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SOUTHERN VEILS: THE SISTERS OF LORETTO IN EARLY NATIONAL
KENTUCKY

By

Hannah O'Daniel
B.A., Murray State University, 2014

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in History

Department of History
University of Louisville
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A Thesis Approved on

November 20, 2017

By the following Thesis Committee:

Dr. A. Glenn Crothers

Dr. Thomas C. Mackey

Dr. Susan Ryan

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ABSTRACT

SOUTHERN VEILS: THE SISTERS OF LORETTO IN EARLY NATIONAL KENTUCKY

Hannah O'Daniel

November 20, 2017

This thesis analyzes the experiences of Roman Catholic women who joined the Sisters of Loretto, a community of women religious in rural Washington and Nelson Counties, Kentucky, between the 1790s and 1826. It argues that the Sisters of Loretto used faith to interpret and respond to unfolding events in the early nation. The women sought to combat moral slippage and restore providential favor in the face of local Catholic institutional instability, global Protestant evangelical movements, war and economic crisis, and a tuberculosis outbreak. The Lorettoines faced financial, social, and cultural pressures—including an economic depression, a culture that celebrated family formation and reproduction, and race-based slavery—that shaped how they executed their benevolent and educational missions over time. The Sisters pursued benevolent and educational missions to serve God and uphold the economic, racial, and gendered social order of the Border South.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1815, a fundraising and recruiting print (Figure 1) circulated in western European Roman Catholic parishes. Parishioners viewed an engraving of a convent of women religious labeled “Little Loretto Kentucky, United States of America.” In the center of the convent grounds, eighteen sisters kneel on both sides of the Virgin Mary. She stands with her arms raised and heart pierced under her crucified son, while cherubs extend her veil around the women. The cherubs unfurl two banners that read “O SUFFERING JESUS!!” and “O SORROWFUL MARY!!,” clarifying the Catholic devotion depicted. The scene and the disproportionately large size of the women compared to the other visual elements in the print asserts the Lorettones’ commitment to the sorrows of Jesus and Mary at the foot of the cross—and by extension, God—as their central purpose. Surrounding the sisters are uniform, well-kept log cabins labeled with their function and enclosed by fencing. The cabin labeled “school of orphans” identifies the educational and benevolent mission of the community. The image, with its simple but structurally sound buildings, conveys to potential patrons the order’s financial trustworthiness and stability. Distant mountains, tropical foliage like palm trees and ferns, and expansive unpopulated land craft an exciting, exotic, and isolated environment similar to the images of other regions served by European Christian missions. Despite the illusion of tropicity to generate interest, the print maintains local characteristics through the hewn log fencing and cabins. The presence of cleared land, varied gardens, and the cabin labeled “servants quarters and

meat house” allude to the temporal labor conducted by unidentified people that enabled the community to maintain its focus on spiritual work.¹

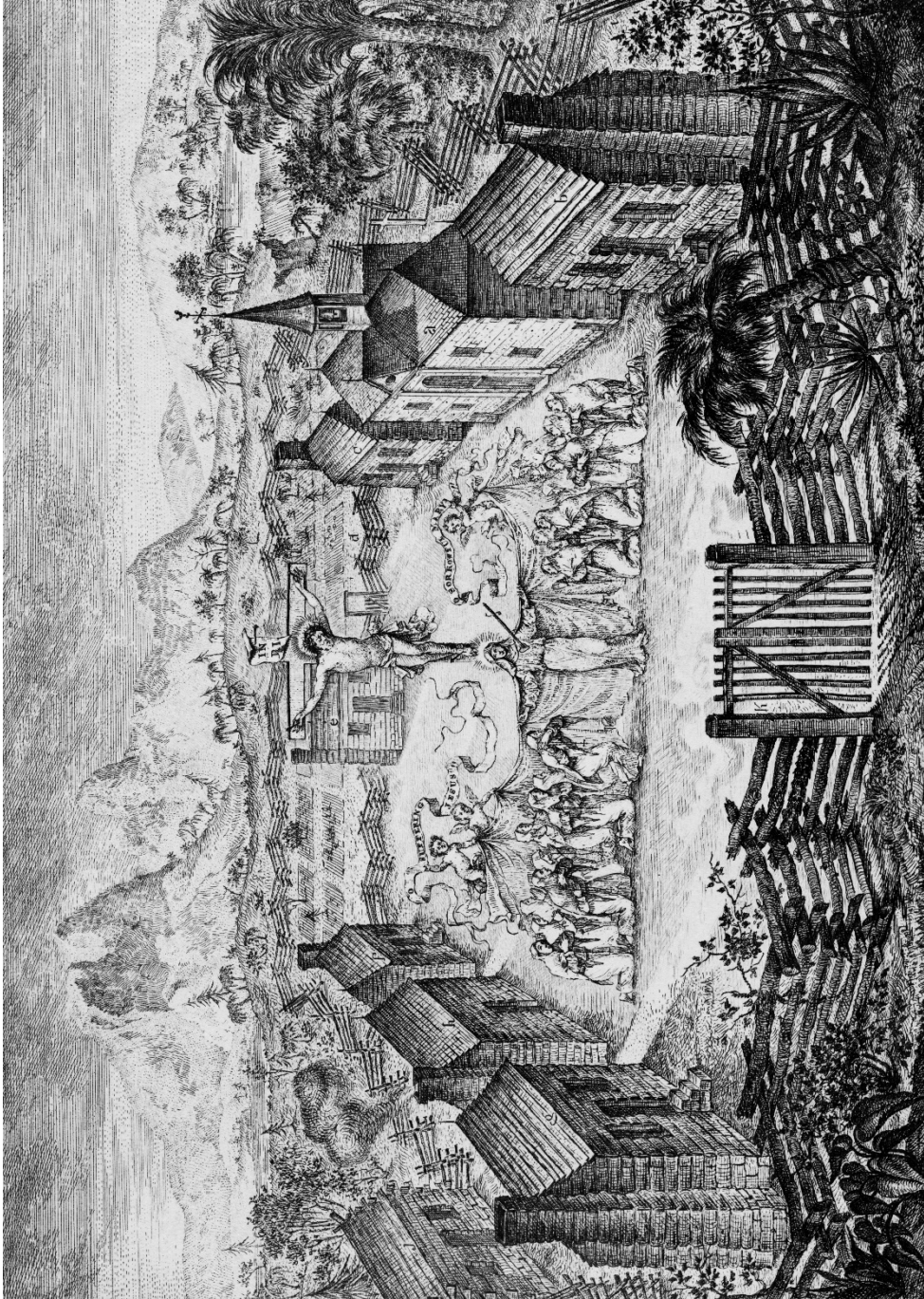


Figure 1: *Klyn Loretten in noord-America. Petit Lorette etats unis de L'Amerique. Little Loretto Kentucky, United States of America / dessiné et gravé par Courtois á Malines. ca.1815. Engraving, 26.9 x 32.8 cm (plate) on sheet 31 x 40.2 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003674808/>.*

The Sisters of Loretto commissioned the print with the intent to attract donors and potential recruits by playing on romanticized European ideas about missions. But, by the

late nineteenth century Catholic writers interpreted the image as evidence of the frontier exceptionalism, resilience, and isolation of the founding members of the Sisters of Loretto. The interpretative shift coincided with similar themes in the late nineteenth and twentieth century histories of the order. Scholars have identified two “waves” of histories of European and American women religious. Before the 1970s, community members, clergy, and other interested Catholics wrote most of the histories of orders and biographies of individual sisters. These works tended toward thick description of their subjects and focused on how sisters exemplified virtue, heroic perseverance, and exceptionalism. Writings that addressed the history of the Sisters of Loretto usually depicted the order as an extension of the holiness of Father Charles Nerinckx, who helped found the Loretines. Since the nineteenth century, American Catholic clerics, journalists, and historians celebrated the contributions of women religious to the development of the American Catholic Church and nation through their teaching, medical care, and other benevolent ministries. Celebratory narratives that stressed the role of Catholics in the history of the United States proliferated in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century when vocal anti-Catholic nativists questioned Catholic claims to American identity. Despite efforts to gain recognition for the role of women religious in American history, pre-1970s scholarly publications on women religious were limited to Catholic presses and consisted primarily of uncontextualized microhistories of an order or diocese.²

By the 1960s, communities of women religious like the Loretines had long valued interpreting their past to understand and shape their response to present circumstances. The Second Vatican Council of 1962 to 1965 further legitimized this practice and encouraged additional examination of the histories of communities. The

1965 “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life” called on orders to reflect continually on “the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time” and “let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions . . . be faithfully held in honor.”³ Women religious like the Loretine Sisters Florence Wolff and Joan Campbell explicitly drew on this call for a usable past in their recent histories of the order.⁴ Other women religious began conducting surveys of nuns and sisters in the United States, with an eye toward identifying the uniquely American founding spirit and changing contexts of orders.⁵ Mary Ewens surveyed historical women religious to “aid in the adaptation of religious communities to contemporary needs.” She argued that stark differences between nineteenth century European and American gender roles for women and “outmoded definitions of canon law” caused inevitable conflict “when nuns adhering to European expectations for women beg[a]n to live and work in [the] American setting.” Interested in a usable past, Ewens stressed the advantages of orders of American-born women, like the Sisters of Loretto, who knew the language and culture of the people they served.⁶

The Vatican II’s call for the study of religious life coincided with the social turn in academic history that increasingly considered women subjects worthy of study. Since the 1970s, women religious with professional history training and secular scholars have worked to apply insights from religious, gender, and social history to analyze individual orders and craft surveys of women religious.⁷ Historians argue that communities of women religious developed to meet needs specific to their time and place.⁸ Broader historical forces, local conditions, and personalities altered the extent to which outsiders accepted the deviation from marriage and motherhood by members.⁹ Scholars of the

economics of religious orders note that orders maintained and cultivated connections to the outside world through their financial management.¹⁰ Historians also examine how sisters shaped their locales and broader culture, and argue that the records of women religious offer historical insights applicable to the lives of non-vowed women and the broader fields of economic, education, medical, and benevolence history.¹¹ Harkening to the older celebratory narratives, post-1970s historians of women religious in the United States continue to focus on sisters' contributions to the development of the American Catholic Church and the nation. First stressed by Mary Ewens in her 1978 study, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America: Variations on the International Theme*, scholars such as Margaret M. McGuinness argue that "sisters were more actively involved in the everyday lives of Catholics than priests" and for both Catholics and non-Catholics "they were and are the face of the U.S. Catholic Church."¹²

Within the United States, collective orders have fostered additional scholarship by improving access to their archival collections. In 1977, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious began holding archival workshops to introduce sisters to best practices in the field. Under the direction of Sr. Mary Evangeline Thomas, the 1976-1983 National Archives Project resulted in a guide to the holdings of 583 repositories of Catholic and non-Catholic women religious, which encouraged more scholarship.¹³

Unlike some of their Protestant neighbors, Catholics did not value individual religious writing as a method to gauge or achieve salvation. Religious orders expected members to spend their limited leisure time performing religious works and thus ordinary nuns did not have doctrinal or institutional justification for journaling. The Rules of the Sisters of Loretto, like those of other early modern women religious, proscribed personal,

external letter writing unless approved and read by the convent leadership.¹⁴ Catholic women religious attempted to avoid “singularity,” or the value of individuality over the good of the community, which by extension branded personal memoir writing as a prideful distraction.¹⁵ The Loretines’ independence from European orders also prevented an accumulation of institutional trans-Atlantic correspondence and reports that bolster the historical record of other convents in the United States. The bulk of detailed correspondence on the Sisters dates to the order’s expansion within and outside the state.¹⁶ The Sisters’ own interpretations of their lives and thoughts are few, but the extant Rules, membership and mortuary lists, and letters of male ecclesiastics who interacted with and raised funds for the Sisters provide rich sources. The limitations of extant source materials composed by ordinary women religious has encouraged historians to turn to other sources. Kentucky newspapers, Protestant publications, court records, bank records, tax lists, and the census supplement and contextualize the historical record of the order and early national American Catholics.

Most recently, historian Margaret A. Hogan sought to integrate the historiography of women religious and American Catholicism into scholarly analysis of the early Sisters of Loretto. Her 2008 dissertation, “Sister Servants: Catholic Women Religious in Antebellum Kentucky,” examines the Loretines alongside the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and Dominican Sisters of St. Magdalen’s, communities founded shortly after the Loretines in Nelson and Washington Counties. Hogan discusses the different challenges faced by American-born orders in rural areas and those transplanted from Europe to urban centers. Hogan places the Kentucky sisters’ development within the centuries-long heritage of women religious in Europe and the institutional needs of the

rural antebellum American church. She stresses the role of women religious in “the surprising growth and success of the Catholic Church in Kentucky,” as the sisters staffed and built institutions that served spiritual and physical needs of the faithful, including schools, orphanages, asylums, and hospitals.¹⁷ In their work and the comparative lack of interaction with male ecclesiastics, women religious shaped Protestant and Catholic views of individual Catholics and the Church. Priests valued sisters for their active services, but orders struggled to carve out autonomy within the patriarchal church and delineate their relationship with priests and bishops across changing diocesan boundaries. Hogan argues that male ecclesiastics’ backgrounds and personal conflicts influenced their interactions with women religious.¹⁸

This thesis follows the lead of historians of women religious in viewing the founding of the Sisters of Loretto as filling voids in institutional authority and providing personal fulfillment for unmarried women. It expands on Hogan’s local focus by explicitly interrogating how popular faith shaped the founding of the community. It also argues for greater nuance in the analysis of the relationship between European Catholics and native-born orders. Catholic women in Kentucky saw themselves not as distinctive from European orders but engaged in the Catholic global mission to evangelize heathen, prevent declension, and combat evangelical Protestantism. The Sisters of Loretto operated independently of European orders, but cultivated a spiritual economy with Europeans for donations and prayers. Furthermore, this thesis amends traditional narratives that emphasize the relative ease with which American-born women founded orders compared to their European counterparts. Analysis of the violent and legislative backlash against the Shakers, another American-born celibate and communal group

operating in early national Kentucky, highlights the importance of the founding women's efforts to craft and safeguard their social respectability. The establishment of the order amid the anti-Shaker backlash and War of 1812 nationalism that celebrated romantic relationships, family formation, liberty, and manhood complicate arguments that the benevolence and service of women religious assuaged conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the early national period. Instead, broader cultural factors and national events continually reshaped the conditions of respectability for local Catholic women.

The debates of religious historians on the characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church in the early national West and South also inform this thesis. Catholic historians agree that the geographically dispersed and diverse Catholic populations strained the few priests and limited resources of the institutional church.¹⁹ Maintenance of orthodox Catholic practice required active commitment by the laity, including women who played a significant role in shaping the faith of their households and communities.²⁰ As residents of a predominantly Protestant nation, Catholics remained constantly aware of how individual and community behavior could impact their relationship with non-Catholic neighbors.²¹ American Catholic historians such as John Tracy Ellis characterize Catholic-Protestant relations in the early republic as benign. According to this narrative, exceptional American religious liberty neatly folded Catholics into the nation after the intense anti-Catholicism of the British colonial era.²² Since the 2000s, historians of early national Catholicism such as Michael S. Carter and John R. Dichtl have corrected this oversimplification by arguing that Catholic ecclesiastics, women religious, and laity intentionally carved out Catholic social and political inclusion.²³

Chapter one establishes the 1812 sociocultural context of the founding of the Sisters of Loretto in rural Washington County, Kentucky. It introduces the religious and material life of Roman Catholics in central Kentucky from the 1780s to the early 1810s and argues that the earliest members of the order both reflected and departed from white women's roles in the maintenance of Catholicism in the early national West. White women faced multiple challenges: limited clerical reach and stability, the threat of spiritual declension and the attraction of other faiths, and the need to define differences between white and black amid race-based slavery. While helping to sustain the faith, white women could only fulfill roles other community members and ecclesiastics deemed respectable. In line with gender norms and concern for perpetuating the faith in youth, single woman Mary Rhodes began the organization of a school for Catholic girls in her central Kentucky parish in 1812. As other Catholic women joined her teaching effort, the group decided to formalize their commitment to God and education by creating a religious community. The local context shaped the particular elements of Catholic devotional and monastic heritage adopted by the founding members of the Sisters of Loretto. They chose Mary as their patron saint, both as a common practice for women religious and as an extension of the prevalence of Marian devotions to demarcate Catholics in the culturally Protestant nation. The women sought to serve God and the broader Catholic and non-Catholic community through a rigorous prayer schedule like that of contemplative nuns. The Lorettoines provided for their temporal needs by offering donors prayer and utilizing the labor sources available in the region, which included enslaved blacks. The economic needs of the order shaped their educational and benevolent work, as they reserved regular teaching and boarding services to orphaned or

paying white girls, and offered separate Sunday-schools for poorer whites, and free and enslaved people of color.

Above all, the Sisters intended to serve God and the souls of the broader Catholic and non-Catholic community. Their focus on faith nevertheless did not remove the women from local, national, and transatlantic events or cultural pressures. Chapter two incorporates scholarship on early national American family-centered culture and nationalism to contextualize the cultural dissonance of the celibate Sisters of Loretto. Politicians and writers proudly trumpeted the rapidly reproducing American population as a sign of the budding nation's power and potential. Republicans argued that reproduction coupled with seemingly endless western land fostered a uniquely free citizenry, and gave the new nation the manpower and resources to build a booming economy and defend the nation. Denser populations offered white settlers a greater sense of security against Native American raids and confidence about the success of their attacks on native villages. Marriage and its end goal of reproduction formed a crucial tool of the expanding white population. Anti-Shaker sentiment in early national Kentucky highlighted the dangers faced by celibate, communal groups, particularly in a region that valued and politicized marriage and reproduction. Historians of Shakers in the early nation argue that observers anxious over the protection of white families, individual liberty, and the nation felt threatened by the celibate, communal faith. Anti-Shaker advocates used motifs of anti-Catholicism to describe the threats of the Shakers.²⁴

Chapter two argues that as both an expression of their faith and an effort to construct a respectable usefulness for themselves as single women in a non-Catholic nation, the Sisters served the larger social order. Joyce Linda Broussard argues that

nineteenth century southern ideology “relegated all women, even those unattached to men as wives, to a position in which they achieved agency and self-fulfillment in their service to the larger patriarchal order of life.”²⁵ According to this ideal, “moral authority and self-respect as well as societal esteem followed from the degree to which individuals accepted their subordinate or superior positions and worked dutifully to fulfill their various roles within a hierarchical social structure.”²⁶ Historians like Lucia McMahon stress that early nationalists considered the education of white girls as serving the moral and functional needs of families and the broader society. Americans in the early republic debated the subjects appropriate for girls of different social classes and their future roles as wives and mothers. The Sisters of Loretto served the social order in part by educating girls according to methods deemed appropriate for their future roles as nonelite women and maintaining racial distinctions.²⁷ In addition to their education ministry, the Sisters of Loretto also offered asylum to groups other historians have noted as “worthy” or “deserving” poor in early modern European and American benevolent work, including the elderly.²⁸ Terri L. Premo argues that financial strain on early nineteenth century elderly widows and single women caused many to seek resources from and shelter with family members and friends. Carole Haber notes that early national elderly Americans felt degraded if they had to resort to public poor relief. In response, some Americans attempted to create respectable, institutional elderly care for those without adequate assistance from family or friends. Chapter two argues that the order’s benevolence to elderly individuals provided a respectable alternative to public poor relief and burdening the resources of family and friends.²⁹ The Sisters also offered asylum to disabled slaves, enabling slaveholders to believe that they maintained their paternalistic obligation to care

for their dependents while divesting themselves of the burden of supporting non-productive laborers. The Sisters' work coincided with Kentuckians' needs as the unfolding War of 1812 disrupted household economies and resources.

The order maintained its local respectability for the duration of the war despite popular nationalist narratives that called on women to use their sexuality and romantic attachments to motivate men to fight. Instead, the celibate women fit another gendered nationalistic narrative perpetuated by newspapers and pro-war advocates: American men fought to protect their female loved ones from sexual predation by Native Americans and British soldiers. War of 1812 cultural historian Nicole Eustace analyzes the public emotional appeals that American politicians and writers used to incite support for the conflict. She argues that pro-war advocates portrayed "romantic love as patriotic duty." They articulated the ideal that young single women roused patriotism by shunning cowardly and un-American suitors in favor of young men who proved their worth with military service. Pro-war writers also celebrated Euro-American men as morally superior to British and Native Americans based on their value and protection of families, and pointed to the war as an opportunity for Americans to prove their moral superiority.³⁰ By the end of the war, public outrage at the admittance of three young women to the Sisters revealed the fragility and contingent nature of the order's respectability among non-Catholics. The gendered narratives that encouraged men to connect decisions on marriage and family formation with nationalism, liberty, and manhood coalesced with local concerns that economically and politically well-connected girls removed themselves from the marriage market.

Chapter three analyzes the order between 1815 and 1820 amid the regional, national, and global contexts of Christian mission movements and economic crisis. It draws on histories of the early nineteenth century European and American Christian mission and bible society movements³¹ to historicize the actions of the Sisters within the global framework of the Catholic Church and to recognize their identity as missionaries in competition with Protestants.³² Historians of early national American religion argue that post-War of 1812 millennialism, nationalism, and western expansion heightened concern for Protestant evangelical movements,³³ which in turn intensified the urgency of the Sisters of Loretto to pursue missions. In the 1810s, young women joined the Sisters to combat the growing reach of evangelizing Protestants. The order planned “colonies” of branch houses in Kentucky and Missouri to shape the faith of poor white girls and Native Americans and cultivated donor relationships with European Catholics interested in North American missions.

While the order expanded and incurred additional expenses, the booming postwar economy gradually faltered. By 1819, central Kentuckians experienced this broader economic depression. Chapter three incorporates scholarship on the early national American economy and the social aspects of economic crisis to analyze how Catholic women and girls adjusted to their changed economic circumstances. Economic historians note that interpretations of the nature and proposed solutions to crisis reveal tensions in society.³⁴ Sarah A. Kidd argues that Americans interpreted the Panic of 1819 as a product of individual moral failings, especially dishonesty, selfishness, laziness, greed, and over-indulgence in material goods after the post-war economic boom. Americans also cited the natural vice of women as a cause and called on women to use their morality to reshape

the economic conditions of their families and the nation.³⁵ Chapter three argues that Kentuckians debated and employed religious and moral reasoning to understand the economy. Explanations that centered on greed, lavish lifestyles, selfishness, and dishonesty further justified the poverty and service of the Sisters of Loretto and attracted new, young members. Young Catholic women and girls drew on the conflicting depictions of femininity during the crisis to create an opportunity to shape the morality of their nation by joining the Sisters of Loretto.

Chapter four analyzes the Lorettones' anxiety over God's intentions and the trajectory of the order during a fatal tuberculosis outbreak between 1820 and 1826. The chapter draws on histories of nineteenth century tuberculosis caregiving, emotions, and religious interpretations of death and illness to argue that the deaths of the thirty-four women and the toll on survivors shook the order and shaped its decisions.³⁶ The unexpected loss of labor further undercut the fiscal viability of the order in the lingering trans-Atlantic economic depression while its members were preoccupied with new branch houses. Worried that they had lost providential approval, members negotiated structural changes with male ecclesiastics, including raising the order's standard of living and marketing the school to wealthier families. Some of the sisters opposed the proposed changes, fearing that they would further affront God by drifting from the original purpose and identity of the order. The Sisters' poverty and attention to non-elite girls, moreover, appeared justified by the economic depression. Amid debates over rule changes, population dispersal between the branch houses, and the loss of labor from disease, three enslaved black women pushed to become formal members of the order, hoping that the upheaval of the times would enable them to receive greater recognition of their spiritual

and economic contributions. The chapter employs insights from historians of women religious of color in the Americas to highlight the unique reasons that the black women desired to join the community. It argues that black women found fulfillment in Catholic sisterhoods because membership publicly declared their virtue and capacity for chastity, contrary to white assumptions of the innate lewdness of women of color. Claiming the protection of chastity offered women of color a rare opportunity to assert control over their bodies and subvert the sexual abuse and pressure to reproduce rampant in slavery.³⁷ The Loretine leadership considered the enslaved women's request, but decided that maintaining the order's respectability among the white population by adhering to the border South's racial hierarchy outweighed the benefits of more full members. The black women accepted a compromise and gained recognition below the status of full members, revealing how external cultural and social practices continued to shape the order.

The local story of the establishment and early challenges of the Sisters of Loretto raises broader historical questions. The collective experience of the Loretines provides insight into how rural unmarried adolescents and young women interpreted the fluid and often conflicting popular conceptions of femininity in the early republic. Analysis of the Sisters' actions and interpretations of the world around them through the lens of their faith demonstrates the utility of studying religious views in the early national United States. As women who devoted their lives to their faith, religion was a central factor in their lives. But even studying such exceptionally devout individuals shows that religion was inseparable from the changing social norms and economic realities in the early national era.

¹ *Klyn Loretten in noord-America. Petit Lorette etats unis de L'Amerique. Little Loretto Kentucky, United States of America / dessiné et gravé par Courtois á Malines*, ca.1815, Engraving, 26.9 x 32.8 cm (plate) on sheet 31 x 40.2 cm, Popular Graphic Arts, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003674808/>.

² For the tendencies of the pre-1970s historiography of women religious, see Deirdre Raftery, "The 'Third Wave' is Digital: Researching Histories of Women Religious in the Twenty-first Century," *American Catholic Studies* 128 (Summer 2017): 32-34; Elizabeth Kolmer, "Catholic Women Religious and Women's History: A Survey of the Literature," *American Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1978): 639, 641. For the efforts of Catholic writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to celebrate the history of women religious in the United States as evidence that Catholics played a positive role in society and had a claim to American identity, see Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For early writings on the history of the Sisters of Loretto that exemplify thick description, see Margaret B. Downing, *Chronicles of Loretto. . . . Souvenir of the Golden Jubilee of Loretto, Florissant, Missouri, Celebrated June 21, 22, 23, 1897* (New York: D. H. McBride and Company, 1897); Anna C. Minogue, *Loretto: Annals of the Century* (New York: The America Press, 1912); Mary Matilda Barrett, *Courage, American: Mother Mary Rhodes, Foundress of the Sisters of Loretto* (Louisville, KY: Schuhmann Printing Co., 1962); Mary Matilda Barrett, "One Hundred and Fifty Years," ed. Esther Marie Goodrow, unpublished manuscript, 1968, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky. For early writings that include the Sisters of Loretto as an extension of male virtue, see Martin J. Spalding, *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky; from their Commencement in 1787, to the Jubilee of 1826-7* (Louisville, KY: B. J. Webb and Brother, 1844), 202-14; Camillus P. Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx: With a Chapter on the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky; Copious Notes on the Progress of Catholicity in the United States of America, from 1800 to 1825; An Account of the Establishment of the Society of Jesus in Missouri; And an Historical Sketch of the Sisterhood of Loretto in Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, etc.* (1880; London: Forgotten Books, 2015), ch. 14-31; Benjamin J. Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (Louisville, KY: Charles A. Rodgers, 1884), ch. 17; W. J. Howlett, *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx: Pioneer Missionary of Kentucky and Founder of the Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross* (1912; Techny, Illinois: The Mission Press, S.V.D., 1940), ch. 14-22. Joseph B. Code, *Great American Foundresses* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1929), 120-51.

³ "Decree On the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965," *The Holy See*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html (accessed October 10, 2017).

⁴ Florence Wolff, *From Generation to Generation: The Sisters of Loretto, Their Constitutions and Devotions, 1812-Vatican II* (Louisville, KY: General Printing Company, 1982); Joan Campbell, *Loretto: An Early American Congregation in the Antebellum South* (St. Louis, MO: Bluebird Publishing, 2015).

⁵ Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America: Variations on the International Theme* (1978; Sinsinawa Dominicans, Inc., 2014); Barbara Misner, *'Highly Respectable and Accomplished Ladies': Catholic Women Religious in America, 1790-1850* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988).

⁶ Ewens, *The Role of the Nun*, 1, 3.

⁷ Raftery, "The 'Third Wave' is Digital," 34.

⁸ For example, historians of modern European women religious argue that women chose to organize communities to face threats to Catholicism in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation and French Revolution; see Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (1996; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Microhistories also show how local context influenced the timing and aims of the founding of orders; see Joan Mueller, *The Privilege of Poverty: Clare of Assisi, Agnes of Prague, and the Struggle for a Franciscan Rule for Women* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006); Kathryn Burns, *Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁹ For analysis of tenuous toleration of Catholic women religious, see Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Maarten Van Dijck, Jan de Maeyer, Jeffrey Tyssens, and Jimmy Koppen, eds., *The Economics of Providence: Management, Finances and Patrimony of Religious Orders and Congregations in Europe, 1773-c1930* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012); Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Burns, *Colonial Habits*.

¹¹ For recent histories of women religious in the United States and Americas that trace links between the communities and broader society, see Burns, *Colonial Habits*; Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Clark, *Masterless Mistresses*; Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Ann M. Little, *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

¹² Ewens, *The Role of the Nun*; McGuinness, *Called to Serve*, 8.

