French Missionary Clergy Confront the Protestant Menace in New Mexico, 1851-1885

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Although no shots were fired, the 1846 American invasion of New Mexico marked a new era for Mexico's poorest and most isolated province. Entirely Roman Catholic, New Mexico was nominally under the spiritual direction of the Bishop of Durango, but in reality the parishes were nearly autonomous. The Franciscans, who had comprised virtually the entire clergy in New Mexico in the Spanish period, left the region after Mexico secured its independence in 1821. Secular clergy were scarce, and the bishop, 1,500 miles away on the difficult and dangerous Camino Real, seldom visited New Mexico. Religious authority was in the hands of the local clergy, the wealthy laity of the few towns, and the most powerful landed families. Religious worship, in which the laity played a central part, comprised a rich repertory of distinctive images, practices, and associations related to those that the settlers had brought with them from Spain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the years after the American army came to New Mexico, the religious world experienced a second "invasion" with the arrival of two distinct groups of missionaries. A few American Protestant missionaries came to Santa Fe, followed in 1851 by the arrival of a French bishop-designate for New Mexico named Jean-Baptiste Lamy, together with his close friend and associate,
Joseph Machebeuf. Lamy had been in the United States for twelve years, and in Ohio and Kentucky he had surely come to terms with the presence of Protestants. He was determined, however, that they not establish themselves in New Mexico. He wrote to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith (SPF) in Lyon, the principal financial support for his missionary activities, that "the Protestants do everything in their power to introduce their errors in New Mexico. It is therefore necessary to redouble my efforts to conserve the true faith." In another letter he complained that the four Protestant ministers in Santa Fe had for two years "made vain efforts to seduce some of the Catholic . . . inhabitants."1

Lamy greatly exaggerated the Protestant menace to New Mexico in 1852. John Greiner, a government official in the new territory who was acquainted with local Methodist missionaries, wrote of one of them that "with all his labors, he has not got a single convert, [and] he cannot get a dozen hearers out of the whole population, Mexican and American."2 The efforts of the Baptists were no more successful, but unlike the Methodists, who abandoned New Mexico in 1853, they persisted.

It is tempting to attribute Lamy and Machebeuf's hostility to Protestants to their origins in the Auvergne, one of the most zealously Catholic regions of France, and to their intellectual formation at the doctrinally rigorous Sulpician seminary at Clermont-Ferrand, but this must remain speculation. It is striking to note, however, that the native New Mexican clergy responded differently. Lamy's

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1 J. B. Lamy to SPF (Lyon), 28 July and n.d., 1852. Horgan Collection, Archdiocesan Archives of Santa Fe [hereafter AASF]. Translations from French and Spanish are my own.
future antagonist, Padre Antonio Martínez, allowed one of the Baptists to preach in the Taos plaza and discussed with him the formation of a school. The priest in Socorro, seventy miles south of Albuquerque, who had studied first with Martínez and then at the seminary in Durango, welcomed Baptist missionaries on several occasions before he, like several other native priests, went to Mexico to serve his former bishop rather than remain in the French-dominated church.³

Over the next decade, the Baptists were no more than a minor irritant with a few small congregations. Yet in 1859, soon after the Christian Brothers opened a school in Santa Fe, Lamy warned that "a crowd of children . . . are exposed in all sorts of ways to become indifferent or Protestant. The latter make incredible efforts to spread their false doctrine."⁴

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church in New Mexico was transformed when nearly all the New Mexican clergy were either deposed or left of their own volition to be replaced primarily by French priests. Reporting in 1864 to the SPF that he had been named bishop, Lamy wrote that in the past decade "twenty-one men, missionaries and all from the diocese of Clermont-Ferrand, have come . . . to aid us in reclaiming this part of the field of the Church that is entrusted to us."⁵ In France between 1815 and 1830, well over a thousand missions sponsored by various diocesan and regional societies went into the dechristianized areas of France in order to "reclaim" them. Those leading the missions were Jesuits or members of newly established

