjoined fidelity to the inner, divine promptings of the Holy Spirit in man's soul; he chose a voluntary agreement as the principle of community unity. He therefore, his critics inferred, minimized the value of divine grace, of ecclesiastical authority, of vows. (A less theological but more emotional criticism was provoked by his preference for the institutions of the English-speaking world as compared with those of the Latins.) McSorley believed "that an honest and accurate exposition would leave no ground for charges such as the above." Letter to Ellis, March 27, 1953, quoted in *Divided Friends*, p. 357.
  112. William LeRoy Portier, *Providential Nation: An Historical-Theological Study of Isaac Hecker's Americanism* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology, 1980), p. 365.
  113. *Providential Nation*, pp. 367-368. "For God is no less the author of nature than of grace, of this earth than of heaven." *The Church and the Age*, p. 60.
  114. *Catholic World*, 45 (1887), p. 711. On the common 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic conception of human cooperation with grace, see also Holifield, pp. 428-429.
  115. Portier, "Isaac Hecker and Testem Benevolentiae: A Study on Theological Pluralism," in *Hecker Studies*, p. 29.
  116. *The Church and the Age*, p. 123.
  117. "Father Hecker's Farewell Sermon," *Catholic World*, 10, December 1869, pp. 289-293.
  118. Cf. John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Harvard University Press, 2018) pp. 130-131.
  119. O'Malley, p. 146.
  120. O'Malley, p. 227.
  121. Cf. O'Brien, pp. 230-231.
  122. *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 143.
  123. Farina, pp. 139-140.
  124. Chinnici, p. 31.
  125. "On the Mission of New Religious Communities" (1876), *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 283. "Catholics found in religious fragmentation, moreover, the scandalous evidence that 'the judgment of reason' led in conflicting directions." Holifield, p. 419.
  126. *Roman Pontifical*
  127. Joseph I. Malloy, *The Church of St. Paul the Apostle in New York* (Paulist Press, pp. 5, 11. "In the parish church of the early Paulists, liturgical correctness, ceremonial dignity, fine music and good preaching, drew numerous visitors from a wide area." McSorley, p. 161.
  128. Elliott, p. 412.
  129. *Pastoral Letter* (1884).
  130. Letter to Brownson, April 3, 1871, *The Brownson-Hecker Correspondence*, eds. Joseph F. Gower and Richard M. Leliaert (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 302.
  131. Quoted in McVann, p. 181. On Hecker's flirtation with "his era's intellectual enthusiasms," see also Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome* (Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 112-114.
  132. *The Church and the Age*, p. 99. "With relatively few dissenting voices until the twentieth century, analysts of the American experience have presupposed their culture's

- extraordinary status in the divine economy; often extolling the nation's glories, sometimes damning its fault, they have seldom questioned that America is the locus of a drama whose outcome carries universal significance." James H. Moorhead, "Theological Interpretations and Critiques of American Society and Culture," *Encyclopedia of American Religious Experience: Studies of Traditions and Movements*, ed. Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams (Scribner, 1988), p. 101. Meanwhile, demographic changes both in the U.S. and in the U.S. Catholic Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have both affirmed and challenged Hecker's insights. Thus, for decades, "the Catholic share of the U.S. population has held steady at roughly 25 percent, remaining the single largest denomination in the country. Such stasis in the aggregate is possible only through the influx of Catholics from another source – immigration largely from predominantly Catholic nations in Latin America," without whom "the American Catholic population would have experienced a catastrophic collapse." Putnam and Campbell, p. 299.
133. Cf. *Testem Benevolentiae* (1899).
  134. Diary begun in Egypt, 1873; *The Paulist Vocation*, pp. 259-260. "Here in Geneva I have met several distinguished persons, both Protestant and Catholic, and the light and profit which they have derived, according to their own acknowledgement, from the views which I have expressed, ought to be to me the source of great consolation and support. It appears to me that Divine Providence is employing me in a larger field and a more important one than my past, and that by and by this will become more and more clear. However this may be, all is in His hands. He will do as He will." Letter to friends in America, 1874, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 87. "One of Father Hecker's favorite themes was the obligation of Catholics to give spiritual aid to neighbors outside the fold." McSorley, p. 160.
  135. Elliott, p. 373.
  136. O'Brien, p. 241.
  137. "From private memoranda made in Europe during his illness, 1874-75," *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 90. "Were there a sufficient number of Paulists, I should like to see a community established in every center of Europe; in London, Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Berlin, Florence, Rome." Unpublished Diary, February 24, 1870, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 153.
  138. O'Brien, p. 260.
  139. Elliott, p. 370.
  140. "Recollections of Father Hecker by the Abbe Xavier Dufresne, in Elliott, p. 424.
  141. Elliott, p. 384. Hecker "painfully combined the tourist and the pilgrim, attempting to experience God in a wandering travail of sight-seeing, struggling in the seemingly inextricable bonds of a physical and spiritual malaise that greatly tested but did not destroy his faith." Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (University of California Press, 1994), p. 336.
  142. Farina, p. 147.
  143. O'Brien, p. 283.
  144. July 13, 1873, O'Brien, p. 281; August 27, 1875, O'Brien, p. 285.
  145. Miscellaneous Hecker Papers, c. 1877; *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 189.
  146. Dufresne, *Catholic World*, 67 (1898), p.327.
  147. From private memoranda made in Europe during his illness, 1874-1875, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 90. Hence, Hecker has been recognized as "the most important indigenous source for devotion to the Holy Ghost in the United States." Chinnici, p. 25.
  148. "The definition of papal infallibility and the European reaction to it forced him to rethink the theological synthesis he had implicitly accepted since the 1840s. Given his own personal experience and his encounter with Transcendentalism, it is not surprising that he turned to the Holy Spirit as both the agent and symbol of his new synthesis." Chinnici, p. 27.
  149. *The Church and the Age*, pp. 22-25.
  150. *The Church and the Age*, p. 25.
  151. *The Church and the Age*, pp. 25-26.