¹³ Kolmer, "Catholic Women Religious and Women's History," 643; "1989 Awards: Sr. Evaneline Thomas, Distinguished Historian Award," *Conference on the History of Women Religious*, <http://www.chwr.org/1989-awards/> (accessed August 27, 2017); Evangeline Thomas, *Women Religious: History Sources. Guide to Repositories in the United States* (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1983).

¹⁴ Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious*, 10.

¹⁵ Little, *The Many Captivities of Esther Wheelwright*, 15; Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious*, 10.

¹⁶ For analysis of European connections and branch houses as contributing to historical records, see Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious*, 10.

¹⁷ Margaret A. Hogan, "Sister Servants: Catholic Women Religious in Antebellum Kentucky" (PhD. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 1-2.

¹⁸ Hogan, "Sister Servants."

¹⁹ John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism* (1956; rev. 2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); John R. Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁰ For the argument that Catholic laity in early America took the initiative in pursuing orthodox practice in the absence of stable institutional support, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), ch. 1. For the role of women in Catholic practice and catechism, see James J. Kenneally, *The History of American Catholic Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 4; Margaret Susan Thompson, "Women and American Catholicism, 1789-1989," in *Perspectives on the American Catholic Church*, eds. Stephen J. Vicchio and Virginia Geiger (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1989), 124; Beatriz Betancourt Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland, 1689-1776" *Maryland Historical Magazine* 94 (Winter 1999): 401; Karen Kennelly, "Ideals of American Catholic Womanhood," in *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration*, ed. Karen Kennelly (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989), 2.

²¹ Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*.

²² Ellis, *American Catholicism*, ch. 1-2; James Hennessey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 117-18; Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 15-18.

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³² Historians of early nineteenth century foreign Catholic women religious and priests in the United States have stressed the importance of their subjects' identities as foreign missionaries. See Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*; Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*. Although native-born and confined to Kentucky and Missouri, the early members of the Sisters of Loretto cultivated a similar global missionary identity for their work.

³³ For the connections between post-War of 1812 millennialism, nationalism, western expansion, and Protestant evangelical movements, see Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 2; Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism*; Fea, *The Bible Cause*, 23-26; Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*; Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 28, 39-40, 62.

³⁴ For crises as socially constructed and opening opportunities otherwise unavailable, see A. T. Brown, Andy Burn, and Rob Doherty, "Introduction: Coping with Crisis: Understanding the Role of Crises in Economic and Social History," in *Crises in Economic and Social History: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. A. T. Brown, Andy Burn, and Rob Doherty (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2015), 1-23.

³⁵ For morality and femininity as reported causes and solutions of the Panic of 1819, see Sarah A. Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order: The Panic of 1819 and the Culture of the Early American Republic" (Ph.d. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2002). For the trajectory of the Panic of 1819, see Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 192; Stephen Aron, "'The Poor Men to Starve': The Lives and Times of Workingmen in Early Lexington," in *The Buzzel About Kentucke: Settling the Promised Land*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 181-182; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order;" Sharon Ann Murphy, "Banks and Banking in the Early American Republic," *History Compass* 10 (2012): 409-22; Murray N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Matthew Gerard Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics: Central Kentucky, 1790-1840," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1996), ch. 4-6.

³⁶ Medical historians describe nineteenth century tuberculosis patients' miserable, messy, and often long-term symptoms. See Emily K. Abel, *The Inevitable Hour: A History of Caring for Dying Patients in America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press,

2013), 14-15; David S. Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Helen Bynum, *Spitting Blood: The History of Tuberculosis* (2012; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), ch. 3-4; Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (1999; New York: New York University Press, 2000). Emily K. Abel and Joanna Bourke combine medical and emotion history to show that in the United States and Britain, nineteenth century caregivers of patients experienced emotional tolls themselves. Abel, *A History of Caring for Dying Patients*, 10-15; Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From Prayer to Painkillers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37-38. Historians of religion and medicine note that Christians long viewed illness as providential and debated the theological meaning of large-scale outbreaks. For analysis of Protestant religious interpretations of the source of epidemics in early America, see Thomas A. Apel, *Feverish Bodies, Enlightened Minds: Science and the Yellow Fever Controversy in the Early American Republic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), ch. 4; Cristobal Silva, *Miraculous Plagues: An Epidemiology of Early New England Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁷ For the appeal of Catholic monasticism to women of color in the Americas and their struggle to gain acceptance by whites, see Mónica Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Virginia Meacham Gould, “Henriette Delille, Free Women of Color, and Catholicism in Antebellum New Orleans, 1727-1852,” in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Americas*, eds. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 280-81; Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious*; Susan Midgen Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*, 2nd edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 109-112; Nancy E. Van Deusen, “The World of Ursula de Jesús,” in *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula de Jesús*, trans. and ed. Nancy E. Van Deusen (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Shannen Dee Williams, “Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2013), 18, 21-23.

CHAPTER I

FAITH AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SISTERS OF LORETTO, 1780s-1810s

In 1812, Roman Catholic woman Mary Rhodes did not know how her proposal to teach Catholic girls in Washington County, Kentucky, would be received by Catholic clergy and laity. She recognized, however, that young Catholic girls in central Kentucky needed an education to bolster their faith and produce future generations of Catholics. Traditional religious concern for the souls of Catholic youth took on new intensity because of cultural threats to the perpetuation of the faith in early national Kentucky. Catholics in the West lacked clerical support, feared declension and evangelical faith movements, and needed to maintain differences between the white and black population to protect race-based slavery. The Sisters of Loretto emerged in a climate in which Roman Catholic women helped guide their households and communities through these challenges while acting in ways deemed respectable in the patriarchal culture of early nineteenth century Kentucky. The unmarried women first intended to serve the local Catholic population spiritually through education. They intensified their endeavor by dedicating themselves to a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience for God. According to monastic theology, their vows minimized temporal distractions, enabled them to devote their time more fully to God, and leveraged their prayers to benefit both Catholics and non-Catholics. The Lorettoines selected the suffering Virgin Mary during Jesus' crucifixion as their patron. Their selection represented popular Catholic devotion to Mary in the early national United States, delineated their doctrinal differences with local Protestants, and asserted

their commitment to atone for the insults of non-Catholics against God. The community met its temporal needs through donations, school fees, textile production, agriculture, and the utilization of available local labor sources, including enslaved people of color. Concern for financial stability shaped for whom and how the Lorettoines directed their spiritual influence.

The Sisters of Loretto originated in a region characterized by a limited clerical presence and tensions between clerics that threatened the viability of Catholicism in central Kentucky. Following the American Revolution, Roman Catholics in the United States enjoyed little ecclesiastical support at home or from abroad. The Holy See in Rome considered Catholics outside of Europe residents of mission territories and delegated authority over them to the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, a governing body of fifteen officials that met bimonthly. Until 1815, the Catholic Church in the United States operated with only minimal oversight from the overstretched and distracted Holy See. Events in Europe—particularly the anticlerical animosity of the French Revolution and Napoleon’s imprisonment of the Pope—disrupted the organizational network of the Propaganda Fide and undercut the authority of the papacy. Clergy in America tried to remain in contact with the Propaganda, but the role of the body was limited to the appointment of new bishops for the dioceses.¹ In 1785, only twenty-four priests resided in the United States, an insufficient number for a faith that relied on priests to minister sacraments. The new republic also lacked resident officials capable of ordaining priests to meet the demand, prompting Father John Carroll, a Maryland-born priest, to call on the Holy See to form a diocese in the United States. Advised by his contacts in Rome, Carroll

appealed to fears of anti-Catholicism to justify the creation of a diocese. He argued that Protestants would raise alarms if a foreign entity—the Propaganda—asserted control in the new republic and that unruly priests would fuel American anti-Catholicism. The Propaganda agreed to Carroll’s plan and created a diocese centered in Baltimore. It then approved Carroll’s election as the first bishop in 1789.²

From his consecration in 1790, Bishop Carroll worked to build and maintain a resident church hierarchy in a diocese that spanned the entire United States.³ Carroll had noted the problem of unruly priests to justify the creation of a diocese for the United States and problems with a small number of clergy continued after his election as bishop. Most clergy supported his authority and sought to serve the laity, but some asserted that Carroll had no authority over them. Others proved incompetent at their ministry, suffered from alcoholism, or were too physically and mentally exhausted from constant travel to devote adequate attention to the laity. The minority of problematic priests challenged Carroll and the other clergy as they sought to minimize public controversies.⁴ Ethnic differences also strained the early Church. About fifty French priests fled to the United States in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The horrors of the French Revolution led many of these clerics to stress adherence to authority, a benefit to Carroll, and their sheer numbers seemed a welcome addition to a consistently understaffed church with a sizeable French-speaking population. But Frenchmen also had to adapt to English, Spanish, Irish, and German lay populations who mocked their accents, and learn to cooperate with priests—particularly the English—trained in other traditions.⁵ Even with the influx of clergy following the French Revolution, high mortality, migration out of the

United States, and the slow pace of seminary training meant that by 1808 only sixty-eight priests resided in the nation.⁶

Westerners like the earliest members of the Sisters of Loretto faced even less access to priests and the sacraments than Catholics in the East.⁷ Eastern colonial families began moving west in the 1770s because they perceived better economic opportunities in the trans-Appalachian region. Beginning in 1776, Virginians, Pennsylvanians, and North Carolinians moved west with their slaves to the central Kentucky settlement of Harrodsburg. Mostly Protestants, they settled along tributaries of Beech Fork and Chaplin River, amid the hills and ridgetops of the Outer Bluegrass. Catholic families of the Western Shore of Maryland began migrating to central Kentucky nearly a decade after this initial Euro-American settlement. In 1785, the first contingent moved to land around the growing town of Bardstown before shifting south to Pottinger's Creek. Catholics settled in the uneven valleys adjacent to waterways that wound through the steep hills of the Knobs region. By the time Kentucky became a state in 1792, Catholics had established three more communities in Washington County: settlements along Hardin's Creek and Cartwright's Creek in the Outer Bluegrass, and Rolling Fork in the Knobs.⁸

Kentucky lay Catholics' attitudes toward maintaining the faith in the West varied from anxiety to indifference.⁹ The devout pressured Carroll to designate priests to serve their settlements and attempted to entice priests to take up residence with promises of church structures, housing, and financial support. Carroll and his clergy, however, had to consider the needs of the laity spread across the United States, and only incrementally authorized mobile priests to include Kentucky in their circuits.¹⁰ The first priest reached central Kentucky in 1787, two years after initial Catholic settlement. Between 1787 and

1805, seven different priests ministered in Kentucky, only one of whom, Father Stephen Badin, proved stable. Despite their optimistic promises, lay Kentuckians struggled to support the early priests and provide resources for church construction. Furthermore, lay-clerical tension grew as the priests attempted to reassert clerical control over parish monetary decisions and police the morality of Kentucky congregations. The arrival of six more priests in 1805 and 1806 increased clerical ability within the state, but their arrival also challenged unified clerical authority as the laity recognized and played off their contrasting ethnic pastoral styles. In the eyes of many Kentucky laity, French-trained Badin and Flemish newcomer Father Charles Nerinckx were unreasonably strict and more conservative than the five English Dominicans. In 1808, Carroll succeeded in elevating Baltimore to an archdiocese, dividing the expanding United States into four dioceses—Bardstown, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston—each presided over by a bishop. Frenchman Benedict Joseph Flaget waited until 1811 to move to Bardstown to fulfill his appointment as bishop. Central Kentuckians benefited from proximity to the clergy at the new diocesan seat, but the sheer size of the diocese—bounded by the Great Lakes, the southern border of Tennessee, the Mississippi River, and the Allegheny Mountains—necessitated that the clergy remain mobile.¹¹

In addition to internal discord, Catholicism faced threats from Protestants in the early republic. In early national central Kentucky, Catholics lived in close contact with more populous Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist congregations.¹² Regular interaction and the conscious efforts of Catholics to maintain respectability encouraged non-Catholic groups to tolerate their Catholic neighbors while still retaining their disapproval of the larger Church.¹³ For their part, Catholics sought to preserve the distinctive theology and

rituals that delineated the confessional divide and, therefore, “true” Christianity. For example, early national Catholics stressed devotion to the Virgin Mary as a signifier of their commitment to Catholic theology. Since the Reformation, Protestants and Catholics clashed on interpretations of Mary, with Protestants leveling heavy criticism of Marian theology without a biblical basis.¹⁴ In the newly independent United States, Catholic clerics selected Mary as the patron saint of the diocese of Baltimore and consecrated the first bishop, Carroll, on the Marian Feast of the Assumption. For Catholics, Mary’s assumption into heaven marked the beginning of her role as mediator between humanity and God, which Protestants considered blasphemy. Catholic laity performed the Marian rosary, which focused prayer on Mary’s joyous and sorrowful moments in Jesus’ life, and her later assumption and heavenly coronation.¹⁵

Interactions with non-Catholics and active Protestant proselytizing risked Catholic theological slippage and conversion.¹⁶ A flowering of evangelical religious expression in the early republic threatened to draw Catholics away from the church. Populist Protestant laity challenged the theological authority and traditions formal clerics espoused and encouraged exuberant involvement of the faithful at meetings.¹⁷ Catholic clergy invested in the maintenance of the Church’s infallibility, clerical control of orderly access to the sacraments, and orthodox religious interpretation considered the movement a dangerous profanation of Christianity.¹⁸ Following news of the multi-denominational Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky in 1801, Stephen Badin noted his concern to Carroll that the evangelical revivals “are very troublesome among Catholics” and that they might lead astray the “Scandalous & nominal Catholics” “among my Parishioners.” Badin reassured Carroll that none had converted at the time of writing and that he was attempting to

mitigate the threat: “I preach peace . . . but I have strictly forbid[den] any communications *in spirituality*.”¹⁹

Catholic clergy stressed the behavior of women in evangelical meetings as particularly blasphemous. In a 1805 report to the Propaganda Fide on the state of the Catholic Church in the United States, Badin noted that “[a]fter the ministers, the women play the principal role” in agitating the “infamous revels” of evangelical revivals.²⁰ Women forsook their Christian role as cultivators of familial spirituality and moral decorum, and instead behaved more like pagan priestesses: “like the Pythonesses of Apollo one see[s] them all in confusion, with wild glances, trembling violently, singing, exhorting, dancing, praying, clapping their hands, seizing those of the assistants, uttering without ceasing the name of God, &c.” Meeting attendants followed the lead of these “Pythonesses,” “begin[ning] little by little, their sighs, ridiculous ejaculations, then follow either mournful or joyous cries, and finally horrible shrieking; some sing, some weep, some clap their hands and stamp their feet, or skip towards one another for hours at a time, finally a number fall fainting.”²¹ Under “the cloak of Christian religion which condemns them,” women partook in the sexual impropriety of camp meetings: “they tear off part of their clothing, especially the sex that should be most modest; they embrace each other often and they say, they give the kiss of peace.”²²

Badin also noted the interracial crowds and black ministers at evangelical Protestant revivals as further evidence of their impropriety.²³ The race-based slavery of the region made white Catholics uneasy about opportunities for people of color to act on an equal footing with whites. From initial settlement, Protestant and Catholic slaveholders transported black bondspeople to Washington County and deemed enslaved

labor essential for the demanding tasks of farm building.²⁴ By 1792, about 21 percent of taxed households held approximately 350 slaves in the county. Owners' migration separated bondspeople from family members and friends, and imposed new expectations on the enslaved as they worked to make the environment habitable.²⁵ Settlers and slaves labored to clear the thick woods, a task that Catholic slaveholder Leonard Hamilton described as "one of the greatest difficulties I have had to encounter."²⁶ Whites and enslaved blacks plowed and planted the first corn fields, and constructed homes and farm buildings. Slaves also helped defend settlements against retaliatory Native American raids.²⁷

Many Washington County families turned to a wider variety of market-oriented and subsistence agriculture by the 1790s. Enslaved blacks and whites applied their knowledge of Chesapeake agriculture to their new environment. Residents raised hogs, sheep, horses, and cattle. In fields and gardens they cultivated corn, wheat, rye, flax, potatoes, and beans. Some farmers continued Chesapeake tobacco and hemp cultivation, and even experimented with cotton.²⁸ In addition to the tasks of raising animals and cultivating crops, slaves processed agricultural and animal products for market and home consumption. The prevalence of livestock required laborers to drive the animals to market, and slaves skilled in tanning, butchering, and sheep shearing. Enslaved women prepared food for the household and produced textiles from wool, flax, hemp, and cotton. They also performed other demanding domestic tasks under the supervision of white women, such as cleaning homes and clothing, and caring for white children. Slave women bore children that masters eyed as their future labor force or income from hiring out and sale.²⁹ The variable labor demands of mixed agriculture tended to limit

slaveholding sizes compared to the plantation agriculture of the Lower South.³⁰ In 1792, 1800, and 1811, 93 percent of slaveowning families in Washington County held an average of three to four slaves. No planters—owners of twenty or more slaves—resided in the county in 1792. Nearly twenty years later, only four planters lived in the county. Despite small holdings, the number of slaveowning families continued to grow from over one hundred in 1792 to over five hundred in 1811.³¹ The low percentage of slave owners masked the region's economic investment in slavery. Kentucky nonslaveowners often hired slaves at times of peak labor demand, such as harvest. Slaves accumulated and traded goods with whites. They also served as collateral for debts in a credit-dependent economy.³²

Religious doctrine shaped Catholic conceptions of the ideal treatment of slaves, but the extent to which Catholic slaveholding in Washington County reflected these ideals depended on negotiations between individual slaveholders, slaves, and Catholic authorities. Under Catholic interpretations, neither the Old nor New Testament condemned slavery.³³ Catholic doctrine mandated that masters treat their enslaved dependents fairly and provide for their eternal spiritual wellbeing through catechism and adherence to the sacraments. Good Catholics baptized and confirmed their slaves, provided access to the Eucharist and opportunities for penance, allowed enslaved couples to marry and protected them and their future children from separation, and granted extreme unction to dying slaves.³⁴ Catholic doctrine held masters' eternal fate accountable for the physical and spiritual treatment of their human property.³⁵ Southern Catholics believed they exhibited their piety through ideal mastery. In addition to salvation, Catholic paternalism offered tangible economic incentives to slaveholders.

Masters promoted slave family formation through their stress on the sacraments of marriage and infant baptism. Slave offspring meant additional laborers for the white family.³⁶ Catholic doctrine also stressed the reciprocal obligations of mastery and slavery with the enslaved expected to exhibit obedience in exchange for masters' physical and spiritual provisions.³⁷ Catholics believed that teaching slaves obedience and temporary acceptance of their status with the reward of eventual salvation increased the economic efficiency of mastery.³⁸

Catholic migrants from Maryland formerly belonged to parishes that provided membership and sacraments to the enslaved. Priests recorded slave marriages and baptisms in the Maryland parishes of St. Ignoes and Newton, for example, and listed ninety-three enslaved members of St. Ignoes by 1794.³⁹ Some migrants to Kentucky sought to continue their enslaved dependents' involvement in Catholicism. The scarcity and transient presence of priests in early Kentucky prevented regular weekly mass, but other longstanding Catholic institutions, like confraternities, offered laypersons communal spiritual outlets across gender and race.⁴⁰ The 1806 register of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary of Holy Mary's Church on the Rolling Fork named sixty-four slaves as members of the 674-person group.⁴¹ The earliest extant sacramental records for central Kentucky also originated in this Washington County parish. From 1807 to 1812, eleven slaveholding families baptized twenty slaves, seven of whom belonged to the Abell family. In the absence of extant early marriage records, the labeling of fifteen of the baptized slaves as legitimate signifies church-orchestrated slave marriages by the early 1800s.⁴²

Some Catholics also adhered to church mandates not to separate enslaved families, but many broke up families when it proved profitable.⁴³ In 1794, William Hayden willed his slaves to immediate family members: an enslaved mother named Rose to his wife, Rose's children to his two sons, and two other enslaved women, Agnes and Charity, to his two daughters.⁴⁴ Like other southerners, Hayden's desire to provide for his family undermined his moral obligation to preserve the bond between a slave mother and her children. Slaveholders could justify willed separation of slaves between Catholic relatives since, in theory, they would maintain slaves' access to the sacraments and the possibility of continued contact between the slaves. Estate executors and administrators could further disrupt these tenuous ties, however, when they decided to hire out or sell slaves to cover debts. In the case of orphaned, underage Catholic heirs, guardians arranged the hiring out of slaves until the heir reached maturity.⁴⁵

Even when Catholic slaveholders did not actively separate slaves, the nature of the local economy fostered conditions in which Catholic slaves developed kinship ties across distances. The small slaveholding sizes that dominated Washington County often necessitated that enslaved people seek romantic relationships beyond their masters' households. The common practice of slave hiring also enabled Catholic slaves to meet potential romantic partners.⁴⁶ Different masters held the spouses in two slave couples named in the early Holy Mary's baptismal records: Louis and Clara, and William and Maria. The priest recognized their marriages and baptized their children, listing the children as "legitimate."⁴⁷

The enslaved played a crucial role in the spectrum of white adherence to Catholic paternalism. Throughout the South, some slaves resisted practicing the faith of their

masters.⁴⁸ Others outwardly performed Catholic rites according to white expectations, while inwardly maintaining divergent beliefs. Many slaves found elements of Catholicism relevant to their needs and compatible with remnants of African culture, and fervently adopted their version of the faith.⁴⁹ Historian John Dichtl notes that distinct Catholic religious objects, such as vestments, intricate chalices, paintings, statues, and rosaries, “cultivat[ed] a sense of community and mutual identity among Catholics on the western frontier.”⁵⁰ Religious articles delineated the community, but also served as tools for drawing in and educating curious non-Catholics.⁵¹ Remnants of the West African use of religious objects made Catholic ritual materialism less foreign to some slaves and added to these communal appeals.⁵² Like distinct religious articles, Catholic architecture reinforced the uniqueness of the community compared to Protestants.⁵³

While some slaves found the distinct ritual goods and physical space of Catholicism attractive, these elements diminished the appeal of the faith for others since they served as additional reminders of slave subordination. Enslaved people could not expect to wear the exclusive vestments of priests and bishops on account of their race with a double-strike against black women due to gender.⁵⁴ Within the ornamental space that defined the Catholic community against outsiders, racially segregated seating reminded the enslaved that their piety could not overcome their legal status even in the earthly house of God.⁵⁵

Some slaves found parallels between African theology and Catholic saints. The Church designated deceased individuals as saints whose holy lives, deaths as martyrs, and posthumous miracles associated with their remains suggested that they had achieved salvation. As residents of heaven, saints had closer access to God than the living. God

heard all prayers, but the abundance of his Christian subjects made possible avenues for elevating their specific needs appealing to Catholics. The lives and miracles of saints suggested the groups of people or problems for which specific saints would feel mercy. Catholics entreated these saints to pray for them, thereby leveraging the saint's influence with God.⁵⁶ The Roman Catholic belief that saints served as intermediaries between the living and God and their association as intercessors for particular groups of people meshed with African ancestor worship.⁵⁷ The sheer number of saints and their favored groups provided an individualistic appeal to slaves, who could choose from which saints to request prayers.

Mass and holy days of obligation offered appealing temporary respites from work. Required fasting prior to receiving communion alleviated food preparation the morning of mass. Some masters, such as Thomas Hill, offered their homes to priests for mass before the congregation built formal church structures.⁵⁸ Neighboring Catholics gathered in these domestic chapels and slaves had the opportunity to interact with one another.⁵⁹ Whether priests said mass in a home or later churches, the ritual entailed other activities that potentially made the Sabbath obligation a day-long affair. The central rite of mass—consumption of the Holy Eucharist—required that communicants perform penance with a priest prior to mass. Penance absolved Catholics of sin committed since their last confession and made believers clean enough to receive the body and blood of Jesus. Lack of resident priests made laypersons' regular access to confessionals unrealistic. On the morning of an announced day for mass, Catholics flocked to church to ensure they confessed. The sheer number of penitents kept the priest busy into the late

morning and early afternoon, providing Catholics opportunities to socialize while waiting for mass to begin.⁶⁰

Catholic sacraments of marriage and baptism offered Washington County slaves opportunities to receive formal, public recognition of their blood and fictive kinship ties and leverage that recognition to achieve greater autonomy. Marriage served as an “indissoluble union of Christians” without acceptable methods of evasion, like divorce.⁶¹ The possibility of permanent unions proved attractive for enslaved people whose marriages had no legal recognition. But not all Catholic masters respected the indissolubility of slave marriages or allowed their slaves to marry. Low slave marriage rates compared to baptisms across the South suggest that many Catholic slaveholders did not allow their slaves to marry formally because of their obligations to maintain such marriages.⁶² Washington County slaves who managed to negotiate with their masters for marriage placed the private master-slave relationship in the public eye, adding community and God’s judgment of the masters’ actions toward the slave family to their side of the bargaining table. Using this tool, slaves negotiated more time with spouses and children, and fought against permanent separation.⁶³

Slaveholders baptized slave children because this sacrament asserted their piety as Catholic masters.⁶⁴ But for the enslaved community, baptisms offered another opportunity to assert kinship and forge protections for children. The sacrament of baptism involved the washing of original sin from infants and the promise of slave parents to raise their child in the teachings of the church. Parents designated sponsors—or godparents—to assist in this task. Godparents also pledged to provide for the child if the parents became incapable.⁶⁵ In small slaveholding regions, slaveholders and other whites often

took on the role of godparents of slaves.⁶⁶ In Holy Mary's recorded slave baptisms between 1807 and 1812, eight slaves had a white godparent or godparents, though the majority of baptized slave children had slave godparents or a slave godmother. All but two of these godparents belonged to the Abell or Simpson families. The prevalence of these slaves in the records both as godparents and parents of baptized children suggests that their white owners supported slaves' actions and that the Abell and Simpson slaves were respected among the enslaved community along the Rolling Fork.⁶⁷ Through baptismal ties with the Abell and Simpson slaves, enslaved parents likely affirmed preexisting fictive or biological kin networks of obligation. Formal promises to look after children provided a measure of comfort to parents who knew the likelihood of separation.⁶⁸

Catholic slaveholders and enslaved people further negotiated the realities of Catholic mastery with ecclesiastical authorities. Priests and bishops in early national Kentucky held slaves for agricultural and domestic labor, and therefore understood the benefits of slaveholding.⁶⁹ Historian Michael Pasquier argues that French-trained missionaries—including two of the most prominent priests in Washington County, Father Stephen T. Badin and Father Charles Nerinckx—"demonstrated little interest in discussing the moral implications of treating humans as property." To the priests, "slavery was not the product of immoral society, but immoral society could corrupt the right practice of enslavement and the people involved in the slave system, both masters and slaves."⁷⁰ Priests entreated slaveholders and enslaved people to perform the mutual obligations of Catholic mastery, but recognized that slaveholders controlled the master-slave relationship. In 1794, Bishop John Carroll espoused this sentiment to a priest

frustrated with his congregation: “While you confine yourself within the bounds of solid doctrine, you may act freely . . . in remedying the abuses of slavery; and when you have done your duty, if all the good effect possible and desirable does not ensure from your endeavors you must bear that, as every pastor must bear the many disorders, which will subsist in spite of his most zealous exertions.”⁷¹

White Catholics extended greater concern over the other dependent individuals in their households: children and youth. Devout Catholics valued raising children in the faith to protect their souls. In a “Sermon on Charity,” Carroll noted that “the best inheritance you can leave your children is the knowledge, the fear & the love of God.”⁷² Catholics considered regular religious instruction of children and practice of the faith crucial to investing children in the church and avoiding declension. Devout Catholic adults also advocated the monitoring of children’s behavior to align with Christian ideals. In a “Sermon on Duties of Parents to Children,” Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal reminded parents that “you are bound to admonish, to correct, to chastise & reprehend their [children’s] faults.”⁷³ In addition to concern for their immediate children’s fate, adult Catholics looked upon the younger generations as the collective future of the Church. For the devout, regular religious instruction of children and practice of the faith were crucial to ensuring that youth perpetuate Catholic belief to their own future children.⁷⁴ The stakes of raising Catholic children and youth, for the good of their individual souls and the collective survival of the Church, also effected the fate of parents. Maréchal warned Catholic parents: “If you neglect to take care of your household the scripture says you are worse than infidels,” and “you will have to answer for it.”⁷⁵

The sacrament of baptism exhibited the devotion of guardians of infants while the sacrament of first communion marked the religious commitment of youth. Early nineteenth century Catholics performed first communion between age twelve and fourteen after a priest heard the youth's confession and tested their understanding of Catholicism. Although a joyous, community-building event, the severe risk of children insulting God through the blasphemous reception of Jesus's body and blood pressured devout youth to take the sacrament seriously. The Catholic community gathered to witness and celebrate the first reception of the Eucharist, a public event that showed the hopeful continuance of the faith in the younger generations.⁷⁶