³ Ernest S. Stapleton, Jr., "The History of Baptist Missions in New Mexico 1849-1866" (M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1954), 33, 185.
⁴ Lamy to SPF, 1 Feb. 1859. Horgan Collection, AASF.
⁵ Lamy to SPF, n.d., 1864. Horgan Collection, AASF
preaching and missionary orders. In Mexico in contrast, with the exception of the Italian Jesuits who arrived in 1867, missionaries were secular clergy who replaced deposed or departed priests and were charged by the bishop with bringing the faithful into conformity with the sort of centralized authority and moral discipline that characterized the post-Revolutionary French church – in a New Mexico that considered itself devoutly and faithfully Catholic. During the next seventy years, some 120 French priests served in New Mexico, a large majority of the clergy in the territory.\footnote{Nancy Hanks, "Not of this Earth: A Historical Geography of French Secular Clergy in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1850-1912 (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1983), 30, 101; Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, \textit{Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine}, vol. 1, 1800-1880 (Toulouse: Privat, 1985), 54-63; and Caroline Ford, \textit{Divided Houses: Religion and Gender in Modern France} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 66-7.}

At least until the late 1860s, few of these priests had any reason to be concerned about the presence of Protestants in their parishes. The small Baptist congregation in Santa Fe was entirely Anglo. Protestantism at Laguna Pueblo was part of a larger internal controversy that had persisted for nearly twenty years. Besides, the Catholic priest in charge of Laguna had ten villages, Indian and Hispanic, to deal with. The only real confrontation between Protestants and the French clergy took place at Socorro, a town of perhaps 500 situated on the Rio Grande just north of the desolate and dangerous desert that extended nearly to El Paso.

In 1853, a defrocked Mexican Franciscan named Benigno Cárdenas had turned up in Santa Fe with a vague endorsement from the Methodist leadership in New York. He preached on the plaza to a large crowd even though
Lamy had forbidden Catholics to hear or even look at the apostate. When the Methodists withdrew their American missionaries from New Mexico later that year, Cárdenas established himself south of Albuquerque, making a preaching circuit that included Socorro and some of the nearby farming villages along the river. He had been in that area several years earlier when he had participated in a schism in which several churches defied the authority of the Bishop of Durango. In the years after his return to the area, he seems to have won some New Mexicans to Methodism. The Baptists, who visited occasionally, also made some converts.7

In the fall of 1857, the Baptist missionary John M. Shaw moved with his family to Socorro. He formed a congregation of twenty-two, seventeen of whom were New Mexicans from two prominent families, in Socorro and in the village of San Antonio. Shaw's arrival was a small and isolated event, but it meant, as Lamy had warned for fifteen years, that Protestants did intend to seduce New Mexican Catholics from the true faith.

The Catholic priest in Socorro was Pierre Eguiñon, who had come with Lamy in 1854 with the first group of missionaries from Clermont. In 1858, not long after the arrival of the Shaws in Socorro, he was joined by Augustin Truchard, who had been in the second group, brought from Clermont by Machebeuf in 1856. When Eguiñon was called to Santa Fe in November 1859 to be vicar general, Truchard took charge of the parish.

7 Fray Angélico Chávez, "A Nineteenth-Century New Mexico Schism," *New Mexico Historical Review* 58 (1983), 40-4; Thomas Harwood, *History of New Mexico Spanish and English Missions of the Methodist Church from 1850 to 1910 in Decades* (1908; repr., Albuquerque [First United Methodist Church, Committee on Archives and History], 1983), 1:22-33; and Stapleton, 183-9.
Soon after he had come to Socorro, Truchard launched a campaign against the Protestants that included a public debate with one of the prominent local converts and a pamphlet in English disputing various points of doctrine. Shaw refused to respond. According to Shaw's letters published in the Baptist Home Mission Record, the campaign escalated into violence when a mob attacked Shaw and several followers at the village of Lemitar. One of the converts was jailed on false charges, which the local judge dismissed after some months. When the authorities finally arrested several alleged ringleaders of the campaign against the Baptists, the men said Truchard had organized it. Since Lamy carefully monitored his clergy and emphasized obedience above all else, it is hard to believe that he had not initiated or at least privately approved of Truchard's anti-Protestant initiative. Shaw's wife, Harriett, wrote to her mother that "we are continually gaining ground & overcoming opposition & were it not for the little French priest here who stirs up the people to hostilities we should soon overcome all opposition."8

Despite her hopes, Socorro did not become Protestant. Although the Shaws and the other Baptist missionaries believed that preaching and the distribution of tracts and Bibles would lead the New Mexicans to the true faith, Protestantism was too alien, too somber, and too American. Truchard was by all accounts a good pastor and preacher, more willing to accept the distinctive features of local piety than Lamy might have wished. In the following years, until he was called to Albuquerque in 1863, he acquired a reputation as a respected community leader as Socorro endured Navajo raids, drought, and, finally, the prospect of

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8 Stapleton, 214-20; and Harriett Shaw to "my dear Mother," 8 Aug. 1859, New Mexico State Records Center and Archives [hereafter NMSRCA].
war when a Confederate army approached from the south. With the Civil War, the Baptists recalled their few remaining missionaries. Only John Shaw, no longer a minister, remained in New Mexico. His small band of converts still considered themselves Protestants when the Methodists arrived in Socorro in the 1870s.