152. 1873, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 170. According to Lallemand, “the guidance which we receive from the Holy Ghost, by means of His gifts, presupposes the faith and authority of the Church, acknowledges them as its rule, admits nothing which is contrary to them, and aims only at perfecting the exercise of faith and the other virtues.” *The Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemand of the Company of Jesus* (Malvern Classics, 2013 Kindle Edition.)
153. 1873, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 171. In Hecker’s time, as Congar (*Je Crois en l’Esprit Saint*, 1979) has noted, “the Spirit was seen, on the one hand, as the principle of holy living in the souls of individuals – this was the ‘internal mission’ – and, on the other, as guaranteeing acts of the institution, especially its infallible teaching.” Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, tr. David Smith, (Crossroad, 1983), p. 156.
154. February 13, 1875, Paulist Fathers Archives. What *Testem Benevolentiae* later deemed suspect was the contention “that the Holy Spirit pours richer and more abundant graces than formerly upon the souls of the faithful, so that without human intervention He teaches and guides them by some hidden instinct of His own.” Thus, for Portier, what Hecker meant by the greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit was “a heightened appreciation for the doctrine of the divine indwelling and what is traditionally called actual grace.” Farina, *Hecker Studies*, p. 35.
155. *Catholic World*, 38, October 1883, p. 9. The Holy Spirit, according to the Second Vatican Council, “distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit.’ These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church. Extraordinary gifts are not to be sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from their use; but judgment as to their genuinity and proper use belongs to those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs, not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good.” *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
156. O’Brien, p. 269.
157. O’Brien, p. 267.
158. Elliott, p. 380.
159. Elliott, p. 380.
160. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, tr. John Beevers (Doubleday, 1975) p. 39. “It is an ingenious compendium of all spiritual wisdom, but it seemed to Father Hecker that submission to the Divine Will is taught in its pages as it has never been done since the time of the Apostles. The little French copy which he used is thumbed all to pieces. He used it incessantly when in great trouble of mind and knew it almost by heart.” Elliott, *Life*, pp. 382-383. On Hecker’s appreciation of Caussade, see also Farina, pp. 142-144.
161. McVann, p. 194.
162. “Father Hecker,” *Catholic World*, 49 (1889) p. 9.
163. Tr. Walter Elliott CW, 67 (1898) p. 428.
164. “Letter to Religious Superior,” May 30, 1848, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 205.
165. *The Constitution of the Missionary Society of Saint Paul the Apostle*, C2. “In accordance with the example of Father Hecker, the Paulists cultivate a personal and community devotion to the Holy Spirit.” C16.
166. USCCB (2006), p. 36.
167. Archbishop Richard Cushing, “Foreword,” in Holden, p. vi.
168. *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 159.
169. “The Safeguards of the Paulists,” *The Paulist Vocation*, pp. 141-142.
170. Cf., for example, “On the Jewish Question” (1843) in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (Norton, 1978) pp. 30-32.
171. Farina, p. 179.

172. McSorley, p. 114. "Driving McSorley's work as an historian was his desire to bring the entire Hecker tradition, including its spiritual dimension, into the twentieth century in purified and usable form." Portier, *Divided Friends*, p. 366.
173. From a Letter to a Friend, *The Paulist Vocation*, p. 99.