Marriage also served as a public marker of a family's commitment to their faith. Church doctrine dictated that Roman Catholics marry other Catholics, so that a couple's future offspring would not be conflicted with filial obedience to competing faiths. Priests expected young adults to receive guidance from parents on spousal choice and to defer to parents' wishes if they did not approve of a match. Devout parents, therefore, were to guide their children to make proper Catholic engagements and continue the faith.⁷⁷ The Catholic community also had opportunities to police non-relatives' marriage choices. While priests performed most wedding ceremonies in private homes, they expected Catholics to "publish the banns," or publicly announce the intention of a couple to marry, for at least three weeks prior to the sacrament. The three-week notice provided time for the Catholic parish to raise objections and pressure a couple out of marriage. In contrast, if the community approved of the couple, the public nature of the announcement provided an opportunity for the community to celebrate the good, religious match as an example to instruct other youth on proper behavior.⁷⁸

Outside of religious rituals, Catholics expected their children and youth to exhibit the faith through obedience and diligent performance of worldly labor for the collective household. By age seven, white children contributed to household domestic needs and productive economies. Girls sewed and knitted textiles, watched their siblings, cleaned, and worked in vegetable gardens and larger fields, along with other responsibilities.⁷⁹ Once in their teens, households expected more physically demanding contributions from their girls. For rural families without slaves or sufficient male labor, older girls and young women performed heavy labor in the fields.⁸⁰

Children and youth from devout Catholic families faced pressure to learn and embody the faith in all aspects of their lives with varying results. Clergy and parents often held conflicting perceptions of appropriate youthful Christian behavior, such as the sinfulness of dancing, causing stress in devout youth over the state of their soul.⁸¹ Priests in early national Kentucky frequently bemoaned the deviance of youth. In 1796, Badin wrote Carroll: “the youth coming out from Kentucky seem almost strangers to the faith and to good morals.” He outlined practices his contemporary priests commonly cited as the religious failures of western youth: “Ignorance and indifference to be instructed in the duties of a Christian, perversity of heart deceived by a sacrilegious frequentation of the sacraments, habitual profanation of the days consecrated to Divine service, the most shameful excesses, love of self and the contempt of charity—behold there, Monsignor, the fruits of this fertile country that is so vast.”⁸²

Limited clerical reach required U.S. Catholics to rely on women to sustain the faith in the unstable early republic. In the eyes of the devout, proper piety of Catholic women distinguished them from the indiscretions of revival-going evangelical Protestant

women and provided better examples for younger generations and men. Most Catholics saw a priest about once a month. Clergy distributed Bibles, catechisms, devotional materials, and prayer books to the lay population to guide Catholic practice in the weeks when they were absent, but the use of such print materials required the active commitment of the devout. In the vacuum of resident clergy, Catholic women's traditional religious tasks took on added significance as they worked to preserve the faith of their families and communities. Women and men consumed religious texts and priests admonished them to exemplify the faith on a daily basis. Within the home, women educated children in Catholic belief and practice. Women controlled their households' diets, ensuring they conformed to the required seasonal fasts and days of meat abstinence. Mothers and midwives also provided emergency baptisms for infants until a priest could properly minister the sacrament.⁸³

In the South, women and the enslaved laborers they supervised maintained the spaces and materials necessary for regular Catholic practice. In the absence of priests, Catholic communities gathered to follow Sunday devotions that aligned with the church calendar and mimicked the Eucharistic sacrament. Catholics who lived in concentrated populations pooled their resources to build small churches. Smaller Catholic communities gathered at the home of a wealthy family or widow. Catholics traditionally expected women to prepare and clean these domestic and community chapels and provide hospitality—including food and clean sleeping quarters—for traveling attendants. Catholics also turned to white women and enslaved laborers when a priest arrived in the community. Such gatherings became day-long affairs as the visiting priest performed all the crucial sacraments—penance, Eucharist, baptism, and marriage—for attendees. The

need to prepare and clean the variety of vessels and textiles used in mass, and the larger number of visitors and longer length of stays increased the labor demands on women and their slaves.⁸⁴

Catholic women's efforts to direct the faith of their households and communities operated within the patriarchal structure of families and the Church. Wives interested in hosting visitors and priests for Catholic rituals needed their husband's approval to expend resources and time. Catholic women varied in the extent of spousal support in faith matters. On one end of the spectrum, devout spouses worked together to shape the faith of their children and that of the community. Mary Clark converted to the faith just prior to her marriage to a Catholic. She and her husband settled in Kentucky with the first wave of Catholic migrants. Together, the couple opened their home for Catholic gatherings and supported the development of Catholic institutions in what would become Holy Cross Parish. Other wives negotiated their involvement in the church with their non-practicing husbands. Mrs. Janes, who settled in Washington County with her non-Catholic husband and young adult children, extended her concern to the community by hosting mass in her household. Ann French Reynolds in Nelson County faced indifference from her husband and attempted to cultivate her children's faith alone.⁸⁵

In addition, Catholic women negotiated with clergy over their religious influence. Clerical absence opened more opportunities for women to fill religious roles, but also made clergy anxious to institute control when present. One Kentucky Catholic woman's behavior highlighted the bounds of female influence when it challenged the male hierarchy. Devout Washington County Catholic Grace Newtown Simpson studied the

Bible, church teachings, and Catholic apologetic books to defend her faith. According to local tradition,

she was regarded by her Catholic acquaintances . . . as an authority scarcely less reliable than the immediate pastors on all questions relating to dogmatic differences between the Church and the [Protestant] sects. Not a few were of the opinion that in her limited sphere of action, she was even more successful than was any single member of the clerical body of the State in her efforts to spread the influence of her faith among [non-Catholics].⁸⁶

To protect the authority of educated priests and cloak her exceptional activities as respectable for women, local memory credited her influence “not to her superior knowledge, but to her superior prudence, and to the uniform sweetness of her disposition.”⁸⁷ While local memory softened her challenging personality, Simpson’s authority and resolve caused friction with priests in central Kentucky. She allegedly used her connections with Archbishop Carroll to convince him to select someone other than Badin as bishop for the Bardstown Diocese in 1808, sparking outrage among the local clergy who struggled to assert their authority in church decisions.⁸⁸ While Catholic laity and clergy valued the role of women in maintaining the faith, women had to negotiate their religious influence with their families and clergy.

Catholic women also organized to fill the voids caused by clerical limitations and confront the particular spiritual challenges of their communities, albeit within the bounds negotiated with the church hierarchy. In 1812, Mary Rhodes, a single Catholic woman, lived in the household of her married brother, Benedict, near Hardin’s Creek in Washington County.⁸⁹ Rhodes received Nerinckx’s permission to establish a school for Catholic girls, which opened on April 25, 1812, in a cabin. As the number of pupils grew, Rhodes recruited Christina Stuart to work with her. By late June, the project attracted two more women, Ann Havern and Rhodes’s ill sister, Ann.⁹⁰ Cheered by the enthusiasm of

single Catholic women for the work, Rhodes and her colleagues considered a more formal commitment to their faith and community. The four women decided to found a Catholic sisterhood devoted to God and the education of girls. They requested permission to organize from Bishop Flaget by late June 1812.⁹¹ Upon his approval, the group used seventy-five dollars from Ann Rhodes to purchase fifty acres of land near St. Charles Church on Hardin's Creek where they planned to build the convent and cultivate crops.⁹² The community reached five members and Nerinckx advised that the growing group elect a superior and develop formal rules to guide their work. The women chose Ann Rhodes, the youngest at twenty years of age, because of her religious virtuosity and youthful innocence. Nerinckx wrote the Rules for the community, which delineated the authority structure, material quality of life, and religious focus of the women. The women adopted the name "Friends of Mary under the Cross of Jesus" and called their convent "Little Loretto" after the Marian pilgrimage site in Italy. The members and clergy often used the shorter "Sisters of Loretto" or "Loretto Society" to denote the community.⁹³

The founders designed the order to perform spiritual work for the benefit of God, their souls, and the broader community. The Rules described the order's foremost intention as "[t]he glory of God, the honour of the ever blessed Virgin Mary; a perpetual contemplation and a thankful remembrance of the most bitter Passion (in our days so little thought of) of our dear Redeemer, with the SORROWS of his beloved Mother; the propagation of our holy religion, by aiming at a more perfect life, in retirement from the world and its maxims."⁹⁴ To achieve these ends, members professed chastity, poverty, and obedience to regulate their minds and actions.⁹⁵ Reflections on the lives of virgin martyrs in popular Catholic devotional books like Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints*

instructed the faithful on the merit of voluntary chastity. According to Butler, all respected historical Church authorities concurred in “extolling the excellency of holy virginity, as a special fruit of the incarnation of Christ, his divine institution, and virtue which has particular charms in the eyes of God, who delights in chaste minds, and chooses to dwell singularly in them.”⁹⁶ Butler continued: “They often repeat that purity raises men . . . to the dignity of Angels, purifies the soul, fits it for a more perfect love of God, and a closer application to heavenly things, and disengages the mind and heart from worldly thoughts and affections.”⁹⁷ In addition to maintaining sexual purity, preservation of this chaste state required self-denial of all bodily and material desires beyond necessities. The Sisters’ vow of poverty removed the distraction of owning personal property.⁹⁸ To minimize conflict between members that might disrupt the spiritual work of the order, the sisters professed obedience to the bishop of the diocese and superior of the order, and they expected all members to obey the Rules they considered a representation of the will of God.⁹⁹

Monastic vows enabled the Sisters to minimize worldly distractions and devote their time to worshiping God. The Loretines developed a regimented prayer schedule to serve God and pursue their personal salvation. Weekday prayer and meditations began at four o’clock in the morning in the spring and summer, and at four-thirty the remainder of the year.¹⁰⁰ Following morning devotions, sisters worked until mass-prayers or mass at six o’clock in the summer and seven in the winter. Between breakfast and noon, the members worked while one said a rosary and the others responded. At ten and twelve o’clock, a sister read an excerpt from a religious text or sang a hymn. The Loretines gathered for lunch at twelve-fifteen and followed the meal with five minutes of prayer in

the chapel. They returned to work from one-thirty to three, at which time they gathered for fifteen minutes of devotion to the agony of Jesus. The members then sang a hymn and returned to work until four-thirty, when they prayed for thirty minutes. Afterward, the Loretines worked while a member read religious texts until supper. They broke for a litany at six and began prayers before supper at seven. The meal concluded with prayers, individual examinations of conscience, spiritual reading, and meditations. The Sisters prepared for sleep at nine, ending their lengthy day with prayers and a blessing from the superior. When not participating in outward communal worship, the Rules dictated that Sisters maintain silence so as not to allow unnecessary worldly conversation to distract their thoughts from God. Through their day-long worship and diligence in performing silent work, the Sisters followed God's will and expressed their devotion.¹⁰¹

In addition to structuring their day around prayer, the Sisters selected specific devotions to serve God. For centuries, many Catholic women religious adopted the Virgin Mary as the patron saint of their institutions. The founders of the Sisters of Loretto drew on such tradition and detected relevance in particular Marian devotions for their own times. As described in the Rules, they selected Mary under the cross of Jesus as patron of the order, a subset of the Seven Sorrows devotion that called attention to Mary's distress at "the very utmost and highest moment of Christ's suffering, . . . the very instant of his expiring."¹⁰² The founders chose the specific sorrow since "a thankful remembrance of the most bitter Passion . . . of our dear Redeemer" was "in our days so little thought of."¹⁰³ Mary's experience of the Passion linked her to the broader process of Redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, which Catholics believed subsequent generations could only receive through the continual consumption of Jesus. A focus on

the trauma of Christ's crucifixion for himself and his mother marked an assertive action to distinguish Catholicism from their Protestant neighbors and the exuberant populist evangelical movements the founders witnessed. While diverse Protestant groups continued and adapted aspects of Catholic Marian practices, they scorned transubstantiation and many Marian devotions as unscriptural perversions.¹⁰⁴

Monasticism attracted women interested in serving God and pursuing personal salvation, but the Sisters of Loretto also served the broader Catholic and non-Catholic community. According to Catholic theology, the purity of chaste minds made religious women more effective spiritual workers. Nuns used prayer to leverage this gift for others.¹⁰⁵ The Sisters' practice of devotions to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary exhibited their sense of spiritual duty to humankind.¹⁰⁶ The Sacred Heart devotions derived from Catholic guilt arising from humanity's irreverence about Jesus' sacrifices and fear that the insult to God threatened collective salvation. The heightened fervor of Protestantism during the Second Great Awakening increased the importance of the Sacred Hearts for the order, since the devotions cited Protestant ingratitude toward the Eucharist and insults to Catholic Marian doctrine as hurtful to God. The devotion honored Jesus' heart as the seat of emotion, in particular his love for humanity, the agony of his crucifixion, and the heartbreak of humanity's lack of gratitude. The devotion recognized humanity's faults and entreated Christ to forgive them for their insults. The Sisters also performed the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Mary, whose maternal heart Catholics perceived as a sure path to reach Jesus.¹⁰⁷ Performing devotions like the Sacred Hearts that entreated forgiveness for all of humanity, the Sisters of Loretto believed they used their spiritual influence to serve the broader Catholic and non-Catholic population.

In addition to humanity, members directed their spiritual influence to benefit specific individuals and groups. The Rules of the order denoted an array of authority figures, loved ones, faithful, and needy souls as beneficiaries of its prayers. In the daily morning prayer session, for example, the Sisters requested God to “cast your merciful eyes upon . . . the head of your Church, upon all the Prelates and Clergy, especially our Rt. Rev. Bishop and our Rev. Father; upon all Religious Orders, particularly our SOCIETY, to their increasing each in their proper spirit; upon all Christian Kings and Princes, and our own Government and State.” After this prayer for church and secular leadership, the Loretines “offered [intentions] up for our parents, relations, friends and enemies, for the Superiors of our SOCIETY.” They recognized the interest of God in particular individuals and prayed for “those you most desire should be prayed for.” In addition to church leaders and monastics, the Loretines offered intentions for the faithful and those who performed the same devotions as the order: “those who may most promote your honour and glory; those who are most in need, who are most devoted to CHRIST’s Sacred Passion, to the SORROWS of his beloved Mother; and to the Sacred Hearts.” To conclude the prayer, members requested God’s assistance “for all that are in necessity, captivity, prison, affliction, travelers, sick and agonizing, and in a particular manner for the souls in purgatory.”¹⁰⁸

The Sisters’ concern for the souls of others also manifested itself in their efforts to shape the religious practices of the surrounding Catholic community through religious instruction and by modeling morality. The Sisters of Loretto extended the traditional moral authority of southern women and the Christian maternal duty of religious instruction of children to girls in the broader community.¹⁰⁹ The Sisters exercised their

greatest authority over the boarding and day school they established for white girls. The order scheduled religious exercises and education throughout the school day. While the Sisters did not exclude non-Catholics, they expected all students to “be present at every exercise” during the school day and to “suffer to be friendly invited” to Sabbath and holy day practices.¹¹⁰ Boarders began their weekday mornings with over thirty minutes of hymns, prayers, and meditation. They attended mass or heard mass-prayers before the start of school at eight o’clock. Boarders and day pupils prayed before the start of academic lessons, and at least once more during the school day. Academic lessons stopped again at three o’clock for “the hour of Salvation.”¹¹¹ The Sisters gave religious instruction from four forty-five to five o’clock and concluded the school day with a prayer or hymn.¹¹²

While monasticism minimized worldly interests in theory, the Sisters needed resources and labor to support their spiritual work. A subscription from St. Charles Parish provided initial funds for food, but the order needed a long-term means to support itself. School tuition and boarding fees, and the sisters’ production of textiles generated some income for the order. The sisters operated their convent on fifty acres of land, which offered opportunities to cultivate provisions and raise livestock.¹¹³ However, the young women did not bear the burden of maintaining and provisioning a school and growing household alone. On August 27, 1812, Ann Rhodes transferred her personal property and an adult slave, Tom, to Father Nerinckx for the benefit of the new order.¹¹⁴ The early members’ experience with slaveholding suggests that they decided to hold Tom to meet some of their labor needs, such as clearing land. By 1817, the order held at least ten slaves.¹¹⁵

The order's material needs in turn shaped to whom and how they directed their spiritual influence. The order offered prayers and mass intentions to donors like the St. Charles parishioners who subscribed to contribute food.¹¹⁶ Concern for the financial stability of the enterprise led the Sisters to exclude members of the white "poorer class" from the boarding and day school. The order's embrace of the region's racial practices also led it to bar free and enslaved blacks. Instead, the Loretines offered Sunday schools for the religious instruction of blacks and poor whites.¹¹⁷ The moral authority of southern women had limits, however, and white and black community members could refuse to comply with the Sisters' efforts to catechize.¹¹⁸ Like the priests who ministered to the enslaved, the Sisters of Loretto had to negotiate with masters, not all of whom valued religious instruction for their human property. Recognizing the need for slaveholders' approval, Father Nerinckx reminded the Sisters to ensure "that nothing improper [took] place."¹¹⁹

The order sought to uphold the welfare of their slaves' souls as prescribed by Catholic paternalism. As spiritual mothers of the local Catholic community, the Sisters also sought to set an example for mistresses charged with encouraging proper religious practices among the enslaved. The Loretines and Nerinckx expected the order's enslaved people to practice the faith with greater devotion than other Catholic slaves. The Sisters catechized their slaves twice on Sunday and once every other day. They expected slaves to pray for fifteen minutes in the morning and at night. Sacraments required priests and the enslaved could not access them on a regular basis; instead, the Loretines expected slaves to frequent the rituals at least monthly.¹²⁰

The Sisters of Loretto also intended to exhibit proper Catholic mastery over enslaved laborers to the broader community. Like Catholic expectations that children obediently and diligently perform their work for the collective benefit of the household, the Loretaines expected their enslaved dependents to complete their tasks efficiently and uphold the order's honor. In the eyes of the broader community, disorder among the slaves unmasked the Sisters as incapable of controlling their dependents. If they did not sufficiently master people of color, the Sisters faced not only the economic loss of enslaved productivity, but also risked white parents questioning the ability of the order to discipline and teach their daughters proper behavior. Unconvinced parents with the means to pay for their daughters' education could invest in other schools and thereby undercut the income of the order.

Insufficient mastery also jeopardized the Sisters' ability to teach white pupils the racial social hierarchy. Like other nineteenth century Christian slaveholders, the Loretaines employed physical force to condition the behavior of laborers. One young slave's infraction illustrates the order's concern for its public image as slaveholders and the Sister's desire to teach the concept of mastery to pupils. The story comes from oral tradition on a mischievous white orphan girl raised by the order, Lucy Downs. The Sister's oral tradition recounted her many humorous actions to exemplify bad behavior. According to a sister, in the late 1810s enslaved "little black George" Clements upset a male miller to whom the Sisters of Loretto sold corn. The miller monitored the boy's behavior and informed the Sisters of his infraction. Upset that the slave had caused outsiders to question her authority and thus risked the order's respectability, the Superior "wrote a note to the miller, telling him to give George a good flogging and make him

behave himself.” She gave Clements the note to deliver, knowing that he could not read. The nervous boy showed the message to Downs who shelled corn with Clements. She informed Clements of the violent order “and it never reached the miller.”¹²¹ Whites considered white-black collusion like that between Downs and Clements unacceptable as it threatened mastery over enslaved people. The story served to educate white pupils on how not to behave and illustrated the Sisters’ concern for maintaining respectability through mastery.

The founders of the Sisters of Loretto sought to serve God and the spiritual needs of the broader community through their prayer, education, and demonstration of model Christian behavior. As white women in early national Kentucky, they recognized the challenges faced by the local Catholic Church: insufficient clerical support, declension from lack of religious knowledge and interest, the threat of evangelical Protestant faith movements, and the need to maintain racial differences amid race-based slavery. The Loretines represented an extension of Catholic women’s efforts to shape the faith of their communities within the bounds of a patriarchal society and church. They chose Marian devotions to combat spiritual slippage among Catholics and non-Catholics, and to distinguish the faith from Protestants.

Faith provided the motivation for Kentucky Catholic women to organize a religious order in 1812, but material needs, southern culture and slavery, and the status of the Catholic Church in the region shaped their efforts. Although they believed their vows and regimented lives would minimize the distractions of the secular world, the Sisters of Loretto were aware of and shaped by the broader culture, society, and political life of

early Kentucky. They simultaneously sought to provide spiritual service to the Catholic community while retaining their respectability among their Protestant neighbors.

¹ For the relationship of the Holy See, the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, and mission territories, see Luca Codignola, "Roman Catholic Conservatism in a New North Atlantic World, 1760-1829," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (Oct. 2007): 718n1, 740-41; and Raphael H. Song, *The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 17-22. For the relationship between U.S. clergy and the Propaganda, see Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141-42.

² For the low number of priests in the early republic and their difficulties in garnering support from church leaders in Europe, see Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 22; Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*, 141; James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 47-48. For John Carroll's efforts to build a church hierarchy in the United States, see Catherine O'Donnell, "John Carroll and the Origins of the American Catholic Church, 1783-1815," *William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (January 2011): 101-26.

³ O'Donnell, "John Carroll and the Origins of the American Catholic Church," 101-26.

⁴ For problematic priests, see John R. Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), ch. 3.

⁵ Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*, ch. 1-2. For the ethnic diversity of lay Catholics in the early republic, see Carey, *Catholics in America*, 24.

⁶ For the increase in number of clergy, see Carey, *Catholics in America*, 22.

⁷ Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, ch. 2.

⁸ For general Euro-American and Roman Catholic settlement in central Kentucky, see Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 68-69; Orval W. Baylor, *Early Times in Washington County, Kentucky* (Cynthiana, KY: Hobson Press, 1942), 4, 18; Martin J. Spalding, *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky; From their Commencement in 1787, to the Jubilee of 1826-7* (1844; New York: Arno Press, 1972), 22-23; Thomas W. Spalding, "The Maryland Catholic Diaspora," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8 (Summer 1989): 163-65; Stephen T. Badin, "Origin and Progress of the Mission of Kentucky," *The Catholic World* 21 (1875): 825. For Catholic settlement in Washington County, see Mary Ramona Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier (1785-1812)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1936), 23.

⁹ For migrants' anxiety over their souls, see Stephen T. Badin to John Carroll, April 11, 1796, Francis P. Clark Collection (hereafter CFCL), box 5, folder 2, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana (hereafter UNDA). For indifference, see Stephen T. Badin to John Carroll, June 28, 1796, CFCL, box 5, folder [3], UNDA.

¹⁰ Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 23-25, 37-39.

¹¹ For the chronology of the early priests in Kentucky, see Benjamin J. Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (Louisville, KY: Charles A. Rodgers, 1884), 26-27; Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 37-67. For the difficulties priests had acquiring sufficient resources from congregations, see Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 30-35; Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*, 66. For friction between Catholic laity and clergy, and inter-clerical disputes in early national Kentucky, see Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, ch. 2-3, 131-32, 135-36; Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*, 70, 76; Clyde F. Crews, *An American Holy Land: A History of the Archdiocese of Louisville* (1987; Louisville, KY: ikonographics, inc., 1990), 59, 61-70. For the creation of the archdiocese and dioceses, see Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier*, 141. For authority and missionary work in the diocese of Bardstown, see Crews, *An American Holy Land*, 75-76, 78.

¹² For discussion of the dominant Protestant denominations in the region and their development, see John B. Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky* (1976; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 12; W. T. Knott, *History of the Presbyterian Church in What is Now Marion County and City of Lebanon, Kentucky, from the Year 1789 to 1895* (n.p., ca. 1895), 7-13; John F. McElroy, *History of Lebanon* (1910; n.p., 1947), 2-5; Richard C. Traylor, *Born of Water and Spirit: The Baptist Impulse in Kentucky, 1776-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 3; Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, ch. 7.

¹³ Badin reported to the Propaganda Fide in 1805 that “All the sects have the same prejudice against the Catholic religion which they do not know at all: the reading of a private interpretation of the Bible are the points around which all these sects unite. Nevertheless, the non-Catholics who live among the Catholics are less under the influence of prejudices, and they treat us generally as brothers”; quoted in Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 183. For Protestants’ views of individual Catholics as respectable in contrast to the larger church, particularly in regions with sizeable Catholic populations, see Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 191-92.

¹⁴ Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), ch. 6.

¹⁵ For Marian devotion in colonial British America and the early national United States, see Michael Sean Winters, “Marian Spirituality in Early America,” in *American Catholic Preaching and Piety in the Time of John Carroll*, ed. Raymond J. Kupke (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 87-105. For the development and focus of the Marian rosary, see Cunneen, *In Search of Mary*, 190.

¹⁶ Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 118-19.

¹⁷ For the populist evangelical Protestant movements in the early republic, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky*, 20-29.

¹⁸ Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 191-94.

¹⁹ Stephen T. Badin to John Carroll, November 3, 1801, quoted in Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 191.

²⁰ Stephen T. Badin to Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, June 7, 1805, quoted in Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 193, 192.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

²² *Ibid.*, 192.

²³ Ibid., 192-93.

²⁴ Baylor, *Washington County*, 2; Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 13; Spalding, "The Maryland Catholic Diaspora," 171; Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation* (1992; Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), xiv. Sparse tax records and nonexistent parish registers do not allow for an authoritative estimate of the number of Catholic slaveholders in the region before statehood.

²⁵ Ellen Eslinger, "The Shape of Slavery on the Kentucky Frontier, 1775-1800," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 92 (Winter 1994): 5-8; Craig Thompson Friend, "Searching for Kentucky's Female Frontier," in *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*, eds. Melissa A. McEuen and Thomas H. Appleton Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 23.

²⁶ Leonard Hamilton to Elizabeth Hamilton McAtee, quoted in Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 10. By 1792, Leonard Hamilton held eight slaves in Washington County. Washington County, Kentucky, *Tax Lists, 1792-1816*, reel 01, Louisville Free Public Library, Main Branch, Louisville, Kentucky (hereafter LFPL).

²⁷ Craig Thompson Friend, "'Work and Be Rich': Economy and Culture on the Bluegrass Farm," in *The Buzzel About Kentuck: Settling the Promised Land*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 133-36; Matthew Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 50, 72.

²⁸ Inventories and wills in county probate records provide the data on agriculture and home production. See *Wills A, 1792-1808*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (hereafter KDLA); *Wills B, 1809-1816*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA.

²⁹ Lucas, *Kentucky Blacks*, 6-9.

³⁰ For the relationship between agricultural labor needs and slaveholding sizes in the Border South, see Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 49, 98-103; Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 5-7, 25-27.

³¹ Tax records are not extant for 1810, hence the use of 1811. Washington County, Kentucky, *Tax Lists, 1792-1816*, reel 1, LFPL.

³² Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, 72-73, 77; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 100, 185.

³³ Kenneth J. Zanca, ed., *American Catholics and Slavery, 1789-1866: An Anthology of Primary Documents* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1994), 1-6.

³⁴ Beatriz Betancourt Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland, 1689-1776," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 94 (Winter 1999): 401; Randall M. Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870*, ed. John B. Boles (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 138.

³⁵ *Colossians* 4:1 and *Ephesians* 6:9, in Zanca, *American Catholics and Slavery*, 8; John Carroll, "Sermon on Charity," Archdiocese of Baltimore (Md.): Manuscripts (hereafter CABA), box 4, folder 19a, UNDA; Ambrose Maréchal, *Sermon on Duties of Parents to Children*, CABA, box 4, folder 23, UNDA.

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- ³⁶ Mary Beth Corrigan, "Making the Most of an Opportunity: Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," *Washington History* 12 (Spring/Summer 2000): 92.
- ³⁷ Maura Jane Farrelly, "American Slavery, American Freedom, American Catholicism," *Early American Studies* 10 (Winter 2012): 97.
- ³⁸ Tammy K. Byron, "'A Catechism for their Special Use': Slave Catechisms in the Antebellum South" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 2008), 207.
- ³⁹ Edwin W. Beitzell, *The Jesuit Missions of St. Mary's County, Maryland* (Abell, MD: n.p., 1960), 72-73, 85, 91, 92.
- ⁴⁰ Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 122-25.
- ⁴¹ "List of Names," in W. J. Howlett, *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx: Pioneer Missionary of Kentucky and Founder of the Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross* (1915; Techny, IL: Mission Press, S.V.D., 1940), 425-28.
- ⁴² "Baptismal Registry of Holy Mary's Church in Calvary, Kentucky," 1-2, in vertical file "Binder: Records of Baptisms performed by Father Nerinckx," Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky (hereafter LHC).
- ⁴³ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 93; Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland," 401, 403, 406, 407, 408; Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 138-39.
- ⁴⁴ Will of William Hayden, made March 24, 1794, recorded June 5, 1794, 21-24, *Wills A: 1792-1808*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA. For evidence of William Hayden's Catholic faith, see Henry C. Peden Jr., *Marylanders to Kentucky* (Westminster, MD: Family Line Publications, 1991), 68; Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier*, 34.
- ⁴⁵ Administrator Account of Ignatius Clark Estate, recorded September 11, 1816, 494-95, *Will Book C-2*, Nelson County, microfilm #7006775, KDLA.
- ⁴⁶ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 200-203.
- ⁴⁷ "Baptismal Registry of Holy Mary's Church in Calvary, Kentucky," 1-2, in vertical file "Binder: Records of Baptisms performed by Father Nerinckx," LHC.
- ⁴⁸ Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 136.
- ⁴⁹ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 92; Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 134.
- ⁵⁰ Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 101.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ⁵² Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (1978; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 87.
- ⁵³ Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 110.
- ⁵⁴ For the customary exclusion of slaves from the American priesthood, see Steven J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Struggle for Black Catholic Priests, 1854-1960* (Notre Dame, IN: Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, 1988), 6-7.
- ⁵⁵ For racial segregation in Catholic churches, see Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 20-21; C. Walker Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," *The Catholic Historical Review* 84 (January 1998): 50; Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 98.