Nothing like the Socorro episode occurred again. Surely the Catholic hierarchy realized that it would be futile to forcibly prevent Protestants from attempting to convert New Mexico's Catholics. Rather, the Catholic faithful must be protected from Protestant blandishments through preaching, pastoral instruction, and, above all, education.

From the time of their arrival, Lamy and Machebeuf contended that education, by which they meant primarily moral and doctrinal education, was essential to turn the New Mexicans into real Christians. In 1852, Machebeuf had written to his sister in France that "as the source of evil here is the profound ignorance of the people, the first remedy must be instruction, and for this we need Christian schools for the youth of both sexes." 9

That same year, Lamy had traveled to Baltimore to attend the First Plenary Council of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Its statement on education reflected the campaign against any doctrinal flexibility that Pope Pius IX had launched in Rome, and it clearly enforced Lamy's conviction that strictly Catholic education was essential to his "reclamation" of New Mexico. The Council declared that the only proper education was one "based on religious principles, accompanied by religious practices and always subordinate to religious influence." If children were not taught "the science of the saints, their minds will be

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filled with every error, their hearts will be receptacles of every vice."\textsuperscript{10}

Lamy succeeded in persuading the Christian Brothers to send teachers from France to open a boys' school in Santa Fe and later in a few other towns. The French Ursulines having declined to come to New Mexico, Lamy also brought the Loretto Sisters from Kentucky. They too opened a school in Santa Fe and subsequently in other towns. After the Jesuits arrived in 1867, they opened a handful of schools. In general these institutions were for the local elites. For the great majority of New Mexicans, education was not available despite Lamy's continued expressed concerns about it in his letters to the SPF and in his annual pastoral letters.

The Methodists and Baptists had attempted to establish schools before the Civil War, but they had failed because of a combination of clerical opposition and popular indifference. Lamy was in full agreement with the American hierarchy that so-called secular schools run by Protestants were in reality intended to seduce Catholic children from the Church. One scholar has written that "it seemed that Lamy preferred there be no schools rather than Protestant ones."\textsuperscript{11} Even his admiring biographer Paul Horgan concedes that Lamy believed that if New Mexicans were not exactly inferior to Americans and Europeans, they were different: less intellectually acute, less hardworking. In 1881 Lamy wrote that despite New Mexicans' strong devotion to the Catholic Church, their different "morals,


\textsuperscript{11} Frances M. Campbell, "American Catholicism in New Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, University of California at Berkeley, 1985), 143.
manners, and customs" meant that they would continue to require firm and loving guidance.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, one infers, the sort of universal education for which the Americans were calling would be disastrous for the New Mexicans, who were so prone to moral laxity and so fond of the temptations of the flesh.

After the Civil War, Protestants renewed their efforts to open schools. In 1866, Presbyterians arrived as missionaries, focusing not so much on forming congregations as on establishing schools both in the towns and on the village plazas of northern New Mexico. Three years later, the Methodists and the Congregationalists sent smaller contingents, also with the aim of creating schools. Unlike the earlier Baptist and Methodist efforts, these were generously funded.\textsuperscript{13} Together with some prominent New Mexicans, the Protestants also called for the creation of the sort of public school system that was becoming general in the United States.

In his pastoral letters, Lamy continued to warn Catholics against sending their children to the Protestant schools. His clergy preached against them as well, but according to one Presbyterian convert, they were not very effective "because the priests, and half of them didn't know how to speak Spanish or English, they were Frenchmen and they talked very broken."\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14} Interview with Laura Whitlock Martínez, in \textit{Remembering Presbyterian Missions in the Southwest}, eds. Jane Vasquez and Carolyn Atkins (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 23. See
At least one priest who spoke and wrote Spanish and English very well addressed the issue with perception and candor. This was Augustin Truchard, who had moved from Socorro first to Albuquerque and, then, when that church was turned over to the Jesuits, to the prosperous little town of Bernalillo. In 1875 he went to Santa Fe, first as priest at the cathedral, then as Lamy's vicar general. While still at Bernalillo in 1871, he had addressed the graduating class at the Christian Brothers' St. Michael's College (really a high school) in Santa Fe. Truchard said that despite his efforts and those of others "nothing, or almost nothing has been accomplished" except in Santa Fe and a few other places where Catholics had established schools. The problem was, first of all, the poverty of the poorer classes and, second, the indifference to any broad program of education on the part of the wealthy. The only remedy, Truchard said, lay in "the Government at Washington," which must be persuaded to "open to New Mexico the hand of its liberality."\(^{15}\)