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- ⁵⁶ Émilien Lamirande, *The Communion of Saints*, trans. A. Manson (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963), 146-52.
- ⁵⁷ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church, 92; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 87.
- ⁵⁸ Gollar, "Catholic Slaves and Slaveholders in Kentucky," 42.
- ⁵⁹ Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 140; Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland," 403-404.
- ⁶⁰ For a reprint of Stephen T. Badin's 1821 description of the day-long affair of confessions and mass for missionary priests in early national Kentucky, see "Origin and Progress of the Mission of Kentucky," *The Catholic World* 21 (1875): 828. For Tridentine Catholic doctrine on the necessity of penance before reception of the Eucharist, see J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), session 13, ch. 7, 80-81.
- ⁶¹ Stephen T. Badin, *Summary Proofs of the Catholic Doctrine from Scripture* (Baltimore, MD: Bernard Dornin, 1810), 16.
- ⁶² Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 131, 138-39.
- ⁶³ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 98-99.
- ⁶⁴ Miller, "Slaves and Southern Catholicism," 131.
- ⁶⁵ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 99.
- ⁶⁶ Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland," 405.
- ⁶⁷ "Baptismal Registry of Holy Mary's Church in Calvary, Kentucky," 1-2, in vertical file "Binder: Records of Baptisms performed by Father Nerinckx," LHC.
- ⁶⁸ Corrigan, "Slaves and the Catholic Church in Early Washington," 100.
- ⁶⁹ Will of Father Michael Fournier, made February 11, 1803, recorded May 2, 1803, 249-52, *Wills A*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA; Andrew H. M. Stern, *Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 168-70.
- ⁷⁰ Michael Pasquier, "'Though Their Skin Remains Brown, I Hope Their Souls Will Soon Be White': Slavery, French Missionaries, and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the American South," *Church History* 77 (June 2008): 347.
- ⁷¹ Bishop Carroll to Rev. John Thayer, July 15, 1794, in *The American Catholic Historical Researches* 6 (July 1910): 259.
- ⁷² John Carroll, "Sermon on Charity," CABA, box 4, folder 19a, UNDA.
- ⁷³ Ambrose Maréchal, "Sermon on Duties of Parents to Children," CABA, box 4, folder 23, UNDA.
- ⁷⁴ For the significance of children and youth to adult Catholics, see Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France's Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of Modern Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 20.
- ⁷⁵ Maréchal, "Semon on Duties of Parents to Children," CABA, box 4, folder 23, UNDA.
- ⁷⁶ Harrison, *Romantic Catholics*, 36-46.
- ⁷⁷ For clerical interpretations of Catholic doctrine on marriage and the expectations that parents shape the marriage decisions of their children, see John Carroll, "Sermon on Marriage," January 17, 1802, CABA, box 1, folder 8, UNDA.
- ⁷⁸ For the practice of "publishing the banns" to assess potential marriages, see Waterworth, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, session 24, ch. 1, 197. For Badin's interpretation of the act as a public profession of faith by the couple, see Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 130-31.

⁷⁹ Colin Heywood, "Children's Work in Countryside and City," in *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, ed. Paula S. Fass (New York: Routledge, 2013), 127; Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 25; Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 23, 97.

⁸⁰ Heywood, "Children's Work in Countryside and City," in *The Routledge History of Childhood*, 127.

⁸¹ For differences in parents and priests' views of the propriety of supervised dances for their children and the stress caused for the youthful participants, see Michael Fournier to John Carroll, August 28, 1797, CFCL, box 8, UNDA. For priests' different approaches to dances, see Stephen T. Badin to John Carroll, January 7, 1809, CFCL, box 6, folder 7, UNDA.

⁸² Stephen T. Badin to John Carroll, June 28, 1796, CFCL, box 5, folder [3], UNDA.

⁸³ For the role of women in Catholic practice and catechism, see James J. Kenneally, *The History of American Catholic Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 4; Margaret Susan Thompson, "Women and American Catholicism, 1789-1989," in *Perspectives on the American Catholic Church*, eds. Stephen J. Vicchio and Virginia Geiger (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1989), 124; Beatriz Betancourt Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland, 1689-1776" *Maryland Historical Magazine* 94 (Winter 1999): 401. For Catholic use of printed religious materials in the early republic, see O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 28-32.

⁸⁴ For the role of women and enslaved people of color in maintaining spaces and material culture for Catholic practice and providing hospitality for visitors, see Hardy, "Women and the Catholic Church in Maryland," 400. For Catholic communal worship in regions without a resident priest, see O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 19-20, 24, 27-30. For the day-long affair of the visit of a priest, see Badin, "Origin and Progress of the Mission of Kentucky," 828.

⁸⁵ For local memory of Mary Clark, Ann French Reynolds, and Mrs. Janes, see Webb, *Catholicity in Kentucky*, 44, 60-61, 84.

⁸⁶ Webb, *Catholicity in Kentucky*, 134-35.

⁸⁷ Webb, *Catholicity in Kentucky*, 135.

⁸⁸ Webb, *Catholicity in Kentucky*, 137.

⁸⁹ Charles Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State of the Roman Catholic Religion in North America," eds. and trans. Joseph Agonito and Madeline Wellner, *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 83 (March 1972): 17; Charles Nerinckx Journal, 2, RG Spec 1, box 1, folder 6, LHC; Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx; In Life was Missionary in Kentucky to His Relatives and Friends in the Netherlands; Printed in the Hague by the Brothers Langen Huyzen Behind the Big Church," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁹⁰ Nerinckx Journal, 2; Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State," 17; Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁹¹ Nerinckx Journal, 2; Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State," 17.

⁹² *Rules of the Society and School of Loretto, Kentucky* (London: Keating and Brown, 1820), 4; Nerinckx Journal, 2.

⁹³ Charles Nerinckx to “My dear relatives and friends,” Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., “Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx,” Nerinckiana box, LHC; Isabella Clarke, “Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke,” unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC. For the Rules, see Camillus P. Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx: With a Chapter on the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky; Copious Notes on the Progress of Catholicity in the United States of America, from 1800 to 1825; An Account of the Establishment of the Society of Jesus in Missouri; And an Historical Sketch of the Sisterhood of Loretto in Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, etc.* (1880; London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 257-59; *Rules*. For the name and diminutives of the community, see *Rules*, 1-3; Benedict Flaget to the Very Eminent Cardinal [Michele de Pietro], Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, feast of St. Martin 1813, in *Documents: Nerinckx—Kentucky—Loretto, 1804-1851*, in *Archives Propaganda Fide, Rome*, eds. Augustin C. Wand and M. Lilliana Owens (St. Louis, MO: Mary Loretto Press, 1972), 33; Charles Nerinckx to “Most Eminent and Most Reverend Lord, Lord Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, etc., etc.,” February 12, 1823, in *Documents: Nerinckx—Kentucky—Loretto*, 174; Florence Wolff, *From Generation to Generation: The Sisters of Loretto, Their Constitutions and Devotions, 1812-Vatican II* (Louisville, KY: General Printing Company, 1982), 72n3. For the name of the convent, see *Klyn Loretten in noord-America. Petit Lorette etats unis de L’Amerique. Little Loretto Kentucky, United States of America / dessiné et gravé par Courtois á Malines*, ca.1815, Engraving, 26.9 x 32.8 cm (plate) on sheet 31 x 40.2 cm, Popular Graphic Arts, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003674808/>; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 263. For the House of Loretto pilgrimage site, see Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2001), 237.

⁹⁴ *Rules*, ch. 1, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 3, sec. 6, 7-8.

⁹⁶ Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints: Compiled from Original Monuments, And Other Authentic Records: Illustrated with the Remarks of Judicious Modern Critics and Historians*, 12 vols., 3rd edition (Edinburgh, Scotland: J. Moir for J. P. Coghlan, 1798), 1:231.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:231.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 130-31, 135-38.

⁹⁹ *Rules*, ch. 3, sec. 6, 7-8; “A Reflection upon Exactness in Regularity,” in *Rules*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ *Rules*, ch. 2, sec. 15, 14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 2, sec. 15, 14-19.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, quote ch. 2, sec. 15, 20; 1, 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, ch. 1, 2.

¹⁰⁴ For Protestant views of Mary during the Reformation and the Protestant association of devotion to Mary and transubstantiation, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 367-76.

¹⁰⁵ Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life* (2007; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19.

¹⁰⁶ For the devotion of the Sisters to the Sacred Hearts, see *Rules*, ch. 3, sec. 18, 20; 45.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Van Praet, *The Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, For the Use of the Association Erected under that Title in the Domestic Oratory of the Society of Jesus at Bruges. With Permission of Superiors* (Bruges: n.p., 1767).

¹⁰⁸ “A General Oblation and Intention, To be made in the Morning, to direct the Course of all the Duties of the Day,” in *Rules*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁹ John G. Mannard, “‘Maternity . . . of the Spirit’: Nuns and Domesticity in Antebellum America,” in *The American Catholic Religious Life: Selected Historical Essays*, ed. Joseph M. White (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 140.

¹¹⁰ “Rules for the School,” in *Rules*, 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31, 33.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹³ Margaret A. Hogan, “Sister Servants: Catholic Women Religious in Antebellum Kentucky” (PhD. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 71, 148, 154; *Rules*, 4.

¹¹⁴ Bill of Sale, Mother Ann Rhodes to Reverend Charles Nerinckx, August 27, 1812, Historical Information series, box I, folder 7, LHC; “Chronology of Slave Ownership: Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross, State of Kentucky,” Slave Memorial box, folder 3, LHC.

¹¹⁵ Benedict Flaget to Simon Bruté, February, 7, 1817, quoted in Charles LeMarié, *A Biography of Joseph Flaget, B. 1763 – D. 1850, First Bishop of the Dioceses of Bardstown and Louisville, Kentucky, 1811-1850*, trans. Mary Wedding and Rachel Willett, 3 vols. (Bardstown, KY: St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral Archives, 1992) 2: 104.

¹¹⁶ As part of the weekday morning prayers, the Sisters prescribed “one *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* for . . . the Benefactors of the Institute”; *Rules*, ch. 3, sec. 15, 15-16.

¹¹⁷ “Rules for the School,” in *Rules*, 34.

¹¹⁸ Marli F. Weiner, “Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding: The Ideology and Behavior of Elite Antebellum Women,” in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 284.

¹¹⁹ “Compendium of Instructions,” Nerinckiana box, folder 1, LHC.

¹²⁰ Charles Nerinckx Journal, 16, RG Spec 1, box 1, folder 6, LHC.

¹²¹ For the account of George Clements’s incident with the miller, see Sister Laurentia Sims, “Mother BERLINDES—Little Lucy Downs,” RG III-2, box 1, folder 8, LHC. For biographical information on the orphan girl, Lucy Downs, see “Mother Berlindes Downs (Lucy),” RG IV, box Dow-Doy, folder “Downs, Sister M. Berlindes,” LHC.

CHAPTER II

CRAFTING LOCAL RESPECTABILITY, 1810-1815

In addition to their faith, the founding members of the Sisters of Loretto acted on a desire to forge roles for themselves outside the bounds of marriage and motherhood. In the 1810s, these women navigated a political and cultural climate that politicized marriage and reproduction, and led many Americans to call for the suppression of the Shakers, a religious group they deemed a threat to families and individual liberty. Widely circulated anti-Shaker pamphlets and newspaper tracts, petitions to the Kentucky state legislature, and an act drawn by the legislature's Committee on Religion politicized religiously motivated celibacy, communal living, and property holding as dangers to families and the nation. Shaker opponents easily identified parallels between these elements of Shaker doctrine and Roman Catholic monasticism. Yet Catholics denounced Shakers and the link drawn between the faiths. The early members of the Sisters of Loretto founded the order within this anti-celibate climate, first taking on educational and benevolent roles among their family members and later expanding their mission to provide instruction to girls within the broader community. While not fulfilling expectations of marriage and childrearing, the community deemed these single women's activities respectable by southern and Christian standards because the Sisters served the larger social order.

During the War of 1812, in the order's first years of existence, pro-war advocates

and American popular culture celebrated family formation and childbirth as women's contribution to American power. In turn, print culture portrayed the war as a means for young men to earn the attention of a bride and required men to protect their families from immoral Native Americans and British troops. These celebrations of marriage, child birth, and the protection of families as patriotic expressions did not prevent the establishment of a religious order committed to celibacy. By 1815, however, gendered patriotic rhetoric heightened public concern for the fate of three marital-aged young women who wished to join the Sisters. The ensuing controversy sparked the first documented protest against the order and highlighted the fluidity of gendered respectability over time.

In 1812, the founders of the Sisters of Loretto committed themselves to a celibate life that evaded long-standing European and Euro-American expectations of marriage and reproduction.¹ The Sisters in central Kentucky also faced early national Americans' politicization of marriage and family formation. From the late eighteenth century through the era of the War of 1812, politicians and writers pointed to the rapidly reproducing American population as an indicator of the nation's power and potential.² Republicans argued that reproduction and seemingly infinite western land advanced a uniquely free citizenry and fostered the manpower and resources to build a booming economy and defend the nation. While some depicted western lands as a freely available prize for fertile white families, westerners were keenly aware that expansion sparked violence with Native Americans. White westerners desired denser populations to instill a greater sense of security and confidence in the success of their attacks on native villages. Marriage and

its end goal of reproduction, then, served as a crucial tool of the expanding white population.³

Prior to the founding of the Sisters of Loretto, its first members witnessed early national Americans' enthusiastic defense of the family-centered social order from the threat posed the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearance, a celibate, communal sect known as the Shakers. From the Shakers' arrival in British North America in the 1770s, Protestant writers drew on long standing anti-Catholic vocabulary and themes to articulate how the sect threatened families, liberty, and the nation.⁴ Early anti-Shaker publications in New England explicitly equated the group to Catholics, and in 1783 Benjamin West concluded that "there is no essential difference" between the beliefs of the Shakers and Catholics.⁵ In making his argument for the similarities in the faiths, West first noted "[Shaker's] doctrine of perfection, celibacy or abstinence [*sic*]," key elements of Catholic monasticism.⁶ An anonymous 1785 article in the New York *Theological Magazine* deemed Shakerism "a species of Roman Catholicism."⁷ The author stressed the parallels between Catholic and Shaker celibacy and condemned both as inimical to American social norms. He also noted that Shakers' blasphemous veneration of their deceased founders resembled Catholic prayers to saints.⁸

After Shakers arrived in Ohio and Kentucky in 1805, their opponents continued to draw negative parallels between the sect and Catholics.⁹ Upset that his son had joined the Shakers and induced his grandchildren to convert, Kentuckian James Smith proved the most prolific anti-Shaker writer in the 1810s.¹⁰ He compared the authority of David Durrow over the western Shakers to the infallibility of the Pope to illustrate the greed, deceit, and un-American allegiances of Shakerism.¹¹ Like papal control of church

property and the Catholic practice of indulgences, Smith argued that Durrow, the Shaker “Pope, . . . has the treasury in his own hand,” and duped converts into divesting their property. Tricked into following a blasphemous faith, converts became slaves in the “money making scheme” that benefited the leadership alone.¹² Smith drew on anti-Catholic sentiment to stress the danger of the situation. Shakers did not just follow dangerous Catholic practices, but “Shakerism far exceeds popish bondage, or any thing that ever was known in the world.”¹³ For Smith, Papist-like “infallibility and implicit faith and obedience” demonstrated that “Shakerism stands in direct opposition to the United States’ government.”¹⁴ He reminded Kentuckians of the history of “popish despotic power” that “spread all over Christendom,” and caused “the loss of the lives of millions of the human race.” “We know what shocking effects infallibility and implicit faith and obedience have produced in the world; and have we any reason to believe or expect that it will be any better now?”¹⁵

The Kentucky Catholic women who became sisters also could read descriptions of Shaker atrocities that echoed long held motifs in anti-convent literature. Popular disbelief in the ability of nuns and clergy to maintain celibacy resulted in characterizations of convents as hotbeds of scandalous sexual relations and rape, and the site of horrific murders of nuns’ secretly birthed infants.¹⁶ Similar anxiety over feigned celibacy exhibited itself in tales of Shaker lewdness. Attempting to refute such charges, Shaker Richard McNemar in 1808 noted Kentuckians’ popular belief that “divested of all modesty, [Shakers] stripped and danced naked in their night meetings, blew out the candles and went into a promiscuous debauch.—And what was still more shocking, the fruits of their unlawful embraces, they concealed by the horrid crime of murder.”¹⁷

Despite Shaker attempts to argue otherwise, the characterization persisted. In 1810, the *Kentucky Gazette* reported rumors that circulated in Ohio and Kentucky that Shakers' "celibacy was only a pretence [*sic*], and that they had secret vaults wherein was thrown their infants."¹⁸

In the face of such comparisons, Catholics denounced and sought to distance themselves from Shakers to maintain their respectability.¹⁹ Bishop Benedict Flaget's report on Shakers published in a French mission fundraising paper illustrated North American Catholics' unease. Flaget stressed key elements of Catholic doctrine that the sect renounced: "They reject the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the merits and the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the maternity of the Blessed Virgin, the resurrection of the body, and other articles of faith. They dare even to hold the blasphemy that the Father and the Holy Spirit are two incomprehensible beings, united in the same essence, as male and female, although not forming two persons." They practiced confession, like Catholics, but "not to priests, nor in secret." While Catholics respected celibacy for devout individuals, biblical praise of marriage and family life justified the expectation that most Catholics marry. Shakers, however, flaunted civil and ecclesiastical law by "condemn[ing] marriage as unlawful." Like Catholic monastics, "[t]he Shakers believed in a community of goods. A convert in entering society gave up all property to the community or church." New Catholic monastics remained in the novitiate state until they learned the practices of their order and thereafter strove to live sinless, ever aware that they could slip into sin if not vigilant. But Shakers "continued in a probationary state until he or she was judged to have arrived at such a state of perfection that future sin was impossible." While Catholics

were concerned for non-Catholics' souls, Shakers "boasted of having divested themselves of every filial, fraternal, or conjugal affection for those not of their church."²⁰

In addition to Shakers' un-American allegiances and disruption of families, many Kentuckians expressed unease about the elevation of women in the sect.²¹ In July 1810, the *Kentucky Gazette* printed "Who are the Shakers?," an article that in part focused on the oddity of female leadership and divinity in the faith. The author described the founder Ann Lee as "a raving woman," "whom [the Shakers] dignify with the appellation of Mother, and venerate as a second Saviour, and the representative of the Holy Ghost." "The wild, extravagant painting of the male and female in deity, the indwelling of a She-Holy-Ghost in Anne Lee . . . seem to be designed to burlesque all religion whether natural or revealed."²²

From mid-1810 to 1812, central Kentucky Catholic women witnessed the anti-celibate and anti-communal rhetoric in newspapers and local gossip materialize into action. Events in Ohio and Kentucky prompted legislation to safeguard families and liberty from the Shaker threat. James Smith's anti-Shaker print campaign impelled an armed mob to travel to the Shaker community of Union Village in Ohio. Western newspapers reported on the August 1810 altercation in the ensuing months because "[the] subject. . . considerably agitated the public mind," according to a Lexington editor.²³ Estimates of the number of participants ranged from five hundred to more than two thousand.²⁴ When the mob proved unsuccessful in soliciting the liberty of "captives" they disbanded.²⁵ But unsatisfied Ohioans turned to the state legislature, which in 1811 passed a law to protect families from Shaker disruption. The statute fined the proselytizers of celibate sects who recruited married men or women. The law also stipulated that if a

husband joined a celibate group, his abandoned wife and children received title to his property.²⁶

Discord and political action in Ohio provided a model for Kentuckians uneasy about the growing Shaker population. In petitions and legislation, Kentuckians denounced and mobilized against a religious group they believed disturbed family norms and challenged individual liberty. When the pattern of a husband converting to Shakerism, abandoning his family, and kidnapping a child repeated itself in the case of the Boler family of Barren County, Kentucky, it prompted legislative action.²⁷ During the winter 1811-1812 legislative session, the Kentucky House of Representatives heard a series of anti-Shaker petitions and forwarded them to the Committee on Religion for further consideration.²⁸ In late January, the committee presented a report to the House that stressed that their proposed resolutions did not constitute religious persecution: “your committee leave the Shakers, and all other sects, to pursue uninterrupted, the dictates of their own consciences—leaving their religious creed to the approbation or disapprobation of themselves, and their God.” Nevertheless, the first resolution stated, “That an open renunciation of the marriage vow and contract, and total abstinence from sexual connubial intercourse, agreeably to the intentions and objects of matrimony, ought to be provided against by law.” The remaining resolutions closely modeled the Ohio legislation, advocating for provisions to protect the material wellbeing of the abandoned wife and children of a “husband so renouncing the marriage contract.”²⁹ In the context of the petitions and popular anti-Shakerism, the committee argued that the resolutions addressed the problem of family disruption without explicitly infringing on Shakers’ constitutional rights:

In adopting the foregoing resolutions, your committee have not been unmindful that religious tenets, are not the subject of legislative or judicial interference. They entertain too high respect for their country, this legislative body, and themselves, to recommend any measure contravening these golden provisions of our constitution, which declare—“That all men have a natural and indefeasible right, to worship *Almighty God*, according to the dictates of their own consciences.”³⁰

The House “*unanimously concurred*” with the resolutions and “[o]rdered—That the committee of religion prepare and bring in a bill.”³¹

On February 8, 1812, the legislature passed a veiled anti-Shaker act based on the resolution. Like the Ohio legislation, the final act exhibited a concern for the financial strain on families abandoned by husbands who “renounce[d] the marriage covenant by refusing to live with his wife in the conjugal relation—by uniting himself to any sect, whose creed, rules, or doctrines require a renunciation of the marriage covenant, or forbid a man and wife to dwell and cohabit together, according to the true spirit and object of marriage.”³² Despite the similar language of the Ohio and Kentucky acts, Kentucky legislators omitted the fine against proselytizers who converted a spouse to a celibate group. Kentuckians also broke from the Ohio precedent by designating the liberty of children as a particular concern. The legislature specified “that if any religious association of persons, or any person or persons belonging to such association, or acting under their authority, shall illegally detain an infant or *feme covert*,” anyone could apply to the local circuit court for a writ of *habeas corpus*, resulting in the seizure of the child and assessment of the situation.³³

By 1812, uneasy Kentuckians passed legislation to repress a celibate, communal sect deemed similar to Catholics and a threat to families, liberty, and the nation. Meanwhile, other Kentuckians managed to craft lives that deviated from family norms without provoking immediate outrage. Thirty-year-old Catholic Mary Rhodes wondered

how she could make herself respectably useful and find satisfaction as a single woman.³⁴ White southerners taught their daughters from birth that serving the needs and happiness of others was how they would find satisfaction in life.³⁵ They expected white women to marry and become mothers.³⁶ Father Charles Nerinckx reported in 1805 that “The girls here usually marry between the ages of sixteen and nineteen,” and society anticipated that a single woman in her mid-twenties and especially by thirty would remain unwed.³⁷ Although not fulfilling traditional gender expectations of marriage and reproduction, southern single women like Rhodes carved respectable roles for themselves by dutifully serving the larger social order.³⁸ Single women often chose to live under the protection of family members’ households.³⁹ According to Nerinckx’s retrospective accounts, Rhodes lived in the household of her married brother, Benedict, near Hardin’s Creek in Washington County.⁴⁰ She fulfilled the role of a maiden aunt who helped care for her extended kin, with a particular interest in her niece.⁴¹ She wanted to teach her niece and realized that other families in the parish of St. Charles on Hardin’s Creek might also be interested in formal instruction for their daughters.⁴²

According to Nerinckx, he approved of Rhodes’s plan to open a school for Catholic girls because of her “particular view of keeping some girls from the promiscuous Schooling with the boys subversive of morality.”⁴³ Rhodes opened her school on April 25, 1812 and found the broader Catholic community receptive to her endeavor. Rhodes recruited another “virtuous girl” of the community, twenty-nine-year-old Christina Stuart, to work alongside her and bolster the respectability of the enterprise. By late June, twenty-six-year-old Ann Havern and Rhodes’s ill sister, twenty-year-old Ann decided to join the school staff.⁴⁴ Despite the anti-celibate and anti-communal

climate of Kentucky, the four women decided to establish a Catholic sisterhood devoted to God and the education of girls. They followed the appropriate patriarchal ecclesiastical channels to achieve their goal, requesting permission from Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget by late June 1812.⁴⁵

Aware that their celibate and communal lifestyle challenged social norms, the Sisters distributed a circular to announce their intentions, garner funds, and shape public opinion. Dated October 2, 1812 and signed by Nerinckx, the circular omitted the religious practices of the order and instead focused on activities that made its members useful to both Catholics and non-Catholics. The address focused foremost on the order's school, foregrounding it before introducing the order itself: "a long desired Institute for the Education of the Female Youth is begun by the lately established *Little Society of the friends of Mary, under the Cross of JESUS*, in the Congregation of St. Charles (Harden's Creek), at their place called Loretto." In describing the merits and terms of the school, the Sisters sought to attract students and describe its usefulness to the broader community. Readers learned that the order's school served girls "of every Denomination," and enrolled "already thirty or forty Scholars." The Sisters provided close supervision: "The scholars are instructed by two Sisters of the Society, & rules are strictly observed." The "uncommonly low" tuition of "\$5 a year for schooling, of which, one [dollar] in cash," and provision that "Needy orphans, as much as possible, will be admitted gratis" illustrated that the Sisters intended to make the institution accessible to as many girls as possible.⁴⁶

The school offered subjects culturally acceptable for lower-class and middling girls in the early nation: "Reading, Writing, Needlework, &c. sound morality, and

Christian politeness,” content considered “useful to all.” The Sisters’ educational efforts aligned with early national arguments on the role of female education in serving families and the broader nation. The curriculum the Sisters advertised taught girls the basic skills needed to manage a household and teach their future children, without broaching subjects such as grammar, history, and natural philosophy that many early national Americans considered superfluous for the lower classes. The school’s teaching of “sound morality and Christian politeness” reflected the belief that educating girls in virtue would enable them to become a sound moral influence on their families, men, and the broader republic. Advocates also argued that education enabled girls to develop knowledge and basic communication skills to converse pleasantly with men, which served companionate romantic relationships and socializing. Female education, therefore, served to better relations within families and society at large, creating harmony and fostering virtue in an otherwise tumultuous republic.⁴⁷

The circular also argued that others would benefit from the charity of the order: “The same Society will become besides, an asylum or shelter for old age, decrepit and useless Slaves, and whatever kind of sick or distressed fellow-creatures may call for their assistance, as far as their condition will permit.”⁴⁸ The Loretines’ offer of asylum for “old age” addressed a longstanding need in the community exacerbated by warfare. In the early national United States, women considered themselves “old” by their fifties and early sixties.⁴⁹ Elderly women worried that poor health, mental and physical decline, or financial ruin would leave them and their loved ones incapable of supporting themselves.⁵⁰ Elderly widows and single women often lived in the households of family members and friends, but fluctuations in their hosts’ resources frequently forced them to

seek new residences.⁵¹ The Sisters' offer provided needy elderly women a temporary residence while ensuring that, unlike recourse to court or legislative poor relief, their personal dignity and family honor remained undiminished.⁵² Furthermore, the War of 1812 disrupted Kentucky families and challenged their ability to provide for their households. By late 1811, rumors and public calls for armed conflict with Great Britain made warfare—and ensuing family disruptions—seem inevitable to Kentuckians. Following the U.S. declaration of war in June 1812, public celebrations erupted across the state and Kentuckians cheerfully predicted the imminent military sacrifices of their men.⁵³ The reality of warfare, however, soon undermined optimism and forced Kentucky residents to adapt to the absence of over eleven thousand men by the end of 1812.⁵⁴ When their menfolk left for militia musters or died in the conflict, families bore the burden of filling the labor deficit, managing business affairs, and economizing amid inflation.⁵⁵ The Sisters, then, offered timely respite to households that struggled to support family and friends during the war.

The order's announcement that it would house "decrepit and useless Slaves," served to uphold slaveholding and the social order of the Border South. Large slaveholders could afford to support physically, emotionally, or mentally disabled slaves because the bulk of their enslaved labor force performed profitable work. The typical Border South small slaveholder, however, needed more flexible laborers. Thus, traits a large planter could tolerate could mark the same enslaved person as "decrepit and useless" among small slaveholders. As historian Dea H. Boster argues, "[m]eager subsistence, unsafe work conditions, repetitive stress injuries, corporeal punishment, and abuse—physical, sexual, or emotional—could cause physical and mental conditions

among African American bondspeople that rendered slaves unsound in the eyes of the slaveholding class.”⁵⁶ Masters often sought to shirk the burden of providing for slaves whose condition prevented them from meeting masters’ expectations for efficient performance. Slaveholders neglected, attempted to sell, or abandoned enslaved people they deemed inadequate, but doing so violated the paternal obligations of slaveholders and the tenets of Catholic mastery, threatening justifications of the social order.⁵⁷ The Sisters of Loretto served the Border South patriarchal order by offering to take in unwanted slaves. The order enabled masters to believe they upheld proper paternalism while freeing themselves from the burden of support.

In its first few years of existence, the Sisters of Loretto carefully crafted their respectability based on upholding the larger social order. By 1815, however, family-focused wartime rhetoric meshed with a shift in membership to incite local concern that the budding order threatened families. The entrance of nineteen-year-old Ann Hart in March followed in August by fifteen-year-olds Esther Grundy and Ann Clarke sparked a public protest over the fate of marital-aged girls who eschewed their patriotic duty to become wives and mothers. Wartime focus on patriarchal protection of dependents, liberty in marriage choice, and long-standing anti-convent motifs stirred fears that the young women entered non-reproductive lives against their will.

Martial rhetoric during the War of 1812 era heightened Kentucky men’s sense of manhood and nationalism by highlighting the patriarchal protection of dependents. In turn, male community members felt empowered to voice their disapproval when it appeared that young women were threatened by convent life. Pro-war advocates stressed the uncivilized targeting of women and children by the British and Native Americans to

rouse men's support for the war.⁵⁸ A "War Song," circulated in Kentucky newspapers in July 1812, enumerated reasons for the conflict. Two lines referenced foreign interference in American trade and impressment of American sailors, but the song placed greater emphasis on British incitement of Native American violence against western families: "westward, hear the savage yells, / Triumphant in their murders; / See the bleeding matron die, / By the fell savage smitten, / Her slaughter'd infants, round her lie; / 'Tis all the work of Britain."⁵⁹ In addition to invoking anxiety over the general safety of their families, pro-war advocates called on men to perform their patriarchal duty to protect their female dependents from rape.⁶⁰ While Native Americans did not use sexual violence as a military tactic and reported British incidents were rare, widely circulated news of British atrocities at the Chesapeake towns of Hampton and Havre de Grace provided ominous warnings of the potential for rape.⁶¹ The poem "Appeals," printed in the *Kentucky Gazette*, pointedly noted, "Shall your wives and daughters dear, / Murdered, violated be?" to encourage Kentucky men to see assault on their female loved ones as an outcome of men's failure to fight.⁶² Popular memory of the war as a conflict to protect women was further engrained by George Poindexter's widely-reprinted rumor that "the watch-word and countersign of the [British] on the morning of the [Battle of New Orleans] was BEAUTY & BOOTY."⁶³ An 1815 song, "Hunters of Kentucky," played on the rumor and perpetuated the perception that Kentuckians fought to protect women's honor. The British commander at New Orleans "made his brags, / If he in fight was lucky, / He'd have their girls and cotton bags, / In spite of old Kentucky." But "They found, at last 'twas vain to fight / Where lead was all their booty; / And so they wisely took to flight; / And left us all the beauty! / And now if danger e'er annoys, / Remember

what our trade is; / Just send for us Kentucky boys, / And we'll protect ye, ladies.”⁶⁴ By denouncing British and Native American violence toward women and children, Kentucky men believed the war exhibited their honor as protectors of families.

As pro-war advocates drew on marital themes to incite support for the war and stir nationalism, they raised the expectation that men who made martial contributions would receive access to women as a prize. Wartime popular culture portrayed marriage and sexuality as the key avenues for white women to contribute to the war effort. Stories, songs, and poems articulated the ideal that young single women should rouse patriotism by shunning cowardly and un-American suitors, while rewarding patriotic young men with their hand in marriage after they proved their worth with military service.⁶⁵ In early August 1812, the *Kentucky Gazette* shared a dialogic poem, first printed in the *Bardstown Repository*, that instructed youth on the proper approach to the war. A young courting couple, Alfred and Stella, conversed about Alfred's decision to fight. An ideal young republican man, Alfred expressed his sadness at leaving her and the dangers of not resisting “oppression's hand.” Alfred informed Stella that he “Must grasp the sword, O, charming maid, / And not thy lily hand.” In saying goodbye, he focused on how her physical attractiveness made it difficult to leave: “Yet is thy face so beautiful, / Thy bosom is so fair, / And Nature's hand so gracefully / Has curl'd thy golden hair.” Not realizing the stakes of the conflict and the need for selflessness, Stella exclaimed, “How mad and foolish nations are! / What useless wars they wage,” and entreated, “Stay ardent youth, at home, / And let the Moon-struck nations fight / And spill their blood alone.” Alfred countered, “No, Stella, no, my love for thee / Commands me not to stay.” Swayed by his logic and sensing her own selfishness, Stella dropped her opposition and

encouraged his valor instead: “Well Alfred, arm’d in terrors go, / Compel the proud to yield, / And let the foes of freedom hear / Your thunder through the field. / And may the angels guard you there, And lead you on to fame; / And distant lands and ages hear / Your warlike deeds and name.” For her part, she promised, “Should Heaven in safety send you home, / You’ll find your Stella true; / But should you fall, the tears shall stream / When she remembers you.”⁶⁶

As the war dragged on and enthusiasm waned, “M.,” a reader of the *Kentucky Gazette*, believed youth needed additional reminders of their roles. A poem he submitted to the editors, he asserted, “will teach our sweethearts to school us into public spirit, and warn our fellow young bachelors of the danger they may be in, if preferring the charms of ease to their country’s service, they should venture on such declarations” of love. Printed in late June 1814, the poem portrayed a young shepherd expressing his love for a maid. Annoyed, she “half . . . turn’d aside” her cheek, and noted the inappropriateness of his actions: “But oh! is this time for bliss, / Or themes so soft as these? / Whilst all around we hear no sound, / But war’s terrific strain; The drum commands our arm’d lands, / And chides each tardy swain.” She challenged the shepherd to join the fight or remain a coward unfit for her attention: “Our country’s call arouses all / Who dare be brave and free; / The youth alone my love shall crown, / Who saves himself and me.” She had her desired affect as he scrambled to do her bidding: “‘Tis done,’ he cried, ‘from thy dear side, / Now quickly I’ll be gone; / From love will I to freedom fly, / A slave to thee alone. / And when I come with laurels home, / And all that freemen crave, / To crown my love, thy smiles shall prove, / The Fair reward the Brave.’”⁶⁷

Wartime rhetoric raised men's expectation of access to women, but also complicated unrestrained desire by enshrining liberty in marriage choice and protection of the institution as a motive for the conflict. Anxious over the legitimacy and course of the new country, early national polemicists touted the superior morality and liberty of the United States over Great Britain. Republicans celebrated Americans' freedom to choose a marriage partner and the nation's protection of the institution. War advocates argued that the right to choose a marriage partner formed the basis of all other rights, since families were the bedrock of the nation. In contrast, dramatic tales of British impressment of American men that circulated in newspapers demonstrated that the British did not respect the sanctity of marriage bonds.⁶⁸ In May 1813, the *Kentucky Gazette* reprinted the poem, "Bill Cheerly," which described the fate of American seamen captured by "British press gangs." The poem depicted Bill as devoted to his family, friends, and future fiancé, but it focused on the latter relationship, using the mystery of her identity to draw the audience into the young romance. While in port, "Bill bought a ring of 'Lonnon gold,' / With inward posey true; / For whom it was, he never told, / *That was a posey too!*" "Yet should his mess mates hint the *ring*, / The blood in torrents rush'd-- / Bill could not talk of *such a thing*, but bent his head and blush'd." Bill longed to see his loved ones while at sea, but before he could return home a British pressgang intercepted his vessel. Forced into British service, he died when an American fleet attacked. The poem concluded by stressing the cruel severance of family bonds and his loved ones' pain: "There are, in love and kindred's name, / To whom *that man was bound*; / . . . Yet never will the heart of Love, / Recover from despair; / Or time from Kindred's cheek remove; / The tear that trembles there!"⁶⁹

In 1815, the main body of the Sisters of Loretto had not affronted wartime patriarchal rhetoric. As single women considered too old to marry by early national standards, the Sisters did not fit the role of romantic spurs for men's martial actions. Instead, men could feel they protected the Sisters, a group of women intent on preserving their chastity, from violation. However, when three marital-aged women—Ann Hart, Esther Grundy, and Ann Clarke—sought to join the order in 1815 as novices, they affronted some local residents' notions of manhood and nationalism. Kentuckians celebrated the war as a means to protect families and marital liberty, but the young women appeared to disregard such efforts by choosing life in a convent over marriage. In response, local men focused their anxiety on whether the girls freely chose their course.

Catholic women religious and ecclesiastics were sensitive to the longstanding cultural trope that young women joined convents against their will. The Loretines wanted to encourage their pupils to consider monastic life, but were careful to prescribe transparent, age-specific steps to full membership to assure consent. The Sisters allowed students as young as ten to become “Desirants.” They wore “the Little Hearts”—representations of the pierced Sacred Heart of Jesus—on their clothing to indicate their interest in becoming a Sister. After they had received first communion—normally ministered around age twelve—girls could become postulants and wear a modified “Little Veil.”⁷⁰ Neither status required full commitment to the order from the girls, reflected in the relatively low-key ceremony described by the Rules to occur on “general confession days” and “located in the refectory.” Novices represented a more serious commitment, as young women entered a trial period of at least one year before becoming a full member. The Sisters limited novice eligibility to women considered old enough to

consent—at least fourteen years old—and full membership to sixteen as dictated by the Council of Trent.⁷¹ When novices entered the community, they made a series of promises and donned the habit in a public ceremony held on one of the four annual Marian feast days.⁷²

Public disquiet about the reception of the younger women began when nineteen-year-old Ann Hart sought novice status in the spring of 1815. She was born in Breckinridge County, to the west of Little Loretto in Washington County. Hart attended and boarded at the Sisters' school and expressed an interest in joining the order. Her parents did not approve of her choice, however, and she returned to Breckinridge County to teach after finishing school. The persistent Hart returned to Loretto in early 1815 and sought to enter against her parents' wishes. The Sisters and Nerinckx allowed her to reside temporarily onsite while Nerinckx contacted her parents, who thought she had returned only to receive more education.⁷³ According to Nerinckx's biographer, "Her father came to Loretto, had a private interview with her," during which Hart convinced him to let her join.⁷⁴ Hart entered as a novice on March 19, 1815 and chose "Sister Agnes" as her new name, an indication of her resolve to disobey authority for a higher purpose like the saint.⁷⁵ Saint Agnes had lived during Diocletian's persecution of Christians in early fourth century Rome.⁷⁶ At thirteen years of age, according to *The Lives of the Saints*, Agnes's "riches and beauty excited the young noblemen of the first families in Rome, to vie with one another in their addresses, who should gain her in marriage."⁷⁷ Agnes resisted their entreaties, declaring "that she consecrated her virginity to a heavenly spouse."⁷⁸ The men informed the governor of her illegal faith, hoping that the threat of torture would lead her to denounce Christianity and her religiously

motivated chastity. The young girl remained steadfast in the face of intimidation, even after the governor sent her to a brothel and ordered that she be raped into submission. God protected her virginity and the annoyed governor ordered her beheading. Cheerful and fearless, Agnes died a martyr and church teachings held her “as special patroness of purity.”⁷⁹

A few months after Hart stirred controversy by entering against her family’s wishes, two young pupils who witnessed the ordeal also joined the Sisters. Their financial and social ties marked them as attractive marriage partners while the deaths of their fathers muddled patriarchal authority over their fates. Male community members felt empowered to step into the resulting void. One of the girls, Esther Grundy, was born to a distinguished central Kentucky family. Her paternal grandparents, George and Elizabeth Grundy of Virginia, settled in what would become Washington County by 1783. Fifty-one-year-old Elizabeth Grundy became a widow the next year and worked to build up her family’s finances and social network. She managed and acquired extensive rural landholdings and opened a popular tavern and inn in Springfield.⁸⁰ Her oldest son, John, helped integrate the family into the emerging local elite. He served as a deputy sheriff in 1784 and 1785, attended two of the Kentucky statehood conventions, and advocated successfully for the creation of Washington County from Nelson County in 1792.⁸¹ John served as the sheriff of the new county until 1795 and thereafter sporadically served as a county justice of the peace until 1814. Following the death of his second wife, he married Jean Speaks of a wealthy Catholic family in 1794.⁸² He cultivated enough respect in the Washington County community to serve in the Kentucky legislature in 1799 and 1805.⁸³

By the time of Esther Grundy's birth to John and Jean in about 1800, her family had accumulated thirteen slaves and nearly 4,000 acres of land.⁸⁴

Tragedy struck in the spring of 1814, when both of Esther Grundy's parents died within five days of one another.⁸⁵ As a child from her father's third marriage, Grundy had a wide network of adult siblings, in-laws, and extended family members in central Kentucky who could become involved in her life.⁸⁶ As recounted by Father Camillus P. Maes in his biography of Nerinckx, conflict soon arose between her Catholic family and Protestant "grand and wealthy relations" over her future and faith.⁸⁷ While her father reportedly had not been a practicing Catholic, Esther's mother was active in the local Catholic community.⁸⁸ James Dant, a Catholic cousin of Mary Rhodes, became Grundy's legal guardian and thereby controlled the funds for her upbringing.⁸⁹ Against some of her family's wishes, Grundy entered the school of the Sisters of Loretto while her older brothers managed the family's estate and debts.⁹⁰ Her father willed that upon the settlement of his debts, his property would be sold at public auction and the proceeds "equally divided among all my children."⁹¹ At the auction in June 1815, the large crowd in attendance speculated on the wealth she and her assumed future husband would inherit as the auctioneer handled bids.⁹² Grundy purchased some of her family's property at the auction, items of sentimental value and useful to her at school, including a trunk and "knotted coverlet." But she knew that she would have to wait until she was older to collect her inheritance.⁹³

As a descendent of prominent Catholic families, Ann Clarke's extended relatives did not oppose her desire to become a Sister based on denominational strife. But like Grundy she would inherit a share of her deceased father's estate once old enough. Clarke

was born about 1799 in Washington County and was the second daughter of prominent Catholics Ignatius and Aloysia Hill Clarke. By 1812, the family had accumulated wealth in the form of nine slaves valued at \$2,425 in addition to a farm with livestock. Her father died suddenly from apoplexy by late 1812 and left her mother to raise a family of seven children. In the meantime, Clarke boarded with the Sisters and attended the school by 1813.⁹⁴ Clarke recounted sixty years later that she admired “the pious & good Sisters.” She wrote that “Their great courage & cheerfulness was wonderful which gave animation to all around them,” despite “the many privations, difficulties & sufferings they had to endure.” Clarke noted that “all this made such an impression on me, that, young as I was, only 14 years old, I determined to quit the world & struggle with them for my Crown in Heaven.”⁹⁵

Ann Clarke and Esther Grundy expressed their interest in joining the order while pupils, but their youth prevented them from formally becoming novices. Once they turned fifteen in 1815, Nerinckx approved their admittance. Informed by an interview with Clarke, Maes wrote that “Nerinckx gave orders to have [the ceremony] done in the convent chapel,” a departure from the normal reception in St. Charles Church.⁹⁶ Clarke and Grundy’s ceremony occurred in the less public space on August 4, while the entrance of twenty-three year old Juliana Wathen of a prominent Catholic family and the final vows for two other women were scheduled for August 15, the Feast of the Assumption and the date that had become the norm for summer entrances and vows.⁹⁷ The deviance in location and time of the younger women’s ceremony contributed to local suspicions that something was afoul. Local men balked that clergy led astray prime potential brides and mothers against their will. As described by Maes, men “censured [Nerinckx]

severely—aye, threatened him publicly with their vengeance—for thus taking from their midst the youthful and promising portion of the community, the hope and pride of their families, and shutting them up in a nunnery to pine away and wear out their lives in a few short years by austerity and penance.” Maes continued: “Their clamorous protestations grew so loud and fierce that Bishop Flaget thought it his duty to interfere.” Flaget used the Sunday mass to respond to public concerns about the recent novices. In his homily, he stressed the usefulness of the Loretines and their commitment to liberty. He preached on the “happy results and lasting benefits which their families would derive from the teachings of the sisters.” Flaget questioned the protesters’ commitment to liberty by stressing that Nerinckx “allow[ed] young ladies to be free in the choice of their own vocation, whilst these very men had not a word of blame for parents who would compel their daughters to enter the matrimonial state against their wishes and make them miserable for life.”⁹⁸

Flaget’s charge of hypocrisy against the already enraged men added to the tense situation. But his public rebuke also illustrated that the hierarchy would not tolerate the bullying of missionaries by the laity. According to Maes, “This address of the Bishop somewhat checked the outspoken complaints of the fault-finders.”⁹⁹ The men were not convinced that the novices made the correct decision or entered willingly, but they did not act violently on their disapproval nor force the Sisters to dismiss the new novices. The local community still deemed the Sisters as worthy servants of the social order, but the controversy highlighted that such a positive assessment depended on personal connections and could change.

Ultimately, the actions of the Sisters proved more effective over time in easing the tensions of 1815. The Loretines became more careful to avoid the perception of secrecy caused by Grundy's and Clarke's unusual entrance date by holding the ceremonies for entering novices on scheduled Marian feast days. All three novices showed their commitment to their chosen lifestyle by becoming full members and rising through the leadership to become superiors. The women maintained an interest in the people of their home areas as well. In the late 1810s and early 1820s, Grundy and Hart returned to their respective home areas to found branches of the order, serve as the local superior, and benefit their former communities.¹⁰⁰ The Sisters' efforts to establish transparency in their actions and exhibit a commitment to the broader social order reigned in local anxiety over time.

By 1815, the Sisters retained their respectability despite threats posed by nationalized manhood and anti-Shaker hysteria. While early national Americans celebrated and politicized marriage and family formation and some Kentuckians questioned the entrance of marriageable young women to the order, the Sisters gained acceptance in the local community by emphasizing their support for the social order. The Loretines offered useful work for unmarried women, educated girls according to the needs of their future roles, provided honorable assistance to elderly women, and housed disabled slaves undesired by slaveholders. In the ensuing years, local Catholics embraced the order, particularly as the Sisters mobilized against the challenges of evangelical Protestant missions and an economic depression.

¹ For the long-duree of the evasion of marriage and reproduction by women religious, see Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (1996; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-5.

² Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 6-18.

³ Eustace, *1812*, ch. 1.

⁴ Philip Lockley, "'With the Papists They Have Much in Common': Trans-Atlantic Protestant Communalism and Catholicism, 1700-1850," in *Puritans and Catholics in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1600-1800*, eds. Crawford Gribben and Scott Spurlock (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 220, 227; Tom Kanon, "'Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost': Anti-Shakerism on the Early Nineteenth-Century Frontier," *Ohio Valley History* 7 (Summer 2007): 21-22; Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, "'A Very Deep Design at the Bottom': The Shaker Threat, 1780-1860," in *Fear Itself: Enemies Real and Imagined in American Culture*, ed. Nancy Lusignan Schultz (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999), 106-108.

⁵ Benjamin West, *Scriptural Cautions against Embracing a Religious Scheme, Taught by a Number of Europeans, Who Came from England to America, in the Year 1776, and Stile Themselves the CHURCH, &c. &c.* (Hartford, CN: Babil Webster, 1783), 14.

⁶ West, *Scriptural Cautions*, 14.

⁷ "A Short Account of the People Known by the Name of Shakers, or Shaking Quakers," *Theological Magazine* 1 (1795), quoted in Lockley, "Trans-Atlantic Protestant Communalism and Catholicism," in *Puritans and Catholics*, 227.

⁸ Lockley, "Trans-Atlantic Protestant Communalism and Catholicism," in *Puritans and Catholics*, 227.

⁹ Kanon, "Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost," 2, 22; William R. Black, "Went Off to the Shakers: The First Converts of South Union" (M.A. thesis, Western Kentucky University, 2013), 80; Lockley, "Trans-Atlantic Protestant Communalism and Catholicism," in *Puritans and Catholics*, 227.

¹⁰ Kanon, "Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost," 8-10; Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 186.

¹¹ James Smith, *Remarkable Occurrences, Lately Discovered Among the People Called Shakers; of a Treasonous and Barbarous Nature, or Shakerism Discovered* (Paris, KY: Joel R. Lyle, 1810), 15-16.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15, 16.

¹³ James Smith, *Shakerism Detected. Their Erroneous and Treasonous Proceedings, and False Publications, Contained in Different News-papers, Exposed to Public View, By the Depositions of Ten Different Persons Living in Various Parts of the States of Kentucky and Ohio, Accompanied with Remarks* (Paris, KY: Joel R. Lyle, 1810), 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

¹⁶ For longstanding popular association of convents and illicit sex, see Graciela S. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Barbara R. Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600-1800: The Cloister Disclosed* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), ch. 5; Ana M. Acosta, "Hotbeds of Popery: Convents in the English Literary Imagination,"

Eighteenth-Century Fiction 15 (April-July 2003): 615-42; Julie Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), ch. 6.

¹⁷ Richard M'Nemar, *The Kentucky Revival, or, a Short History of the Late Extraordinary Out-pouring of the Spirit of God, in the Western States of America, Agreeably to Scripture-promises, and Prophecies Concerning the Latter Day: With a Brief Account of What the World Call Shakerism, Among the Subjects of the Late Revival in Ohio and Kentucky. Presented to the True Zion-Traveller, as a Memorial of the Wilderness Journey* (1807; Albany, NY: E. and E. Hosford, 1808), 95.

¹⁸ "Expedition Against the Shakers," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), October 2, 1810.

¹⁹ Kanon, "Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost," 22; Mary Ramona Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky Frontier (1785-1812)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1936), 185-87.

²⁰ *Annales de l'association de la Propagation de la Foi* (Lyons, 1828), III, 216-18, quoted in Mattingly, *The Catholic Church on the Kentucky*, 186.

²¹ Kanon, "Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost," 18.

²² "Who are the Shakers?," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), July 17, 1810.

²³ Black, "Went Off to the Shakers," 78; "Expedition Against the Shakers," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), October 2, 1810.

²⁴ Black, "Went Off to the Shakers," 78; "Expedition Against the Shakers," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), October 2, 1810. The *Kentucky Gazette* reported that: "This assemblage of people was occasioned by the circulation of multifarious reports prejudicial to the faith and manner of living among the society—some alleging that their living in celibacy was only a pretence [*sic*], and that they had secret vaults wherein was thrown their infants—others that they held involuntary servitude, vigorously inflicting punishments upon all those whom they retained under their jurisdiction, and that a number of this description were anxious to be liberated but could not escape the vigilance of their oppressors; these together with a number of others having gained credence with the public, wrought them up to a degree of phrenzy too great to be endured without investigation." The leaders of the "expedition" threatened the Shaker elders with an ultimatum: "*they, together with their society must either immediately relinquish their faith and manner of preaching, or abandon the country on or before the first day of December next, and that in case they did not agree to these proposals compulsory measures would be resorted to in order to force a compliance.*" The elders refused and the mob attempted to intimidate relatives who had joined the Shakers to admit they were held against their will. See "Expedition Against the Shakers," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), October 2, 1810.

²⁵ "Expedition Against the Shakers," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), October 2, 1810.

²⁶ Kanon, "Seduced, Bewildered, and Lost," 16.

²⁷ Influenced by the growing Shaker community in southwest Kentucky, William Boler converted in 1808. After the faithful embraced communal property, William pleaded with his wife, Sally, to convert and move into a Shaker family household, but she staunchly refused. In 1809, William took his family to his father-in-law's house, and gave half his land and other property to Sally. William then left his wife and two daughters, and moved with his son into the Shaker community. Sally waited two years to meet the minimum requirement to petition for divorce on account of abandonment and sued in the spring of

1811. See Black, "Went Off to the Shakers," 74-75, 83-84; Julia Neal, *The Kentucky Shakers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 58-59.

²⁸ On December 11, "sundry citizens of this commonwealth" petitioned that "a religious sect of fanatics, usually denominated 'Shakers,'" acted "subversive of the first principles of morality and social obligations, [in] violation of the reciprocal marital rights of man and wife, and [with] a total disregard of the claims of their children, for the means of personal sustenance and education." The petitioners requested "the enactment of some law in the nature of a statute of lunacy, for the protection of their families and estates." See *Journal of the House of Representatives, of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the Town of Frankfort, on Monday the Second Day of December, 1811, and of the Commonwealth the Twentieth* (Frankfort, KY: William Gerard, 1812), 54. The next day, Barren County residents who likely knew of the Boler family asserted that the Shakers "are enemies to American liberty; and disturbers of the peace and happiness of mankind." Specifically, the Shakers "have taken a large number of children from the parents of those who have joined them, and have given them up to David Durrow for slaves." The petitioners "pray[ed] that a law may pass authorizing the taking such children from the society." See *Journal of the Twentieth House of Representatives*, 56. The Committee on Religion did not take action before the Christmas recess, but upon the legislators' return in January 1812, another citizen petitioned for "Legislative interposition" against the Shakers. Concerned, the Shakers sent "an address . . . containing a declaration of their politics and partiality of their theology, in opposition to the several petitions heretofore presented against their sect" and "sundry documents and vouchers" that the House acknowledged, read, and forwarded to the committee. See *Journal of the Twentieth House of Representatives*, 132.

²⁹ *Journal of the Twentieth House of Representatives*, 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

³² "AN ACT concerning alimony and separate maintenance of wives and children abandoned by their husbands and fathers," in *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twentieth General Assembly for the Commonwealth of Kentucky; Begun and Held in the Capitol, in the Town of Frankfort, on Monday the Second Day of December, 1811, and of the Commonwealth the Twentieth* (Frankfort, KY: W. Gerard, 1812), ch. 394, sec. 1, 219.

³³ *Ibid.*, ch. 394, sec. 10, 222.

³⁴ For Mary Rhodes's age in 1812, see Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, in Sister M. Sarita Veretyrin, trans., "Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx; In Life was Missionary in Kentucky to His Relatives and Friends in the Netherlands; Printed in the Hague by the Brothers Langen Huyzen Behind the Big Church," Nerinckiana box, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky (hereafter LHC).

³⁵ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36, 44-45.

³⁶ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 90; Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 3.

³⁷ For Nerinckx's description of the marriage age of girls in the region, see J. J. Peemans to Propaganda Fide, Louvain, September 28, 1806, *Scrittura Riferite Nei Congressi*

America Centrale, in *Documents: Nerinckx—Kentucky—Loretto, 1804-1851*, in *Archives Propaganda Fide, Rome*, eds. Augustin C. Wand and M. Lilliana Owens (St. Louis, MO: Mary Loretto Press, 1972), 23. For the expected age of marriage, see Susan E. Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, and Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4, 48; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 90; Joyce Linda Broussard, *Stepping Lively in Place: The Not-Married, Free Women of Civil War Era Natchez, Mississippi* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 7.

³⁸ Broussard, *Stepping Lively in Place*.

³⁹ Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 66, 73; Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 96.

⁴⁰ Charles Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State of the Roman Catholic Religion in North America," eds. and trans. Joseph Agonito and Madeline Wellner, *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 83 (March 1972): 17; Charles Nerinckx Journal, 2, RG Spec 1, box 1, folder 6, LHC; Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, in Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁴¹ For the relationship between single women and their brothers, nieces, and nephews, see Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, 66-73, 82-86.

⁴² Charles Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State," 17; Charles Nerinckx Journal, 2, RG Spec 1, box 1, folder 6, LHC; Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, in Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁴³ Nerinckx Journal, 2.

⁴⁴ Nerinckx Journal, 2; Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State," 17; Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁴⁵ Nerinckx Journal, 2; Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State," 17.

⁴⁶ C. Nerinckx, "To All Catholics Or Others, To Whom It May Belong," October 2, 1812, Slave Memorial box, folder 3, LHC.

⁴⁷ C. Nerinckx, "To All Catholics Or Others," October 2, 1812, Slave Memorial box, folder 3, LHC; Lucia McMahon, "'Of the Utmost Importance to Our Country': Women, Education, and Society, 1780-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (Fall 2009): 478-79, 487-89, 494-99; Lucia McMahon, *The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 5-7; Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 25, 49; Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), ch. 2; Beth Barton Schweiger, "A Social History of English Grammar in the Early United States," *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (Winter 2010): 550.

⁴⁸ C. Nerinckx, "To All Catholics Or Others," October 2, 1812, Slave Memorial box, folder 3, LHC.

⁴⁹ Terri L. Premo, *Winter Friends: Women Growing Old in the New Republic, 1785-1835* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 12n9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 36-37, 43.

⁵² For articulation of the degradation associated with government poor relief and efforts to provide respectable elderly women alternatives, see Carole Haber, "The Old Folks at

Home: The Development of Institutionalized Care for the Aged in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (April 1977): 240, 242.

⁵³ For Kentuckians’ sense in 1811 that war with Britain was looming and celebrations after the declaration of war, see James Wallace Hammack Jr., *Kentucky and the Second American Revolution: The War of 1812* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 8-15.

⁵⁴ Hammack states that “[a]ltogether, Kentucky in 1812 provided a total of 11,114 regulars, militia, and volunteers for the war”; *Kentucky and the Second American Revolution*, 20-21.