Over the next twenty years, the Church did attempt to persuade the national government to fund its establishment of schools on the Indian pueblos of New Mexico. Their efforts ultimately failed when the government took over the task of Indian education, but the campaign indicates that Catholics saw the possibility of a joint effort to remedy the woeful state of education in New Mexico. The problem remained that the French clergy and the majority of New Mexicans both believed that it was imperative that the Roman Catholic Church control any system of public education. The most urgent aspect of the educational

\(^{15}\) Quoted in Report of the Commission of Education [1871]. Ritch Collection, microfilm reel 8, NMSRCA. Originals in the Huntington Library.

situation concerned not the pueblo Indians but the much larger and much more conventionally Catholic population of Hispanic New Mexicans. As early as 1856, some Anglo and New Mexican representatives in the territorial legislature introduced a bill proposing the creation of a public school system, but the bill was soundly defeated. Nevertheless, the issue had been raised, and it would not go away.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1873, Jean-Baptiste Salpointe, whom Lamy had sent to oversee the churches in the new territory of Arizona, where the Anglo majority was in the process of establishing a public school system, reported to Rome that "Protestant propaganda" had "a powerful auxiliary with the system of public schools." The only solution would be for the Catholics to establish a system of free schools of their own.\textsuperscript{17}

In New Mexico, the opportunity to do just that presented itself in the form of a recent law passed by the territorial legislature. The law levied a tax on adult males to support the establishment of public schools and authorized each of the twelve counties to create a board of school supervisors to start public schools. In at least half the counties, French priests or Italian Jesuits led the boards, which were entirely Catholic. In some localities, an existing Christian Brothers, Lorette, or Jesuit school simply became the public school. Instruction was generally in Spanish, utilizing textbooks printed by the Jesuits in Las Vegas, New Mexico.

These Catholic public schools were clearly not what the American settlers, arriving in greater numbers as the


\textsuperscript{17} Salpointe to Trésorier de l'Oeuvre (Rome), 31 May 1873. Horgan Collection, AASF.
railroad was built across New Mexico, had in mind. Prominent figures, notably the new territorial secretary of state William Ritch, persistently attacked the school situation in letters, pamphlets, and broadsides. In a letter published in a New York newspaper, the minister of Santa Fe's First Presbyterian Church wondered whether New Mexico, whose poverty and ignorance were essentially the fault of its Catholic clergy, deserved to become a state. Father Jean-Baptiste Guérin, who as the head of the Mora County school board had been attacked in the letter, responded that such an attitude was part of the "heritage of fanatical Protestants." All that Catholics wanted was "liberty," the liberty to provide the kind of education that the great majority of the population needed and demanded.18 Guérin's response appeared in the weekly newspaper Revista Católica, launched in 1874 by the Jesuits with Bishop Lamy's approval. For the next twenty years, it would be the principal source of Catholic opinion originating not only from the Jesuits but also from the French secular clergy. Theirs was a view of education diametrically opposed to that expressed by Secretary Ritch or the commission that stated in 1876 that "our schools shall not be sectarian but essentially American, and it shall be the duty of the Teachers to instill into the mind of each one of the pupils a just appreciation of the dignity, rights and duties of the citizen of the United States."19

In 1880, the vicar general, Truchard, published an "official notice" to the "secular press" of New Mexico. He stated that when the Santa Fe New Mexican had claimed that using public funds for sectarian schools went against

18 Revista Católica (Las Vegas, NM), 15 Apr. 1876.
19 Commission of San Miguel County for the Governance of the Schools (Mar. 1876), Ritch Collection, microfilm reel 9, NMSRCA. The commission was soon replaced by one dominated by the Jesuits.
"the fundamental law of the land," the newspaper essentially expressed "the masonic doctrine about public schools." Truchard concluded, "nothing can make us accept a school system that is positively condemned by the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church."20