⁵⁵ Historical analysis of noncombatants during the War of 1812 focuses on residents of regions that experienced direct conflict and occupation. Although not the site of combat, Kentucky was deeply enmeshed in the war because of militia enlistment and thus warrants inclusion in discussions of noncombatant life. For the economic and emotional strain of the War of 1812 on North American families, see Diane Graves, *In the Midst of Alarms: The Untold Story of Women and the War of 1812* (2007; Montreal: Robin Brass Studio, 2012). For the tendency of family members and friends to move between households during war time, see Lorri Glover, *Founders as Fathers: The Private Lives and Politics of the American Revolutionaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 92.

⁵⁶ Dea H. Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 34-35.

⁵⁷ For slaveholders’ actions to rid themselves of the burden of disabled enslaved people, see Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability*, 64-67.

⁵⁸ Eustace, *1812*, ch. 4.

⁵⁹ “War Song,” from the *Aurora*, in *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), July 21, 1812.

⁶⁰ Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 230-37.

⁶¹ Eustace, *1812*, 206, 275n38; Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America*, 222-23, 226.

⁶² “Appeals,” from the *New York Columbian*, in *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), September 12, 1814.

⁶³ Quoted in Eustace, *1812*, 212. For discussion of the rumor, see Eustace, *1812*, 212-30.

⁶⁴ “Hunters of Kentucky,” Providence, Rhode Island, 1815, Manuscripts Miscellaneous Collection, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky, in *American Memory*, Library of Congress, https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=icufaw&fileName=alf0003/icufawalf0003.db&recNum=0&itemLink=D?fawbib:2:/temp/~ammem_Ioqq::@@@mdb=mcc,aap,consrvbib,vv,presp,varstg,suffrg,hlaw,aaodysey,coolbib,fpnas,mff,mnwp,rbcmlillerbib,ww2map,mfdipbib,klpmap,rbaapcbib,mal,ncpm,psbib,mharendt,fawbib,afcpearl,awh,awhbib,afcesnbib.

⁶⁵ Eustace, *1812*, 53-56, 32-35, 93-100, 119-20.

⁶⁶ “A Dialogue. Alfred to Stella,” from the *Bardstown Repository*, in *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), August 4, 1812.

⁶⁷ “Poetry,” *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), June 27, 1814.

⁶⁸ Eustace, *1812*, 26, 80-83, 170.

⁶⁹ Sedley, “Bill Cheerly,” from *The Enquirer*, in *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), May 11, 1813.

⁷⁰ For the age of first communion in the nineteenth century, see Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France’s Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of Modern Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 36-37. *Rules of the Society and School of Loretto, Kentucky* (London: Keating and Brown, 1820), ch. 3, sec. 6, 7.

⁷¹ *Rules*, ch. 3, sec. 6, 7. J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), session 25, ch. 15, 246.

⁷² *Rules*, ch. 3, sec. 6, 7.

⁷³ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 286-87.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁷⁵ “Register, Sisters of Loretto,” Register box, vault, LHC.

⁷⁶ Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 31-33; Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Primitive Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints: Compiled from Original Monuments, And Other Authentic Records: Illustrated with the Remarks of Judicious Modern Critics and Historians*, 12 vols., 3rd edition (Edinburgh, Scotland: J. Moir for J. P. Coghlane, 1798), 1:227.

⁷⁷ Butler, *The Lives of the Saints*, 1:227.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:227-28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, quote 1:227, 228-29.

⁸⁰ J. Roderick Heller III, *Democracy’s Lawyer: Felix Grundy of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 17-19.

⁸¹ Heller, *Democracy’s Lawyer*, 20-21.

⁸² Heller, *Democracy’s Lawyer*, 21, 33; “Sheriff—Research, 4/4/1793 Thru 1/27/1868,” p. 1., Washington County Subject Files, County Court Officers folder, Washington County Circuit Court Clerk Office, Springfield, Kentucky (hereafter WCCCCO); “Justices—Research—9/6/1792 Thru 12/16/1867,” p. 1-3, 6, 8-10, Washington County Subject Files, County Court Officers folder, WCCCCO.

⁸³ Lewis Collins and Richard H. Collins, *History of Kentucky* (Covington, KY: Collins and Company, 1878), 2:749.

⁸⁴ Heller, *Democracy’s Lawyer*, 33.

⁸⁵ Heller, *Democracy’s Lawyer*, 119; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 376.

⁸⁶ John Grundy Family Chart, Family Files, Grundy folder, WCCCCO.

⁸⁷ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 376.

⁸⁸ For her parents’ faith, see Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 376.

⁸⁹ For James Dant’s Catholicism, relation to Mary Rhodes, and legal guardianship of Esther, see Benjamin J. Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky* (Louisville, KY: Charles A. Rogers, 1884), 28, 31, 234; Faye Sea Sanders, comp., *Washington County, KY Guardian Bonds, 1792-1834* (Louisville, KY: Willi Todd Madden, 2001), 18.

⁹⁰ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 376; John Grundy Will, made March 21, 1814, recorded May 9, 1814, p. 300-301, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky (hereafter KDLA); John Grundy Inventory, appraised May 28, 1814, recorded July 10, 1815, p. 432-34, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA; John Grundy

Inventory, recorded July 10, 1815, p. 434-35, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA; John Grundy List of the Estate Sale, recorded July 10, 1815, p. 435-42, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA.

⁹¹ John Grundy Will, made March 21, 1814, recorded May 9, 1814, p. 300-301, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA.

⁹² Not including the Grundys, at least seventy different people purchased an item at the auction, an indication of the large size of the crowd. Two pages of the list are illegible. John Grundy List of the Estate Sale, recorded July 10, 1815, p. 435-42, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA.

⁹³ John Grundy List of the Estate Sale, recorded July 10, 1815, p. 435-42, *Wills B*, Washington County, microfilm #241410, KDLA.

⁹⁴ Webb, *The Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*, 54-55; Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters," Nerinckiana box, LHC; "Mother Isabella, Rosalia and Elenora Clarke," RG III-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC; "Mother M. Isabella Clark (Supr. General 1824-26 & 1838-42)," RG IV, box Cis-Cle, folder "Clarke, Sister Isabella / Clarke, Sister Rosalia / Clark, Sister Eleanora," LHC; Ignatius Clark Inventory, made December 3, 1812, recorded August 17, 1813, p. 148-50, Will Book C-1, Nelson County, microfilm #7006775, KDLA; Clark Guardian Bond, made July 15, 1816, p. 147, Executors Bonds, Nelson County, microfilm #009621, KDLA; Administrator Account of Ignatius Clark Estate, recorded Sept 11, 1816, p. 494-95, *Will Book C-2*, Nelson County, microfilm #7006775, KDLA; Partition of Slaves of Ignatius Clark Estate, recorded July 17, 1820, p. 169-70, *Will Book D*, Nelson County, microfilm #7006776, KDLA.

⁹⁵ Isabella Clarke, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke," unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC.

⁹⁶ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 288. For the location as unique, see Anna C. Minogue, *Loretto: Annals of the Century* (New York: The America Press, 1912), 46-47.

⁹⁷ For dates of entrance, see Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, London, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

⁹⁸ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 289-90.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁰⁰ For novices' dates of entrance, see "Register, Sisters of Loretto," Register box, vault, LHC. For the leadership positions of the women, see "Miss Ann- Sister Mary Agnes, Hart," RG IV, box Han-Hay, folder "Hart, Sister M. Agnes," LHC; "Mother Isabella, Rosalia and Elenora Clarke," RG III-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC; "Mother M. Isabella Clark (Supr. General 1824-26 & 1838-42)," RG IV, box Cis-Cle, folder "Clarke, Sister Isabella / Clarke, Sister Rosalia / Clark, Sister Eleanora," LHC; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Nerinckx*, 375-76. Hart helped found Mount Carmel in Breckinridge County, Kentucky, in 1823; see "Miss Ann- Sister Mary Agnes, Hart," RG IV, box Han-Hay, folder "Hart, Sister M. Agnes," LHC. Grundy's legal guardian donated land for the creation of a branch location named Gethsemani in Nelson County, Kentucky. She served as the local superior of Gethsemani until her death in 1819. Isabella Clarke, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke," unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC; Stephen T. Badin to Ambrose Maréchal, March 24, 1818, Francis P. Clark Collection, box 6, folder 18, University of

Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Nerinckx*, 375-76.
For more on the branch locations, see chapters 3-4 of this thesis.

CHAPTER III

COMBATING MISSIONS AND ECONOMIC CRISIS, 1815-1820

In the post-War of 1812 era, the opportunity to combat the local and global Protestant mission movement and economic depression drew young women and girls to the order. Kentucky Catholics perceived a global onslaught of evangelical Protestants. Despite their denominational differences, Protestant mission and Bible societies crafted an image of a united front to spread Protestantism to “heathens” and “misinformed” Christians, including Catholics, around the world. In addition to seeking non-Christian conversions, Kentucky Protestants celebrated missionary efforts and Bible distribution among foreign and Euro-American Catholic populations. In response, many Catholics felt compelled to combat Protestant influence with their own missionary efforts among foreign, Euro-American, and Native American populations. In Kentucky, Catholic leaders and lay people encouraged adherents to become involved in a global Catholic missionary movement. Young women in the state joined the Sisters of Loretto in unprecedented numbers and established “colonies” in Kentucky and Missouri to further Catholic civilizing and conversion missions through the education of poor girls. In addition to combating local Protestant movements, young women joined in the hope of starting Catholic missions among Native Americans. Local Protestant Bible and mission societies focused on the poor, the same demographic the Sisters of Loretto served. Educating poor young girls, the order believed, would undermine the efforts of Protestants to spread their heretical publications and faith among youth. In the long term,

the order believed their outreach would ensure girls grew up to become pious mothers who raised their children in the Catholic faith.

Meanwhile, the booming post-war economy collapsed as the Sisters sought to fund new missions and support their growing membership. Kentuckians interpreted moral, religious, and feminine failings as the cause of the economic crisis and young women and girls felt further compelled to join the Loretines. Explanations of the depression that centered on greed, selfishness, dishonesty, and feminine luxury and laziness further justified the poverty and service of the Sisters, as they sought to shape the morality of the nation. Theologically justified and motivated by the pursuit of individual and collective salvation, the Loretines nevertheless struggled to manage their temporal affairs as the economic crisis undercut their income sources. They temporarily limited accepting new members and intensified their spiritual economy with European donors, solidifying their identity within the global mission network.

The threat of Protestant movements attracted Catholic women in Kentucky to the Sisters of Loretto. In September 1809, Kentuckians met in Lexington in a Presbyterian meeting house and founded the state's first Protestant Bible society.¹ The managers of the Lexington Bible Society lamented their lack of funds and resulting circumscribed reach,² prompting them to foster contacts with nascent northern societies. The Society accepted Bible donations from the North and spread the news of the Philadelphia Bible Society's purchase of new technology to print Bibles.³ American and European Bible societies proliferated despite the ravages of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars in Europe.⁴ Kentucky Protestants, like their British and New England counterparts, interpreted their

local efforts as part of a global movement to spread “divine light and truth” to the whole world.⁵ The Kentucky Bible Society’s report covering 1813 and 1814 celebrated the “unexampled increase of Bible Societies, throughout the Christian world, during the last year” and prophesied that “[a] new era in Christ’s church is certainly about to commence.”⁶ Optimistic Protestants noted that “every scheme that is laid for the promotion of religion, seems to meet with the smiles of heaven, is executed with despatch, and embraces results vastly extensive and important.”⁷ Protestants in Catholic-heavy Nelson and Washington Counties sought support from the burgeoning Bible societies based in Lexington. By October 1814, the Presbyterian Reverends Nathan Hall of Washington County and Samuel B. Lapsley of Nelson County requested and received scriptures from the Kentucky Bible Society, with Hall expecting fifty more Bibles.⁸

Catholic women in central Kentucky witnessed with concern the growth of Protestant evangelization efforts following the War of 1812. American attention to Protestant missions and distribution of scripture accelerated in the post-War of 1812 era of heightened nationalism, western expansion, and millennialism.⁹ The Kentucky Baptist Mission Society circulated an appeal for assistance in the spring of 1815 that identified the providential opportunities offered Protestants by the end of the war: “The kind hand of Providence has hushed the howling tempest; peace is again restored to our happy land.” The appeal continued: “An effectual door is now open for the glad tidings of salvation to be proclaimed to all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth. May we not comfortably hope that the time . . . set . . . to favor Zion is drawing near.”¹⁰ Protestants in the Kentucky Catholic heartland heightened their commitment to the evangelical movement by establishing Sunday schools and free schools, and distributing

tracts.¹¹ In September 1816, shortly after the founding of the American Bible Society in New York, Kentucky Protestants formed an auxiliary in Bardstown, and Springfield residents followed suit by the spring of 1817.¹² Auxiliary societies fundraised, purchased scripture from the national organization or the state auxiliary, and distributed the word within their locale.¹³

In Kentucky, the prominence of Catholics intimidated Protestants and drove their commitment to evangelical movements. In both 1810 and 1820, Catholic-heavy Nelson and Washington Counties constituted the fifth and seventh most populous of Kentucky's fifty-four and sixty-seven counties.¹⁴ The seat of the top diocesan Catholic leaders in central Kentucky and educational institutions like the Sisters of Loretto and Sisters of Charity marked the potential for Catholics to influence the relatively large local population. To the unease of many Protestants, the papists had settled in; they fundraised and began the construction of an imposing cathedral in Bardstown in 1816, which signified the permanence and strength of the Catholic presence in Kentucky. Certainly, not all Protestants viewed the construction with disdain; Bishop Benedict Flaget reported that non-Catholics promised nearly \$10,000 for the project.¹⁵ However, the willingness of some Protestants to offer assistance to Catholics heightened others' anxieties. As Father Charles Nerinckx proudly remarked in 1818 on the ongoing construction of the cathedral, "Bardstown used to be the pleasure garden of Presbyterians and Anabaptists; hence it is a great mortification for these sects to see the Old Church . . . looming up triumphantly in their midst. Animated by an unlooked-for zeal or spite, they made an attempt to build a meeting-house which would far surpass the Catholic cathedral."¹⁶

Protestant mission and Bible societies highlighted their success among Roman Catholics and called for the conversion of Catholics world-wide. Kentucky societies framed their work within the global evangelical movement, including extracts of reports and summaries of other successful societies in their publications. Kentucky Protestant newspaper editors and society managers localized the international assault on Catholicism by selecting news designed to appeal to readers who lived among Catholics. In 1816, Kentuckians read of the Baptist Missionary Society's use of American and British funds to operate mission schools in Calcutta, India, and its targeting of Catholic children: "The objects of the 'Benevolent Institutions' are the children of the poor of various nations. . . especially those of the Portuguese Catholics."¹⁷ *The Western Monitor* printed "Extracts from the Address of Managers of the United Foreign Missionary Society" in the fall of 1817. The piece enumerated the people around the world who needed the society's labor, including "a hundred millions attached to the Church of Rome . . . who are sunk in deplorable ignorance, their knowledge in many instances scarcely transcending that of the heathen."¹⁸

In *The First Report of the Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society* (1817), Kentucky Protestants highlighted the work of one of the over eighty-four American Bible societies to encapsulate success in America and animate Kentucky efforts.¹⁹ The managers of the Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society "recommend[ed] to the notice of the Roman Catholic people in Kentucky" news from the Louisiana Bible Society.²⁰ The report portrayed disorganized Louisiana Catholics susceptible to the Protestant faith. The society also highlighted the foreign nature of the French and Spanish Catholics, implying that the distribution of Bibles contributed to the nationalization of the borderland population.

Kentuckians read of Catholic discord as lay people turned against the orders of the Church and clergy disagreed over how to respond. The report celebrated the willingness of the laity “to receive and read the Bible and never think of any objection to it until informed by a priest.”²¹ One Catholic, when “asked if the Spaniards were satisfied with their New Testament [from the society], observed, ‘*they* could not be christians who were not.’”²² The report portrayed French priests in Louisiana opposing the true Christianity of their flock: “One parish priest preached to his congregations against the evil of reading the Bibles and Testaments that have been sent for distribution among them.”²³ The ordeal threatened the authority of the Catholic hierarchy, and “parishioners, instead of complying with [the priest’s] advice” accepted the Bibles and “a very considerable number . . . were immediately distributed.”²⁴ The narrative stressed the inconsistency of Catholic leadership, noting that “[t]he conduct of this parish priest has been condemned . . . by one of his brethren [clergy].” Indeed, one Spanish priest, the report claimed, approved the Bible society’s translation of a controversial New Testament verse “in opposition to the Catholic doctrine, of the perpetual virginity of the virgin Mary.”²⁵

Kentucky Catholics bristled at the reports of the Louisiana Bible Society’s work and Bardstown diocesan missionary Father Stephen Badin published an eleven-page pamphlet in response. Badin reinterpreted the report’s examples of the Louisiana Bible Society’s success as evidence of proper Catholic piety and authority.²⁶ He clarified Catholic doctrine about the Bible for Protestant readers: “All Catholic priests of all nations do, with St. Peter, teach their parishioners, that ‘*no prophecy of scriptures is of private interpretation*, that there are many things in the sacred writings hard to be understood, and that the unlearned and unstable wrest them to their own perdition.’”²⁷

Badin asserted that he had “never known any Catholic Priest or Bishop to forbid the reading of the Scriptures to their parishioners, in the spirit recommended by Peter.”²⁸ He defended his fellow priests’ opposition to Bible societies as principled: “I am confident, that the Catholic Clergy of Kentucky would lend their assistance in disseminating the Bible among their parishioners, provided it were not mutilated and mistranslated, as is [the] King James’ version, edited by the Bible Societies.”²⁹ Badin chided the society and Protestants more broadly, pointing to their “variety of systems in religion . . . schisms in the churches, and discords in families” as “evidence that the interpretation of the holy Scriptures by private spirit, is pregnant with many dangerous consequences and pernicious errors.”³⁰ Instead, Catholics “‘meet in the unity of faith,’ though far more numerous than the Protestant communions of different creeds summed up together. Solidly founded on [the Apostolic] rock, it is their special characteristic not to be ‘tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.’”³¹

The opportunity to combat the local and global Protestant movements drew women and young girls to the Sisters of Loretto in the post-war period. Postulants and full members believed that educating local poor white girls and orphans protected their souls from the corrupted Protestant faith and literature. It also enabled students to create pious Catholic marriages and families, thereby bolstering the Catholic population in the long term. Some of the girls taught and orphans raised at the school witnessed the labors of the Sisters on behalf of the Catholic mission and felt inspired to become members. From 1815 through 1817, eighteen new novices entered the order and lowered the median age of living members from 31.5 to 22 (See Figures 2-5 in Appendix).³² Every morning, novices joined the sisters in a series of devotions as described by the Rules. One prayer,

“to direct the Course of all the Duties of the Day,” served as a daily reminder of their contemplative role in the mission movement. After declaring their devotion to God and thanking Him for past favors, the members pledged to “bring all infidels and heretics to the true faith.” For souls unwilling to convert or ignorant of Catholicism, the Sisters asked that their faith serve in place: “grant, that I may know and believe you with the understandings of them all, and love you with their hearts.” They entreated God to “send apostolical men, and second their endeavors to the conversion of America, England, China, Japan, and the whole world.”³³

The contemplation of conversion and global missions contributed to the solidarity of Catholic voices worldwide invoking God’s assistance and enabled the Sisters to frame their work within the Catholic mission movement. The Sisters participated directly in the evangelical mission by teaching orphaned and poor white girls and slaves the rudiments of Catholicism. Enslaved blacks and the majority of Sisters performed the crucial labor that fed, clothed, and housed the pupils and Sisters, thereby making the mission possible.³⁴

The success of the order in attracting new members, the growth of the school, and the encouragement of well-connected Catholic families prompted the Sisters to found new branches. Bishop Flaget reported in the spring of 1816 that the Sisters’ school had “at least twenty-five boarders” and “[a]pplications for admission are received from every direction, and I am afraid that, after Easter, we shall have more subjects than the house can accommodate or support.”³⁵ On June 10, 1816, the Sisters created a colony named “Calvary” in the Holy Mary’s Parish of Rolling Fork. Located in Washington County fifteen miles from the motherhouse, the branch hosted a school, convent, and asylum.³⁶

The new location expanded the Sisters' mission and contact with the local population and fourteen new novices entered the society in 1818.³⁷ In the fall of 1817, a devout Nelson County Catholic couple promised land and a house along Pottinger's Creek to the order. The following March, eight sisters settled on the property to found Gethsemani.³⁸

The Catholic mission movement inspired local participation in the order and clergy highlighted the Sisters' place within the global Catholic movement to solicit funds in Europe. The order's decision to admit women without dowries and its focus on orphans and impoverished girls necessitated that it fundraise shrewdly to augment the variable surplus generated from slaveholding, agriculture, textile production, and boarding fees. Nerinckx traveled to Belgium in the fall of 1815 to fundraise and collect goods for the Bardstown diocese.³⁹ He spoke to potential donors in Belgium and traveled to Rome to present diocesan affairs and seek papal approval for the Sisters of Loretto from the Propaganda de Fide, the decision-making body for Catholic mission territories. Before departing Europe, he published a pamphlet in Flemish, "A Look at the Present state of the Roman Catholic Religion in North America" (1816), to encourage Catholics to contribute to the mission cause. He detailed the construction of "well designed" churches of permanent materials—stone and brick—to demonstrate the vitality of the mission and its proper use of previous funds.⁴⁰ However, such promising efforts were threatened, he argued, by a dangerously insufficient number of missionaries to preserve and expand the Catholic flock. He noted the need to compete with Protestants and the embarrassment of Catholics in the face of Protestant gains:

I must confess to our shame that much more zeal and sacrifice is shown by our erring brethren in order to spread their false doctrine. The sectarians in America, like elsewhere, increase daily in number . . . Each sect exhibits particular zeal, and their so-called religious houses, as well as their preachers, multiply in number.

Each year their Bible Societies swallow great sums of money to impose the false word of God on mortal men.⁴¹

Nerinckx highlighted how the Loretines countered Protestant zeal and he stressed the noble poverty of the order. “The nuns live from the work of their hands,” he noted, and “their most important task and occupation is to keep the school, namely for poor orphans, who, free of charge, as in the case of the nuns themselves, are accepted and educated.”⁴² Nerinckx requested readers to consider a vocation as a priest or Sister of Loretto, or contribute financial “means to educate the young, books, ornaments, etc.,” for the mission.⁴³ He continued, “Those who can not help us with their person or substance are earnestly requested to give us at least the help of their prayers.”⁴⁴ Nerinckx suggested that devout women join with the Sisters of Loretto in their “devotions to the Suffering Jesus, to His Suffering Heart, to Mary his Blessed Mother,” and “Jesus dying and His sorrowing Mother at the foot of the cross.”⁴⁵ He concluded the appeal by reminding his audience of the “extent [to which] this young American Church, and these new congregations of white, black, and red Catholics, were tied to our pious Netherlands.”⁴⁶

Nerinckx proved more successful in garnering goods and prayers for the Sisters than in inducing foreign women to join the order. He used donations to purchase and transport three bells, vestments, an altar hanging, and clothing for the order’s statue of Mary from Benedictine nuns; and textiles, pictures, rosary beads, and other objects from individual donors.⁴⁷ Such goods fostered the order’s international identity and connection, as their use in mass and individual devotions reminded members of their link to the world-wide spiritual mission.⁴⁸

The prospect of creating Native American missions also fueled interest in and funding for the order. Catholic and Protestant missionary histories, biographies, and

published letters offered sensational narratives of missionaries' pious sacrifices among indigenous populations and the competitive nature of missions.⁴⁹ Early nineteenth century European and American Protestant publications described and denounced historic Catholic mission work among indigenous people to shame Protestants who allowed popery to spread before the formation of evangelical Protestant mission societies. Nineteenth century Catholic missionaries stressed their encounters with Native Americans in fundraising letters and promotional reports distributed in Europe, shrewdly playing on the European fascination with indigenous people. The missionaries cultivated and perpetuated the mythology of an ancestral Catholic faith, first instilled in Native Americans by seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries, that persisted in subsequent generations without the assistance of clergy.⁵⁰ In an 1818 letter intended to incite Dutch contributions to the mission movement, Nerinckx remarked that "an uncommon and admirable zeal is stirring up alike the Indians and the civilized" in the Louisiana Diocese. "Some little grains of the old seed sown by the hand of the faithful and never equaled Jesuits have been preserved, and the Netherlanders, so long persecuted for their faith, can not but rejoice and be encouraged at the sight of the miraculous workings of their all-conquering and never conquered faith!"⁵¹ The ancestral faith mythology convinced many European Catholics that Native Americans were pious and susceptible targets of missions and encouraged fundraising and attracted missionaries to the United States.⁵²

Perceptions of the nobility and probable success of Native American missions coalesced in a trans-Atlantic Catholic print culture that celebrated historic Catholic missionaries as models of pious self-sacrifice, bravery, and martyrdom. Early nineteenth century Catholic and Protestant publications celebrated male missionaries and disputed

the appropriate role of women in foreign missions. American Protestant publications tended to praise the supportive wives of missionaries as models for Protestant women.⁵³ Catholic women instead drew on the life of a seventeenth century French Ursuline sister, Marie de l'Incarnation. Catholic women missionaries admired her evangelical teaching ministry among Native American girls and women at the cloistered convent she founded in Quebec. Publications about Marie de l'Incarnation's life described a feminine model of evangelism focused on education and collaboration with mobile male missionaries who directed Native women and youth to the cloistered convent. The model theorized that the converted and civilized women would return to their homes and bring faith and European civilization to their men and children. As European interest in foreign missions grew in the early nineteenth century, Catholic women explicitly modeled their missionary goals and plans on Marie de l'Incarnation.⁵⁴

Kentuckians' concern for the fate of the Missouri Territory and violent history with Native Americans further cultivated Catholic interest in Native American missions in the West. Kentuckians began settling west across the Mississippi River in the late 1700s and in increased numbers after the War of 1812.⁵⁵ Diverse indigenous populations competed with Kentuckians and other Euro-Americans for access to the land.⁵⁶ Kentuckians fought Native Americans in the 1811 Battle of Tippecanoe and western theater of the War of 1812.⁵⁷ Kentuckians at home feared and read of Native attacks on non-combatants.⁵⁸ Their Missouri Territory neighbors experienced more raids and also feared invasion.⁵⁹ Warfare fueled long-standing anti-indigenous racism as newspapers, captivity narratives, and American military leaders portrayed Native Americans as lewd, irrational predators who operated outside European standards of civilized war by

targeting women and children.⁶⁰ Peace bolstered American confidence in their control of the Missouri Territory against European threats and the United States government, seeking to pay off its large war debt, offered liberal loans for western land. Individual Kentucky families seeking a competency in a new environment and speculators interested in buying larger tracts to divide for resale quickly purchased and squatted on land in the Missouri Territory.⁶¹ White Missourians' fear of Native Americans, desire for land, and sense of racial superiority, inflamed by the recent war, led them to use violence to pressure Native Americans. They also called for federal support of white land rights.⁶²

The hostile racial environment in the Missouri Territory presented the Loretines an opportunity for martyrdom and suffering akin the stories of great saints. Despite the dangers, the order perceived a role for itself in Missouri, establishing "civilization," saving the eternal souls of indigenous people, and reducing the worldly threat of indigenous retaliation against whites, including relatives of members. Equally important, the Loretine mission would shape the character of the early West as "civilized" and truly Christian, in contrast to the "false" Christianity of Protestant missions.⁶³

By 1818, the Sisters of Loretto, in cooperation with the Congregation of the Mission more commonly known as the Vincentians, planned to establish a colony in the Missouri Territory to educate Native American girls. While abroad advocating for the missions, Nerinckx crossed paths with Bishop Louis Dubourg as he recruited European members of the Vincentians to establish a seminary in the Louisiana Diocese. Nerinckx succeeded in recruiting fellow Belgians for the missions, including Father Charles de la Croix who proposed to Nerinckx that the order "[send] a colony of Loretines to Louisiana" just before Nerinckx sailed with missionaries to the United States in the

summer of 1817.⁶⁴ Catholics of Kentucky descent living in the Barrens Settlement of eastern Missouri Territory offered land to the Louisiana Diocese for the Vincentian seminary. Bishop Dubourg accepted the offer in the spring of 1818.⁶⁵ In May 1818, de la Croix traveled from Kentucky to the Barrens to supervise the construction of the seminary.⁶⁶ There, he repeated his request for the assistance of the Loretines in Native missions.⁶⁷ The Vincentian recruits stayed at St. Thomas near Bardstown under the care of Bishop Flaget while they awaited the construction of the seminary, a proximity that gave the Sisters, Vincentians, and Kentucky ecclesiastical leaders opportunities to articulate a plan for a convent near the Vincentian seminary.⁶⁸ The colony's proposed location suggests that the order intended to follow the precedent of previous cloistered women and rely on male missionary connections to steer Native Americans to the Sisters.⁶⁹ Six sisters prepared to travel the four hundred miles west, but before they could, Louisiana Diocese prelates decided to support the transplantation of a French order, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, to educate white and native girls at another Missouri parish.⁷⁰ Despite this setback, discussion of Loretine participation in Native missions continued, and soon manifested itself in concrete forms.

The Sisters of Loretto's enthusiasm for evangelism and expansion paralleled the economic optimism of the post-war years. Positive feelings were short-lived, however, when a creeping transatlantic economic depression became obvious to Kentuckians in 1819. Americans searched for explanations for the crisis and blamed religious, moral, and gender failings. Such conclusions further justified the Sisters' way of life and attracted over thirty new members by the end of 1819. However, the burgeoning number of young

members strained the resources of the community, especially in the aftermath of its recent expansion projects.

Some Kentucky Catholics benefited from the post-war economic boom which in turn increased contributions to Catholic missions. Agricultural exports expanded and prices increased as poor harvests in Europe expanded the demand for American staples and foodstuffs.⁷¹ Catholic merchants like the prominent Spalding family in Washington County and Edward Hayden in Bardstown purchased crops from farmers and encouraged them to participate in the commodity boom.⁷² European imports flooded the United States, offering consumers a wider variety of goods at lower prices.⁷³ Residents of rural central Kentucky participated in the broader market economy before the War of 1812, but post-war improvements in steam boats on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and the rise of port cities along the Ohio River enhanced their access to the produce and slave markets of New Orleans. Improved transportation also enabled merchants to transport foreign wares more cheaply to rural central Kentucky.⁷⁴ Land and town lot purchases and speculation within Kentucky also grew in the post-war period.⁷⁵ Prominent Catholics in Washington County formed a coalition with Presbyterians to found the town of Lebanon and sell town lots in December 1815.⁷⁶

Optimism about the economy and new investment opportunities heightened the demand for credit and sparked the chartering of new banks across the nation. The United States Congress approved the charter of a second Bank of the United States (BUS) in late 1816 and it proceeded to open nineteen branch offices.⁷⁷ Branches of the Bank of Kentucky in Bardstown and Springfield serviced residents of central Kentucky by 1815 and 1817, respectively.⁷⁸ In addition to banks in which the state had an interest,

Kentuckians pushed for the chartering of independent banks, forty-three of which—including the Farmer’s and Mechanics’ Bank of Springfield, the Centre Bank of Kentucky in Bardstown, and the Catholic-influenced Bank of Washington in Lebanon—were chartered by the state legislature in the winter of 1817-1818 alone.⁷⁹ By the end of 1818, the Centre Bank of Kentucky and the Bank of Washington had sold enough shares to meet their chartered capitals of \$200,000 and \$100,000, respectively, and began operations.⁸⁰ New banks in Kentucky expanded the money supply and credit, further enabling participation in land speculation and consumerism.⁸¹

Despite the optimism of the age, the Sisters of Loretto struggled to balance their additional expenses, especially after the problems in the broader economy became apparent. Domestic manufacturers—like the Sisters’ weaving and spinning operation—struggled to compete with imports. Rising imports and financial failure convinced manufacturers and independent artisans, mechanics, and craftsmen to contract their output, resulting in urban unemployment. Urban workers then searched for jobs in rural areas, compounding the unemployment problem.⁸² When small landholders and speculators repaid the federal government for western land bought on credit, specie drained from the West and South to the BUS in Philadelphia and its branches.⁸³ Confidence in the national financial sector wavered as inadequate regulation enabled BUS branches to issue too many notes and rumors arose of corruption in the BUS.⁸⁴ In addition to paying off wartime debts, the BUS also sought to collect enough specie to make its October 1818 and early 1819 payments on the foreign loans that financed the Louisiana Purchase.⁸⁵ Fearing collapse, BUS leadership decided to contract the number of bank notes in circulation and call in some loans in the summer of 1818, which sent

destabilizing ripples through the financial sector as debtors and lenders reacted.⁸⁶ The newly chartered Washington and Nelson County banks struggled to maintain stability. The Independent Bank of Springfield and Washington Bank in Lebanon suspended specie payments on October 20 and November 3, 1819, respectively.⁸⁷ Banks called in loans to restore their reserves, sending shockwaves through chains of credit as bank loan recipients called on their own debtors.⁸⁸ Lessened European demand for American agricultural products and the rapid monetary contraction initiated by the BUS led to sharp drops in crop prices and land values, undercutting farmers' means of repaying debts and speculators' hopes of selling land for profit.⁸⁹

Difficulties in the financial sector soon impacted the Catholic lay population and institutions, undercutting potential institutional and private funding for the Sisters of Loretto. Lebanon merchant Benedict Spalding Jr. served as president of and lost his investment in the short-lived Washington Bank.⁹⁰ A drought compounded the local depression. As an ecclesiastic at St. Thomas College near Bardstown noted in 1820: "our grain crops failed for two years in succession."⁹¹ The priest explained the seriousness of the local crop failures: "people in this part of the country . . . have been obliged to sell on credit. In this way, we shall probably lose also the portion of the farm products which we did not consume, and which we sold on credit, for the past two years."⁹² The diocese struggled to fund construction projects initiated when investments seemed safe. Nerinckx recalled in 1820 that "some of my congregations had already determined to build new brick churches," but the depression undercut the investments of those who had promised funds and diverted their reduced resources to other needs. Nerinckx noted that "speculation . . . augmented the price of goods twenty per cent, ruined most of the

common people, and . . . knocked many another undertaking into the head.”⁹³

Construction costs of the in-progress 125’ x 65’, \$20,000 cathedral in Bardstown strained Bishop Flaget’s resources when subscribers failed to meet their commitments.⁹⁴ In early 1818, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth invested in larger facilities for pupils in response to rising demand. By December 1818, however, the income-generating boarding population had dwindled to three girls and the order was in debt.⁹⁵

Americans searched for explanations for the sudden economic downturn after a period of prosperity and opportunity.⁹⁶ Newspapers and statehouses became the most visible forums for debate over the nature of the crisis and best solutions to alleviate distress.⁹⁷ Along with financial and economic reasoning, Kentuckians employed religion and morality as key interpretative lenses through which to understand, place blame for, and offer solutions to the unfolding crisis.⁹⁸ Critiques of greed, lavish lifestyles, selfishness, and dishonest dealings permeated the press, providing the Sisters of Loretto with further justifications for their poverty and service, and attracting new members. Poetry, fictional stories of financial distress, and didactic pieces in Kentucky depression-era newspapers informed women of how they should handle the crisis for the sake of their families and nation. Advice to women on how to respond to the crisis frequently invoked traits thought uniquely feminine in the early republic, such as providing emotional comfort to family members, seeking spiritual guidance, and employing moral influence to curb the greed of men. But conflicting narratives abounded, as writers linked the causes and effects of the depression to perceived feminine faults such as temptation, luxury, and dependence. Narratives with male and female characters portrayed men as feminized by their economic fall and women who reestablished household security as

masculine figures.⁹⁹ Ambiguous print depictions of femininity in the crisis also illustrated the opportunities for women—including young women newly attracted to the Sisters of Loretto—to draw on variant models of femininity to navigate their changed economic circumstances.¹⁰⁰

Religious language provided Kentuckians ways to interpret the state of the economy and encouraged them to connect their experiences to faith. In August 1818, a thirteen-stanza verse dedicated to “the God, Nummus,” circulated in Kentucky newspapers. The dedication and content of the poem argued that blasphemous devotion to money had consumed and corrupted Kentuckians. While the false deity’s “temple is all space; / [and] altar earth, air, sea, and skies,” the poem concluded by noting the role of banks as a center of devotion: “On chorus let all mankind rise—/ From ev’ry bank, *rag-incense rise!*”¹⁰¹ As the depression deepened in the fall of 1819, a Kentuckian denounced the practices of independent banks and brokers. He reminded readers that “the laws of Moses and of our Savior” damned “usurers.”¹⁰² In October, an editor printed an extended religious metaphor comparing working to pay off a debt to preparing for salvation and fear of damnation. The article noted the peril of those who

too readily tak[e] credit for large sums, without feeling an anxiety about the day of payment, which like the king of terrors, come sooner or later, and often with as awful an aspect and as peremptory a requirement. The period between the origin of a debt and its extinction is, like the time between the birth and decease of a man, a period of probation; and disgrace and punishment, contempt and misery, are the portion of those who ‘do not work out their salvation.’¹⁰³

While some writers blamed the corruption of financial institutions and speculators for the crisis, others called on Kentuckians to recognize their personal complicity in the depression. Editorials identified youthful, feminine luxury as a moral failing that strained household finances. In October 1818, the *Louisville Public Advertiser* reprinted a letter

from “Timothy Trade” to “Mr. Oldschool.” Frustrated by his daughters’ material aspirations after he “had been partly lucky in trade,” the narrator fumed that “the people will think when they begin to get rich, they must be in the fashion, and spend their time adoin[*sic*] nothing.” Female family members and friends, he complained, fostered wasteful behavior unfit for their class: “my wife is a sensible woman but she humors the girls too much about the fashions, and lets ‘em be idle. . . she says its certain genteel girls don’t work now as they used to do in her time, and her daughters can’t help doing as her acquaintances do.”¹⁰⁴ Daughters like those of Timothy Trade married “steady industrious young men . . . [and] disappointed [their husbands],” according to the correspondent “Dorothy” in November 1818.¹⁰⁵ Another writer blamed feminine spendthrift and “useless” behavior for the rise of unmarried women: “There are but few young men in our country that can afford to support an extravagant wife, who does not bring the means of supplying her own fictitious wants, and this is the true reason why there are such swarms of our blooming damsels withering in the streets of our cities, and such an alarming crop of old maids.”¹⁰⁶

Denouncements of luxury in the fall of 1818 called on women to change for the sake of “attract[ing] the regard of prudent and reflecting young men,” “the enjoyment of her happiness,” and the nation’s “enrich[ment] by new citizens educated by such mothers.”¹⁰⁷ “If wives attended a little more to domestic concerns,” predicted “Dorothy,”

We should see a change; happy husbands, no longer obliged to extend their business beyond their capital—no more care-worn looks—cheerful alacrity would mark their steps—content at home—prosperity abroad. The wife would possess the conscious feeling of duties performed which would give serenity to the countenance . . . superior to any charm that fashion with her attendant train of follies can impart.¹⁰⁸

The themes of prudent household management and curtailing female extravagance echoed through the summer of 1820, as the *Louisville Public Advertiser* found a Pennsylvanian's call applicable to Kentuckians:

Let the work of reformation begin at home, and I confidently believe we shall soon get rid of the hard times, that are much complained of. . . . We are too fond of showing out in our families, and in this way our expenses far exceed our incomes. . . . Our daughters must be dressed off in their silks and crepes, instead of their linsey woolsey coarse dress, and their extravagance is bringing ruin into our families. When you can induce your sons to prefer young women for their real [domestic] worth rather than for their show . . . then, gentlemen, you may expect to see a change for the better.¹⁰⁹

While writers deemed feminine lavishness a cause of troubles, many called for women to employ their “natural” tendencies to counteract the times from within the household. Confusion about the moral character of femininity—expressed by a male missionary who stated, “‘women in all countries are . . . more liable in general, to err than man, but, in general, also more virtuous, and performing more good actions’”—marked the conflicting solutions and causes of the economic downturn.¹¹⁰ “A Man of the Mountain” opined that “Society must return to its rational habits. When men shall live within their income; women act the endearing part of good housewives, their husband’s friends, their children’s guardians; . . . then, and not until then, will our affairs be in a right train.”¹¹¹

Depression-era newspapers depicted virtuous women as putting aside their own complaints to console their distressed menfolk. The *Louisville Public Advertiser* printed a “revolting and shocking narration of the cruelty and revenge of a creditor towards his unfortunate debtor,” in mid-August 1818. The creditor condemned Brown, a likeable young married man, to debtor’s prison for life. Brown’s prison mate noticed his despondency over time and that “[n]othing gave Brown pleasure but the daily visits of his

amiable wife”; “everyday, clear or stormy, she visited the prison to cheer the drooping spirits of her husband.” Mrs. Brown died suddenly from illness, and her distraught husband expired in prison soon thereafter.¹¹² In the narrative, Mrs. Brown’s consolation alone kept Brown alive. Her own emotions and the means by which she survived while her husband was in prison went unmentioned in a story that sought to show the distress of a man condemned to premature death by debt.

As the depression deepened, public prints made more explicit calls for women to undertake consolation and spiritual work in times of crisis. In the fall of 1819, *The Louisville Public Advertiser* printed a poem from Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book*. The editor declared that “Irving . . . has beautifully compared all the endearments and consolations of the other sex, in times of adversity and grief, to the vine binding its caressing tendrils round the shattered limbs of the oak.” In the poem, “when the thunderbolt of wo’ [*sic*]” purposefully struck down formerly blissful sons, “women’s love, a vine more dear,” soothed the men’s pain with charm, “dr[ie]d each tear, And kindly b[ou]nd up every wound.”¹¹³ In addition to patient and loyal devotion to the emotional needs of men, Kentucky papers also portrayed women as uniquely capable of deploying their faith to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. The *Louisville Public Advertiser* reprinted from the *Franklin Gazette* the poem “The Mothers Prayer” directly above the Irving piece. The narrator suggested that mother’s prayers were particularly sincere and worthy of God’s attention.¹¹⁴

Not everyone viewed consolation and restraint on women’s spending as sufficient cures for the times. In a story about a young mercantile couple, the wife learned of her husband’s business losses. The narrator commented that “[t]here are women, and those

whom the world calls women of sense too, who would have contented themselves with sympathizing with their husband Not such a woman was Mrs. M.—she felt deeply her husband’s misfortune; but that was an *active principle*, which prompted her to do what was in her power to assist and relieve him.” She curtailed the household spending and “applied herself to domestic avocations with unabating [*sic*] diligence,” despite “the sneers of her acquaintances.” She steered her family through the depression and served as an example to her husband who “was encouraged still to struggle against misfortunes, and his businesses soon began slowly to revive.”¹¹⁵

Mrs. M.’s assertive restoration of household security and the narrator’s remarks that “her husband . . . perhaps would have perished rather than have prescribed such conduct” exhibited the unhinging of gender roles in the crisis. Spectators drew on femininity to ascertain not only the cause and solutions to the depression, but also to describe men’s experiences. Dependence marked indebted men: “A man who takes a credit is the servant of the creditor until payment is made; he sells his liberty and industry, and mortgages his property and honor.”¹¹⁶ Writers described men caught in the crisis as hyper-emotional, like the despondent Brown in debtors’ prison.¹¹⁷

The Sisters of Loretto faced issues similar to those presented in the public critiques and praise of women, yet their means of coping differed from the course dictated in papers. The majority of women portrayed in depression era prints were married mothers, with the roles of unmarried women and youth unspecified. Conflicting print depictions of femininity in the crisis illustrated the opportunities for women, including young women newly attracted to join the Sisters of Loretto, to draw on variant models to navigate their changed economic circumstances. The membership more than

doubled with the entrance of at least thirty new women from 1818 through 1819. The influx of young women lowered the median age of living members to twenty years old. (See Figures 2-5 in Appendix). Young women joined the Sisters of Loretto to remove themselves from worldly material temptations, restore a household work ethic among pupils, serve the increased number of poor, and alleviate the burden on their families' limited resources. The Sisters also pursued higher goals than household and national financial wellbeing; through their poverty and service they sought personal and collective eternal salvation.

Critiques of feminine greed and extravagance provided the Sisters of Loretto with further justification for their poverty and service, and attracted young women to the community. The Sisters asked for few material contributions from potential novices; interested women needed only the means to make their habit and donate their bedding for the order to consider their entrance.¹¹⁸ As dictated in the community's Rules, upon entrance as a novice and annually as a professed sister, members promised to "observe . . . poverty, so as not to have any thing proper, or in my own name."¹¹⁹ In an era when textile and clothing purchases formed the bulk of transactions with common merchants, the Lorettoines denounced extravagant clothing and strived to wear garments "they [made] with their own hands."¹²⁰ Their Rules dictated that the habit "have nothing of a modern or fashionable appearance."¹²¹ The order adopted uniform color and material composition for their habits for practical reasons and to denounce vanity. The members' crafted dresses for their habits from "cotton for the summer, and yarn or country cloth for the winter; all of a black colour."¹²² The Rules prescribed that members' "under-dresses shall be of dark colour" to combat the vanity that led women, especially those of or aspiring to

high status, to wear difficult to maintain stark white shifts.¹²³ They wore an uncomfortable “half a scapular of country cloth under the shift, which may be of 600 linen, *never fine*,” to encourage empathy with the sufferings of Jesus.¹²⁴ Beyond comfortable and fashionable apparel, the Rules proscribed members from the frivolity of desiring new garments: “They may never have the whole dress new, but a part of it old, or surely patched.”¹²⁵ Should they need clothing replaced because of wear, the Rules dictated that “they are to go to the Superior . . . and falling on their knees, expose humbly their wants, receiving cheerfully what is given or refused.”¹²⁶

The Loretines’ simple material conditions aligned with depression-era discussions of the need to curb extravagant household management. Denial of worldly pleasures characterized their sleeping quarters, as the Rules restricted members to “[s]traw beds to sleep on, and becoming covers, not quilts.”¹²⁷ While other women sought to serve abundant, varied, and complex dishes for their family’s pleasure and honor when entertaining others, the Sisters held to the notion that “a pampered body is one of the greatest enemies of a spiritual life.”¹²⁸ As described by the Rules, the community prepared meals “according to the abilities of the house, within the bounds of poverty, and free from flattering sensualities of gluttonizing appetites.”¹²⁹ The sisters limited their options to soup and a maximum of two dishes per meal, and meat only for lunch.¹³⁰ All visits by outsiders had to be approved by the superior and the sisters were called on to keep “the treatment or entertainment simple, and becoming a poor community” to avoid the wasteful extravagance of worldly social calls.¹³¹

The Loretines’ work ethic and education of girls in domestic and religious values also aligned their mission with contemporaneous critiques of depression-era women and

youth. Unlike the women in stories who displayed no interest in housework, members recognized upon entrance that “they ha[d] to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow,” as described in the Rules.¹³² The Rules instructed members that “they are to impress most deeply upon their mind . . . that hardships and labour, not only as a way of livelihood, but as a well-deserved penance for a sinful life, and mortification for atonement,” constituted part of “the main ground-work of this SOCIETY.”¹³³ The order also sought to shape the work ethic of young girls to ensure the proper functioning and morality of their future households. Boarding and day pupils completed an hour and forty-five minutes of “Work-School” every weekday to learn domestic skills and contribute to the maintenance of the convent.¹³⁴ On Saturday, the order expected boarders to “repair their clothes, &c.” after which the girls participated in their choice of “useful exercise or piety.”¹³⁵

The Loretines’ vow of poverty, and benevolent and educational missions offered a meaningful theological response to the sinful nature that some interpreted as causing the crisis. However, the Sisters struggled to navigate the call of their mission while facing the practical constraints of the limited resources of the local Catholic population, reduced prices for their textile products, and a rapidly growing and inexperienced membership. In 1818, the order charged fifty dollars annually for tuition and boarding of girls and less for day pupils to support the schooling and boarding of orphans and Sunday schools for poor girls and blacks.¹³⁶ Loretine depression-era school records did not survive, but the drop in paying pupils in the region’s other Catholic institutions suggests that families chose to direct their resources from girls’ education to other needs. School income dropped while cheap European textiles flooded American markets, threatening the profitability of the Sisters’ weaving and spinning. The mission movement and depression-driven rise in

novices further strained the economic means of the order, with the total membership reaching at least fifty-seven by the end of 1819 (See Figure 2 in Appendix). The Sisters responded by briefly limiting the entrance of novices; in 1820, only one recorded woman joined the order (See Figure 4 in Appendix).

The order turned to their trans-Atlantic mission network for material support and prayer to weather the severity of the depression. While Bardstown diocesan missionaries prepared to travel to Europe to fundraise for the various institutions and diocese needs, the Sisters crafted a “Letter of Association,” signed January 10, 1820, to acknowledge past foreign contributions and cultivate a spiritual economy with new donors.¹³⁷ The order explained that “[a]lthough the law of charity commands us to pray for all men, we think ourselves obliged to do it in a more particular manner for those who have shown their zeal for the promotion of our institute, and a special wish for our remembrances.” The Loretines promised donors that “during life and after your death, you shall have a share in all devotions and pious works in the houses of our *society*.” The letter assured donors that “Having been informed of your names and qualities, they are, and shall be on our records as a blessed memorial during the existence of our society.” While grateful for material contributions, the Sisters also requested that donors “find a place in [their] holy performances” to pray for the Loretines.¹³⁸ In his own fundraising letter signed February 8, 1820, Bishop Flaget reiterated the order’s commitment to their trans-Atlantic mission partners: “My generous benefactors in Flanders may . . . rest assured that neither I nor my faithful co-operators will ever forget them; that their names are deeply engraved in our hearts, and that they are inscribed in the annals of the Loretto convent, the sisters of which . . . make it their spiritual duty to pray every day for those who have so liberally

helped them.”¹³⁹ Nerinckx circulated copies of the two letters to benefactors in Europe during the summer of 1820.¹⁴⁰

Arriving in London and later Belgium in the late spring and summer of 1820, Nerinckx needed to assure donors that the Loretines and Bardstown diocesan missionaries had not mismanaged past contributions and that reliance on local funds alone was impossible because of the economy. He explained to potential donors that the greed of others caused the depression: “Some of my congregations . . . were in too great hurry to get rich, and entered into a poor speculation. Covetousness and wisdom seldom follow the same advice. . . . We now suffer the consequences of their folly.”¹⁴¹ He stressed the need for donations, including religious objects important to the practice and education of the faith: “gifts from Europe will always be gratefully accepted; for this country is so vast, that there is no end to our needs. We have to work in a wilderness, as it were, in which many articles, such as books, statues, silk, etc, are not to be had even if we had the money with which to purchase them.”¹⁴² Nerinckx wrote to the Sisters in early November 1820 to describe his success in acquiring religious objects to bring to the diocese and motherhouse, including English-language books, statues of Mary, and items for churches.¹⁴³ The extent of the financial contributions to the Loretines is not clear, but Nerinckx celebrated the garnering of prayers from European Catholics. He informed the Sisters that “the poor school of my brother and sister in London” and women’s religious institutions in Belgium “wish to join with you in prayers, good works, and pious remembrances.”¹⁴⁴

Solidarity in spiritual work and the material contributions of European Catholics further solidified the Sisters of Loretto's identity as a component of the global Catholic mission movement. Kentucky Catholic women joined the Sisters of Loretto to combat the theological slippage of Catholics and conversion of "heathens" to Protestantism in the context of heightened evangelical Protestant mission efforts following the War of 1812. While their direct mission work focused on residents of the early national American West, the Loretines performed daily spiritual work for the global missions. They expanded to reach more white girls and slaves within Kentucky and Missouri, and planned to establish missions among Native Americans. However, the collapse of the economy threatened the Sisters' ability to fund their missions and provide for their rising membership. As Kentuckians deemed moral, religious, and feminine failings the cause of the economic depression, more young women sought to join the order. Although the economic crisis threatened their financial stability, the Loretines believed their poverty-focused lifestyle and mission to shape the morality of the nation theologically justified.

¹ *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), September 26, 1809.

² "Communicated, Lexington Bible Society," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), March 24, 1812; "Report of the Kentucky Bible Society," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), December 20, 1813.

³ "Report of the Kentucky Bible Society," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), December 20, 1813.

⁴ Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, *The Second Annual Report of the Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, Presented April 2, 1818. With an Address Delivered before the Society, by James Blythe, D. D. Together with the Constitution, &c.* (Lexington, KY: T. T. Skillman, 1818), 21-29.

⁵ "Third Report of the Kentucky Bible Society," *The Western Monitor* (Lexington, Ky), October 7, 1814.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Third Report of the Kentucky Bible Society," *The Western Monitor* (Lexington, Ky), October 7, 1814; W. T. Knott, *History of the Presbyterian Church in What is Now*

Marion County and City of Lebanon, Kentucky from the Year 1789 to 1895 (n.p., ca. 1895), 16.

⁹ For the connections between post-War of 1812 millennialism, nationalism, western expansion, and Protestant evangelical movements, see Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); John Fea, *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 23-26; Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 28, 39-40, 62; Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 2.

¹⁰ J. Vardeman, "Circular Address," *The Union* (Washington, Ky), April 21, 1815.

¹¹ Stephen Theodore Badin to Simon Gabriel Bruté, Bardstown to Baltimore, November 26, 1817, Mount St. Mary's College and Seminary Records: Manuscripts (hereafter CMNT), University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana (hereafter UNDA).

¹² British and Foreign Bible Society, *The Fourteenth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society; M.DCCC.XVIII. With an Appendix, Containing Extracts of Correspondence, and a List of Subscribers and Benefactors* (London: Tilling and Hughes, 1818), 117; Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, *The First Report of the Managers of the Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, Read Before the Society, at Frankfort, on the 3rd day of April, 1817* (Lexington, KY: Thomas T. Skillman, 1817), 3-4.

¹³ Fea, *Bible Cause*, 22; Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, *Second Annual Report*, 34.

¹⁴ For 1810 and 1820 census data on Kentucky counties, see Steven Manson, Jonathan Schroeder, David Van Riper, and Steven Ruggles, *IPUMS National Historical Geographic Information System: Version 12.0*, database (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2016), <http://doi.org/10.18128/D050.V12.0> (accessed October 26, 2016).

¹⁵ For the beginning of the construction and Protestant contributions to the cathedral, see John R. Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith: Bringing Catholicism to the West in the Early Republic* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 100.

¹⁶ Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Camillus P. Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx* (1880; London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 397.

¹⁷ "Brief View of the Baptist Missionary Society," *The Western Monitor* (Lexington, Ky), May 3, 1816.

¹⁸ "Extracts from the Address of the Board of Managers of the United Foreign Missionary Society," *The Western Monitor* (Lexington, Ky), October 11, 1817.

¹⁹ For the report of at least eighty-four other auxiliary societies, see Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, *First Report*, 4.

²⁰ Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society, *First Report*, 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

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- ²⁶ Stephen T. Badin, *Observations of a Catholic Occasioned by the First Report of the Managers of the Kentucky Auxiliary Bible Society* (Bardstown, KY: Printed by J. P. Edrington, 1817), 4-6.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 6.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 9.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 12.
- ³¹ Ibid., 12-13.
- ³² Calculated from "Register, Sisters of Loretto," Register box, vault, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky (hereafter LHC).
- ³³ *Rules of the Society and School of Loretto, Kentucky* (London: Keating and Brown, 1820), 42-44.
- ³⁴ For enslaved people of colors' labor to maintain schools, see Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 39-40; Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), esp. 134-38.
- ³⁵ Benedict Flaget to Charles Nerinckx, March 1816, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 308-309.
- ³⁶ Isabella Clark, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke," unpublished 1874, box I, folder 4, RGIII-2, LHC; Charles Nerinckx, "A Look at the Present State of the Roman Catholic Religion in North America," eds. and trans. Joseph Agonito and Madeline Wellner, *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 83 (March 1972): 18.
- ³⁷ Calculated from "Register, Sisters of Loretto," Register box, vault, LHC.
- ³⁸ Clark, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke"; Stephen T. Badin to Ambrose Maréchal, March 24, 1818, Francis P. Clark Collection, box 6, folder 18, UNDA; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 375-76.
- ³⁹ Nerinckx, "A Look," 5.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 14-16.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 17.
- ⁴² Ibid., 18.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 20.
- ⁴⁴ Charles Nerinckx, 1816, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 326.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 326-27.
- ⁴⁶ Nerinckx, "A Look," 23.
- ⁴⁷ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 358.
- ⁴⁸ For the significance of acquiring European Catholic religious objects to link Americans to the broader Church, see Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 100-102, 108-10.
- ⁴⁹ Sarah A. Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14-15, 41-45; Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States, 1789-1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106, 112, 114-15.
- ⁵⁰ Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 41-45.
- ⁵¹ Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 368-369.

⁵² Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 41-45.

⁵³ Ashley E. Moreshead, "'The Seed of the Missionary Spirit': Foreign Missions, Print Culture, and Evangelical Identity in the Early American Republic" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2015), ch. 5; Mary Kupiec Cayton, "Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement in New England, 1800-1840," in *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, eds. Barbara Reeves Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 81-87;

⁵⁴ Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 43-45; Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 49-51.

⁵⁵ Sami Lakomäki, *Gathering Together: The Shawnee People through Diaspora and Nationhood, 1600-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 175; Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (2006; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 158.

⁵⁶ Lakomäki, *Gathering Together*, 175-78; Aron, *American Confluence*, 151, 158, 162.

⁵⁷ Harry S. Laver, *Citizens More than Soldiers: The Kentucky Militia and Society in the Early Republic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 12-13, 19.

⁵⁸ Laver, *Citizens More than Soldiers*, 19.

⁵⁹ Aron, *American Confluence*, 152-55.

⁶⁰ Nicole Eustace, *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 69, ch. 4. For post-war persistence of fear of Native American violence, see Lakomäki, *Gathering Together*, 176; Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 345;

⁶¹ Aron, *American Confluence*, 188; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 30.