Except in his pastoral letters, Bishop Lamy rarely expressed himself this candidly in public on the subject of education. In those letters, education continued to be a topic virtually every year. In 1879, for example, he had contended that especially "in these calamitous times . . . moral culture is completed solely by religious education." Those who pressed for secular schools "want their children to be educated like pagans, with no check to subjugate their emerging passions."21

When Lamy wrote of "these calamitous times," he may well have been thinking as much of France, where the republican government was engaged in the prolonged campaign against the Church that Caroline Ford has recently characterized as "the great secular crusade."22 Since the Restoration, the French Catholic Church had dominated education at all levels. Now that domination was to be supplanted by a universal public system from which the Church was excluded. It was a story to which the Revista Católica devoted considerable space.

In an 1882 letter Lamy contended that the situation in New Mexico was virtually identical to that in France. Lamy wrote, "you see [in] what has happened in France what

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20 "Official Notice to the Press of New Mexico," printed in Revista Católica, 8 Feb. 1879. The editor of the New Mexican was in fact a Roman Catholic.
21 Lamy, "Carta Pastoral," diocesan files, AASF, 9 Feb. 1879, microfilm in NMSRCA.
could become of our Mexican youth." While "the war against religion by education" in New Mexico was not conducted with the same "intensity" and "relentlessness" as in France, "it is the same war. It is organized persecution by the secret societies and infidelity against God and his religion," especially dangerous because it was directed against the young.  

Lamy achieved one small victory against the Protestants that year when he managed to engineer the replacement of the Presbyterian Indian agent in Santa Fe with a Catholic, but the episode had no lasting effect. Whatever plans for the establishment of schools he might have had were seriously hampered by the lack of money. He admitted to the SPF that any surplus was committed to building his new cathedral in Santa Fe. 

Lamy fell seriously ill in 1880, and he never recovered his former vitality. The next year he replaced Truchard as vicar general (his reasons remain a complete mystery) with James Defouri, a native of Savoy who had been working in Kansas for the past twenty years. Truchard returned to France, where for thirty years he served as a priest in a village in the Massif Central. 

It was Defouri who wrote to the Vatican two years later, in February 1884, to warn that the New Mexico legislature was about to introduce two bills "most aggravating to Catholics." Four days later, the last pastoral letter of Lamy's long reign appeared, probably also written by Defouri. The letter stated that those who preferred to send their children to "atheistic or impious schools" rather

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23 Lamy to Oeuvre de la Propagation, 28 Oct. 1882, Horgan Collection, AASF. 
than those "of their own religion" would be refused the sacraments. The warning was not enforced, however, because later that year the Third Plenary Council of the American Church ruled against the practice. In March, the education laws were passed in New Mexico, making it possible for the territory to move toward a genuine public school system.25

Lamy's successor was Salpointe, the Bishop of Arizona. In his letters to the SPF and his pastoral letters, he was as zealously opposed to the Protestants' missionary and educational efforts as Lamy had been, but New Mexico was changing dramatically. Americans and other strangers had begun to penetrate the isolated province when the independent Mexican regime opened it to trade in 1821, but when Lamy and the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Santa Fe thirty years later, New Mexico, with its ancient cultures, its vigorous folk religion, and its distinctive social and political structures, was quite unlike either the United States or the other western territories. By the time that Lamy retired as archbishop in 1885, New Mexico was still poor and isolated, but the slow process of becoming "American" had begun.

In religion, to become American meant to accept religious diversity in place of monolithic Catholicism. It also entailed a notion of separation of church and state that had had no place in New Mexico's Spanish or Mexican heritage. This separation was a concept which Lamy and the first generation of French priests, products of the Catholic revival in Restoration France, also found both religiously and morally dangerous. When Lamy sent his annual reports to the SPF, he routinely provided figures on

25 Defouri to Propaganda Fide (Rome), 16 Feb. 1884, misc. church records, NMSRCA from AASF; Lamy, "Carta pastoral," 20 Feb. 1884, NMSRCA from AASF; and Everett, 126.
the numbers of "Catholics" and "heretics" in the territory. Except in a few sermons, he was too discreet to express such views publicly in New Mexico, but there is no question that he saw Protestants as intruders, a menace to the godly kingdom that he and his French clergy were trying to create in New Mexico. The irony is that he and his priests were intruders as well.