⁶² John Craig Hammond, "Slavery, Settlement, and Empire: The Expansion and Growth of Slavery in the Interior of the North American Continent, 1770-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (Summer 2012): 200; Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American States, 1783-1867* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 10-11; Lakomäki, *Gathering Together*, 176-78; Aron, *American Confluence*, 162-64.

⁶³ For national concern about the character of the early West, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 270.

⁶⁴ John Rybolt, Stafford Poole, Douglas Slawson, and Edward Udovic "A Survey of American Vincentian History: 1815-1987," in *The American Vincentians: A Popular History of the Congregation of the Mission in the United States, 1815-1987*, eds. John Rybolt, Stafford Poole, Douglas Slawson, and Edward Udovic (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1988), 12-18; Sister B, "Reverend Charles de la Croix, A Pioneer Missionary in Kentucky, Missouri," *The American Catholic Historical Researches* 24 (January 1907): 59; Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 304-305, 310, 332, 337-41; Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 380.

⁶⁵ Rybolt, Poole, Slawson, and Udovic, "American Vincentian History," 23-24.

⁶⁶ Sister B, "Reverend Charles de la Croix, A Pioneer Missionary in Kentucky, Missouri," *The American Catholic Historical Researches* (January 1907): 59.

⁶⁷ Sister B, "Reverend Charles de la Croix," 59; Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 380.

⁶⁸ Rybolt, Poole, Slawson, and Udovic "American Vincentian History," 20-23.

⁶⁹ Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 380.

⁷⁰ Sister B, "Reverend Charles de la Croix," 59; Charles Nerinckx to family, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 380; Curtis, *Civilizing Habits*, 50.

⁷¹ Daniel S. Dupree, "The Panic of 1819 and the Political Economy of Sectionalism," in *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions*, ed. Cathy Matson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 269; Sarah A. Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order: The Panic of 1819 and the Culture of the Early American Republic" (Ph.d. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2002), 46; Murray N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 6-7, 10.

⁷² Elizabeth Perkins, "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *The Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 506; David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 80; Ann Smart Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods: Early Consumers in Backcountry Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 7, 35. For the Spalding family mercantile business, see John F. McElroy, *History of Lebanon* (1910; unpublished typescript, 1947), 5; Orval W. Baylor, *Early Times in Washington County, Kentucky* (Cynthiana, KY: Hobson Press, 1942), 72; Minute Book, 1817-1822, Springfield Branch Bank, Bank of Kentucky Records, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky (hereafter KDLA); B. Spalding & Co. v. James Austin, packet 174, box 55, Equity and Ordinary Case Files, Washington County Circuit Court, KDLA. For Edward Hayden's business and faith, see Jean David to Simon Gabriel Bruté, July 20, 1817, CMNT, UNDA.

⁷³ Dupree, "The Panic of 1819," 269; Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 4-5;

⁷⁴ Stephen Aron argues that improved market access damaged the Lexington economy and surrounding Bluegrass region as trade shifted to Louisville and Cincinnati. However, the waterways of Nelson and Washington Counties oriented residents to Louisville and other western ports on the Ohio, and thus had a more positive impact on long distance transportation costs in central Kentucky. See Stephen Aron, "'The Poor Men to Starve': The Lives and Times of Workingmen in Early Lexington," in *The Buzzel About Kentucky: Settling the Promised Land*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 181; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 141-43; Matthew Gerard Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics: Central Kentucky, 1790-1840," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1996), 124-25.

⁷⁵ Aron, "The Poor Men to Starve," 192; Stuart Seely Sprague, "Town Making in the Era of Good Feelings: Kentucky, 1814-1820," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 72 (October 1974): 337.

⁷⁶ "An Act to Authorize the Citizens of the Town of Lebanon, in Washington County, to Appointed Trustees in Said Town, and for Other Purposes," in *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-fourth General Assembly, for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Begun and Held in the Town of Frankfort, on Monday the Fourth Day of December, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifteen, and of the Commonwealth the Twenty-fourth*

(Frankfort: Gerard and Berry, 1816), ch. 284; McElroy, *History of Lebanon*, 6; Baylor, *Early Times in Washington County*, 38.

⁷⁷ Sharon Ann Murphy, "Banks and Banking in the Early American Republic," *History Compass* 10 (2012): 412-13; and Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 38.

⁷⁸ Minute Book, 1815-1818, Bardstown Branch Bank, Bank of Kentucky Records, KDLA; Minute Book, 1817-1822, Springfield Branch Bank, Bank of Kentucky Records, KDLA.

⁷⁹ "An ACT to establish Independent Banks in the Commonwealth," in *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, Begun and Held in the Town of Frankfort, on Monday the First Day of December 1817, and of the Commonwealth the Twenty-sixth* (Frankfort: Kendall and Russell, 1818), ch. 201; "An ACT supplemental to the act establishing Independent Banks in this Commonwealth," in *Acts Passed at the First Session of the Twenty-sixth General Assembly for the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, ch. 264.

⁸⁰ Worsley and Smith, *Kentucky Almanac, and Farmer's Calendar, for the Year 1819* (Lexington: Kentucky Reporter for Worsley and Smith, 1818), 34.

⁸¹ Banks in the early republic issued bank notes in the place of harder to transport specie in quantities far greater than the value of their reserved specie. Managers and bank advocates realized that in a healthy economy most bank notes circulated for long periods and depositors only sporadically requested redemption in specie. See Murphy, "Early American Banking," 409-10; A. Glenn Crothers, "Banks and Economic Development in Post-Revolutionary Northern Virginia, 1790-1812," *Business History Review* 73 (Spring 1999): 9-10.

⁸² Dupree, "The Panic of 1819," 269-70; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 34-36; Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 15.

⁸³ Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 38; Dupree, "The Panic of 1819," 279.

⁸⁴ Murphy, "Early American Banking," 412-13.

⁸⁵ Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 11; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 45-46; Murphy, "Early American Banking," 416.

⁸⁶ For the decisions and actions of the BUS, see Murphy, "Early American Banking," 417; Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 11; Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 127. Debtors turned to state and independent banks to redeem notes and withdraw deposits in specie to repay the BUS, further draining specie. See Murphy, "Early American Banking," 416. Many state and independent banks refused to redeem BUS notes, which provoked BUS managers to present state bank notes and demand redemption. Numerous banks resorted to the general suspension of specie payments to protect the long-term interests of their stockholders and depositors, but others collapsed. See Murphy, "Early American Banking," 416; Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 126.

⁸⁷ *Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 20, 1819, November 3, 1819.

⁸⁸ Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 127, 136-37; Dupree, "The Panic of 1819," 272;

⁸⁹ Dupree, "The Panic of 1819," 271-72; Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 13-14; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 47-48, 52; Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 125, 137; Aron, *American Confluence*, 189.

⁹⁰ McElroy, *History of Lebanon*, 7.

⁹¹ Samuel Wilson to John A. Hill, July 23, 1820, Propaganda Archives, American Centrale, volume 4, no. 138, quoted in Victor F. O'Daniel, *The Father of the Church in Tennessee; or, The Life, Times, and Character of the Right Reverend Richard Pius Miles, O.P., the First Bishop of Nashville* (Washington, D.C.: Dominicana, 1926), 123. For the depression era drought in central Kentucky, see Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 127.

⁹² Samuel Wilson to John A. Hill, July 23, 1820, Propaganda Archives, American Centrale, volume 4, no. 138, quoted in O'Daniel, *The Father of the Church in Tennessee*, 123.

⁹³ Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 402.

⁹⁴ Benedict Joseph Flaget to All the Catholics of the Parish of St. Anne, July 1, 1817, Archdiocese of Detroit Collection, Manuscripts, Calendared Documents, UNDA; Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 97.

⁹⁵ Mary Ellen Doyle, *Pioneer Spirit: Catherine Spalding, Sister of Charity of Nazareth* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 46-47.

⁹⁶ Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, v, 19-20; Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 24-27.

⁹⁷ For relief debates in legislative bodies, see Aron, *American Confluence*, 190-91; Schoenbachler, "The Origins of Jacksonian Politics," 156-223.

⁹⁸ For morality as a cause and solution of the Panic of 1819, see Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order"; Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819*, 18-21; Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 35-36. For religion and the depression, see Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 424-31; Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 65.

⁹⁹ For femininity as a cause, solution, and consequence of the national Panic of 1819, see Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 460, 467-75. For the challenge of economic failure to masculinity see Kidd, "The Search for Moral Order," 448-55; Toby L. Ditz, "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 51-80.

¹⁰⁰ For the ways "crises reveal the underlying tensions of society" and provide opportunities, see A. T. Brown, Andy Burn, and Rob Doherty, "Introduction: Coping with Crisis: Understanding the Role of Crises in Economic and Social History," in *Crises in Economic and Social History: A Comparative Perspective* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2015), 1-23.

¹⁰¹ "Forty three New Banks," *Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 11, 1818.

¹⁰² "A writer in the *Kentucky Gazette* . . .," *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 20, 1819.

¹⁰³ "The Casual Remarker," from *Boston Gazette*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 20, 1819.

¹⁰⁴ "The Manners of the Day," from *Port Folio*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 3, 1818.

¹⁰⁵ "Thy Friend Dorothy to Friend Poulson," from the *American Daily Advertiser*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 24, 1818.

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- ¹⁰⁶ “Young Women of Fortune,” from the *Analectic Magazine*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 10, 1818.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁸ “Thy Friend Dorothy to Friend Poulson,” from the *American Daily Advertiser*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 24, 1818.
- ¹⁰⁹ “A Cure for Hard Times,” *Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 5, 1820.
- ¹¹⁰ “Beautiful Eulogium on Women,” *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 24, 1818.
- ¹¹¹ “A Man of the Mountains,” from *Baltimore Chronicle*, in *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 3, 1819.
- ¹¹² *Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 18, 1818.
- ¹¹³ *Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 27, 1819.
- ¹¹⁴ Ibid., October 27, 1819.
- ¹¹⁵ “An Interesting Picture,” *Louisville Public Advertiser*, November 3, 1819.
- ¹¹⁶ “The Casual Remarker,” from *Boston Gazette*, *Louisville Public Advertiser*, October 20, 1819.
- ¹¹⁷ *Louisville Public Advertiser*, August 18, 1818.
- ¹¹⁸ *Rules*, ch. 3, section 2, 5.
- ¹¹⁹ Ibid., ch. 3, section 6, 8.
- ¹²⁰ *Rules*, ch. 3, section 9, 9; Martin, *Buying into the World of Goods*, 75-78; Perkins, “The Consumer Frontier,” 501-02.
- ¹²¹ *Rules*, ch. 3, section 9, 10.
- ¹²² Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 9-10.
- ¹²³ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 10; For the popularity, status, and maintenance of white undergarments, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 26-31, 109-13, 216-17, 266.
- ¹²⁴ *Rules*, ch. 3, section 9, 10.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 10.
- ¹²⁶ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 10-11.
- ¹²⁷ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 10.
- ¹²⁸ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 11.
- ¹²⁹ Ibid., ch. 3, section 9, 11.
- ¹³⁰ Ibid., ch. 3, section 10, 11.
- ¹³¹ Ibid., ch. 3, section 14, 14.
- ¹³² Ibid., ch. 3, section 2, 5.
- ¹³³ Ibid., ch. 4, 27-28.
- ¹³⁴ “Rules for the School,” in *Rules*, 32.
- ¹³⁵ Ibid., 34.
- ¹³⁶ Charles Nerinckx to his parents, 1818, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 377.
- ¹³⁷ For the missionaries’ fundraising intent in Europe during the depression, see Charles Nerinckx to “My dear relatives and friends,” Ascension Day 1820, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., “Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx; In Life was Missionary in Kentucky to His Relatives and Friends in the Netherlands; Printed in the Hague by the Brothers Langen Huyzen Behind the Big Church,” Nerinckiana box, LHC; “Extract of a letter from Bishop Flaget to Father Badin, St. Etienne, February 19, 1820,” *The Catholic*

World 21 (1875): 835; Dichtl, *Frontiers of Faith*, 97. "Letter of Association," January 10, 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 437-38.

¹³⁸ "Letter of Association," January 10, 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 437-38.

¹³⁹ Benedict Flaget to my Benefactors of Belgium, February 8, 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 436.

¹⁴⁰ Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 435.

¹⁴¹ Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 402; Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, in Sister M. Sarita Veretynin, trans., "Posthumous Letters of Rev. Charles Nerinckx; In Life was Missionary in Kentucky to His Relatives and Friends in the Netherlands; Printed in the Hague by the Brothers Langen Huyzen Behind the Big Church," Nerinckiana box, LHC.

¹⁴² Charles Nerinckx to "My dear relatives and friends," Ascension Day 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, 424.

¹⁴³ Charles Nerinckx to "Dear Mother, Beloved Mothers, and Sisters of the Society," November 2, 1820, quoted in Maes, *The Life of Rev. Nerinckx*, 440.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 442.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH AND THE RULES, 1820-1826

While never guaranteed, the ability of the order to stay afloat in the late 1810s bolstered the Sisters of Loretto's confidence that God approved of their work. However, God's intentions seemed less clear when tuberculosis swept through the membership between 1820 and 1826. Thirty-four women died, fourteen in 1824 alone. While Christians often interpreted death through their faith, the order's specific spiritual devotions, centered on empathy with Jesus and Mary's physical and emotional suffering during the crucifixion, predisposed them to interpret suffering as God-induced. The trauma of witnessing afflicted sisters' slow, messy, and miserable deaths led survivors to question what they had done for God to inflict such punishment after their hopeful beginnings. The unexpected loss of labor and the work of those who diverted their attention from income-generating tasks to caring for patients undercut the economic stability of the order while its members were preoccupied with new branch houses. Overextended and concerned that they had lost God's approval, the Sisters considered structural changes proposed by male ecclesiastics. The male leadership worked with the women to accept a higher and thus more costly standard of living to improve their health and attract wealthier students who would generate more income. The proposed changes pained many of the Sisters who believed that the poverty of the order and its attention to lower class pupils formed the core of their founding purpose and identity. Moreover, they believed the recent depression justified continuing on their established path.

The Sisters also considered a departure from the local racial order when three women of color asked to join the community. The prospective black postulants were emboldened by the labor needs of the order as the number of healthy women fell and Sisters dispersed across the new branch houses. As women of color, they found a life of protected chastity and elevated work appealing. Tension between the Christian theology that celebrated the spiritual equality of all human beings and the virtue of servile humility, and the reality of white racism in early national Kentucky shaped the Sisters' response to the black women. Raised in the border South and serving the region's white residents, the Sisters anticipated objections to the elevation of the status of black women. After significant debate, the Loretines decided that admitting black women as equals was too risky for the financial viability of their missions.

The Sisters of Loretto and ecclesiastics considered numerous appeals for the order's services between 1820 and 1825. Amid the continuing depression, the Sisters faced the difficult decision of whether to expand to reach more young girls or to preserve their resources in the extant houses. Desperate pleas from ecclesiastics and Catholic families intensified the Sisters' sense of duty to an ever expanding population. They could not pursue all proposals, but they did invest in four new branch houses. In 1821, a Nelson County Catholic, Henrietta Boone Gardiner, donated three hundred acres of land near Fairfield for the establishment of a school and convent. In the late fall, a contingent of eleven sisters created the branch house of Bethania on the property.¹ In November 1822, Father Joseph Rosati of the Diocese of St. Louis contacted Kentucky clergy to "express . . . [his] great wish and desire, as also that of [his] venerable Bishop & of [his] pious

parishioners for a colonie of [the] poor Loretines” in the Barrens of Missouri and noted that the congregation had already initiated construction of a house to ease the burden of expansion.² Father Charles Nerinckx replied in mid-January 1823 with the order’s decision to pursue the proposed branch in Missouri.³ In the winter of 1822-1823, the Sisters and Father Robert Abel also completed plans for a branch named Mount Carmel at Long Lick, Breckinridge County, and settled six sisters at the convent.⁴ In the spring of 1823, eleven sisters moved to the new convent in Missouri, while others prepared for another Kentucky branch, Mount Olivet in Casey County, settled in 1824.⁵ Nerinckx reported in June 1823 that “[five] locations more at least are requested” across the Bardstown and Cincinnati Dioceses as the Sisters felt pulled to address the needs of an ever broader community.⁶

While the Sisters expanded and worked to maintain their existing houses, disease struck the membership. Doctors diagnosed the ill with “consumption,” or pulmonary tuberculosis.⁷ Initially, members interpreted the loss of their loved ones as orderly exhibitions of God’s will. In a mission fundraising letter written in London in 1820, Nerinckx noted: “In the eight years of [the Loretto Society’s] existence, we have to chronicle the death of only three of its members, one in each of the three houses, and in each case the Superior, as if the head had to be the foundation stone of each establishment.”⁸ Two sisters—Sister Winifred Abel Morgan at Calvary and Sister Apollonia McBride at Gethsemani—died in March 1820, raising concerns about the overall health of the order.⁹ Between 1822 and 1826, thirty-two more women died, with deaths recorded almost yearly at all established houses (See Figures 6-7 in Appendix).

Physical proximity, affection, and faith ensured that the presence of sickness and death shaped the thoughts of members of the order and nearby clergy. Caregivers spent the most time with the ill. According to the order's Rules, an infirmarian cared for sick members onsite and housed the ill "with as much comfort as conditions of the house can afford."¹⁰ The infirmarian witnessed her sisters' slow suffering as they lost their energy, appetite, weight, and voices. Sounds of patients' discomfort—violent coughs, labored breaths, wheezes, and sniffles from running noses—filled the space. The repugnant smell of blood, mucus, and sweat bombarded the caregiver as she cleaned those who coughed and experienced recurrent bouts of fever. When the infirmarian lacked confidence that her insight and care for her deteriorating patients was adequate, she called on one of two doctors affiliated with the order who offered their services for free. She observed her sisters' progression through the fatal disease, suffering that varied from weeks to years before victims succumbed to death.¹¹

Other members also interacted with the ill. Although instructed to avoid contact with the sick, sisters visited the patients between their tasks.¹² When the caregivers determined that a patient was dying, the Rules dictated that two sisters sit up in shifts to comfort and pray for her, and witness her death.¹³ If one was available and time allowed, the attendants called a priest to hear the dying sister's confession of sins, administer the Eucharist, and perform extreme unction—the sacrament of anointing the dying—to prepare her soul for judgment.¹⁴ The sisters and slaves faced the emotional task of encountering and preparing her corpse for burial.¹⁵ Sisters who did not interact directly with the dying learned of their loved ones' suffering through word of mouth and the eerily quieter bells.¹⁶

Catholics recognized the inevitability of death. “A Funeral Song,” began with the unavoidable: “Death is our doom; unchang’d the law shall stand.”¹⁷ Still, death required serious consideration for the Sisters because it marked the soul’s passage either to eternal damnation or heaven. The song stressed survivors’ anxiety over their own fate: “Before an awful judge we must appear; / T’account for all our deeds, and t’undergo, / Our doom for endless bliss, or endless woe.” The faithful, free “[f]rom deadly guilt and lawless passions,” passed happy, hopeful, and cheerful “from toil to endless rest.” However, a dying sinner agonized as they reflected on their life, noticed the distress of their loved ones, and perceived their fate: “what horrors fill the sinner’s mind! / A crowd of unrepented sins, behind!—/ Around, his weeping friends!—before him death! / A Judge above!—a gaping hell, beneath! / . . . The guilty soul, in agonies of pain, / Ascends above, alas! not there to dwell. / But to receive her doom and sink to hell.”¹⁸

Purgatory broke the dichotomy of eternal damnation and reward in Catholic theology, and concern for souls in purgatory served to keep death present for the Sisters. Affronts to God in the form of unsatisfied mortal sins, like murder and adultery, condemned one’s soul to hell. God granted mercy for lesser transgressions, yet they offended Him too much for the soul to be rewarded with immediate sanctity. He relegated the venial sinner’s soul to the temporary punishment of purgatory, with the length of time in that state relative to the seriousness of the sinner’s transgressions.¹⁹ As described in an early nineteenth century Catholic devotional book, “[i]n purgatory souls suffer for a time the *pain of loss* and the pains of the senses.” So close to the eternal reward of happiness, they greatly desired to join God and were made anxious by the delay.²⁰ The devotional book added: “The place of punishment is hideous and in the

vicinity of hell,” with torture and flames similar to that in hell.²¹ It described the dreaded state: “Although the pains of purgatory will not endure like the pains of hell, forever, yet in regard to many poor souls, they will endure for a very long time; and even should the time of suffering be in itself short, it will seem to the sufferers extremely long. An hour of pain there, will be far more painful than a long life of misery here.”²² Once in purgatory, the soul could not speed their sentence. The living faithful, however, could assist the tortured souls in purgatory: “Among the best means of escaping entirely, or mitigating the pains of purgatory, is to pray frequently for the dead.”²³

The order valued remembering their departed members to assist them in purgatory. The Rules structured rituals that made death present not only in the aftermath of loss, but on a daily and monthly basis. Upon the passing of a sister, survivors in her house performed “the Prayers for the departed . . . for nine days,” while residents of the other Loretine houses prayed for her soul for four or five days.²⁴ A priest said “[t]hree solemn Masses and twenty private” for her soul.²⁵ The Sisters concluded their daily evening gathering in their chapel with the funerary psalm *De profundis* to request mercy for the soul of the most recently deceased member.²⁶ On the first Monday of each month, the order held a mass of intention for deceased sisters, which dedicated the sacrament of the Eucharist to benefit their souls in particular. That evening, they processed from their post-dinner gathering “to the Grave Yard, and there, at the grave of the last buried, sa[id] the *De profundis*, for this and others departed.”²⁷ According to the Rules: “At every visit to the Graveyard,” “they dug their graves” in preparation for the next burial.²⁸

Before the outbreak escalated, Nerinckx advised the Sisters to submit cheerfully and faithfully. He wrote from Belgium in November 1820: “I feel much for your sickly

Community; I beg them all to be of good heart, and receive these afflictions with courage, united in heart and mind with the Suffering Jesus and the Sorrowful Mary.”²⁹ Christians interpreted worldly crises as tests from God of the worthiness of an individual or group and evidence of His judgment. The trauma of witnessing their members’ deaths led survivors to question why God punished the order. In February 1822, Nerinckx instructed the Sisters that members should view their suffering as providential mortification that God would lead them through if they remained faithful and obedient: “If you would all be faithful to your God, and strict observers of your Rules, which He has given you, He will enable you to suffer for His sake, whatever you may meet with.” Temporal crisis would continue, however, if the Sisters failed to meet God’s expectations: “if you are unfaithful to your duties, He will not assist you in affliction, neither can you expect Him to do it, and the unfaithfulness of one of you may cause all the others to perish.”³⁰

The order struggled to remain solvent as it pursued planned expansion while suffering the unanticipated loss of labor of the deceased and the diversion of income-generating workers to the care of patients. Nerinckx expressed concern to his brother in June 1823 that the Loretto membership “grows small, weak & too young,” straining the healthy members and slaves who performed all the necessary tasks. Reduced income from fewer paying pupils and inflated prices from the lingering depression compounded the demographic crisis: “we have still in all the houses, & particularly at Loretto, a great number of individuals to feed & clothe, & at Loretto barely one that pays for schooling, which amounts to 50 dollars a year. We feel a great scarcity of corn; the price is six times what it used to be.”³¹

Economically strained and worried that they had offended God, the Sisters considered alterations proposed by clergymen. Bardstown diocesan missionaries had already been discussing the financial viability of the Loretines in the early 1820s after the Propaganda Fide requested further explanation on how the community supported itself. Nerinckx had submitted the Rules of the Sisters to the Propaganda Fide while in Europe in 1816, but the overwhelming docket of the body delayed their review until 1819. That December, the Propaganda sent a letter to Bishop Flaget to inform him of problems. The Holy See refused full papal approbation of the order because the Rules lacked clarity about the sources of the order's income and the Propaganda worried that unease that the active mission and contemplative life they described would be unsustainable. The Loretines needed to revise the Rules and provide explanations of their income sources.³² Nerinckx and Flaget discussed the concerns of the Propaganda after Nerinckx returned from his second fundraising trip in Europe.³³ Nerinckx described the assets of the community in a letter to the Propaganda Fide in February 1823. He detailed the amount of land at each branch house, "income from manual works and other sources," and "[members'] part of their inheritance, which they have brought with them to the convent," concluding that "their support seems a remote worry."³⁴ Nerinckx, however, admitted his concern in the letter to his brother in June and Flaget remained less optimistic.³⁵

The Loretines and clergy disputed in particular how to increase the income from their schools. They questioned how to market the school to wealthier pupils who could pay more while maintaining a curriculum appropriate for lower class students, the intended beneficiaries of the order. The Sisters competed for pupils with other Catholic

institutions in the region and female academies that in the 1820s expanded their curriculum to include the array of subjects offered by male institutions.³⁶ An 1820 advertisement for “A Female Boarding School” in Bardstown highlighted the local competition. The school “taught the following branches, viz: Common branches, spelling, reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, geography; higher branches, composition, rhetoric, the use of globes, logic, history, natural and moral philosophy.” The school charged “for the common branches, \$16 a session; for the higher, \$22” and “Terms of boarding \$2 a week washing included.”³⁷ The Sisters of Loretto, in contrast, charged fifty dollars for one year of tuition—or twenty-five dollars per session—six dollars more annually than the advertised cost for higher branches at the Bardstown school.

The Sisters and Bardstown Diocese ecclesiastics joined early national Americans as they vigorously debated “the forms, uses, and effects of women’s education.”³⁸ Historian Lucia McMahon argues that “proponents of women’s education could not agree about what women should learn because their universal faith in the capacity of women’s intellectual abilities came into conflict with their adherence to conventional gender roles.”³⁹ Bishop Flaget suggested that the Loretines learn and teach “grammar”—the advanced subjects of orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody taught separately from basic reading and writing in the early nineteenth century—“to gain the confidence of the parents, and to attract some pupils.”⁴⁰ As elite and middle-class academies grew in popularity and expanded their curriculum, grammar became a subject expected in the common and preparatory levels of female education.⁴¹ Despite the potential to increase the order’s income, Nerinckx opposed the introduction of grammar as excessive knowledge for lower class girls and wished that the order remained focused on teaching

“the more solid and useful branches of education.”⁴² The lingering economic depression in the 1820s confirmed the danger of women and girls behaving above their social rank. Proscriptive writing stressed the utility of education for women’s marriage and family life.⁴³ But overeducation of a girl risked creating a “pedant,” a woman unattractive to potential husbands because she excessively displayed her useless knowledge in social interactions and could not perform or avoided domestic duties.⁴⁴ Nerinckx implicated women’s use of high language like that taught through grammar as a prideful disruption of the social hierarchy. At Calvary in April 1823, he instructed the Sisters to “strive to keep within the bounds of humility, in writing and speaking.” He provided an example: “A nun, who was under the care of St. Francis wrote a letter to him, in a very high and elegant style, which did not please him. He then told her that he was her father and she was his daughter, and that she need not speak so elegantly, but only to speak plainly to him: that it was better to write in a simple style, than in an elegant one.”⁴⁵

In addition to encouraging harmful ambition in lower class pupils, Nerinckx feared that marketing to wealthier girls would endanger the Sisters with greater worldly temptations. The Rules forbade pupils to wear “immodesties in dresses and newfound fashions.” Instead, students “as much as possible . . . are to wear house-spun clothes on week-days, which are to be made plain and full, and in UNIFORM, if possible; of brown, on work-days; of white, on Sundays and Festivals.”⁴⁶ Nerinckx argued that wealthier students would bring their fashionable clothing and belongings, a “mixture of the elegant, the bright or the gay,” fit for southern ladies, but “less becoming the profession of a nun, forsaking the worldly trifles to keep herself at the foot of a dying God on a cross, with His Mother, overwhelmed with sorrow and grief.”⁴⁷

In contrast, Bishop Flaget did not consider families' desires to invest in their daughters' education to achieve higher status a spiritual or social hindrance but an entrepreneurial opportunity. He disagreed with Nerinckx's belief that advanced education was useless for the poor and characterized the lower classes' desire for upward mobility as too ingrained in American culture to mediate. As he noted in a September 1824 letter to Joseph Rosati: "To say that the poor have no need for the grammar needs an explanation for in the United States that class of people [take on] so many pretensions that they are rich, and every day we see the daughters of [the poor] becoming espoused to a doctor or a lawyer. This is why all the ladies everywhere are to be instructed and to be given a chance in the Society."⁴⁸ White girls' performance of grammar through eloquent speech and writing also reinforced the racial divide between whites and people of color. Although many blacks desired the status associated with grammar mastery, early nineteenth century white advocates of black education perceived grammar as a useless subject for the life prospects of people of color.⁴⁹

In addition to the debate over a suitable curriculum, local priests and sisters participated in broader disputes about the causes of tuberculosis as they proposed changes in the material conditions of the order. Early nineteenth century popular and professional medical texts attributed consumption to a hereditary susceptibility that other widely disputed factors, including air quality and untreated colds, exacerbated.⁵⁰ In a letter to the Loretto superior, Nerinckx pondered potential environmental factors of the outbreak: "I have thought sometimes about your dwelling, on the south side of the Chapel, might be against your health. I wish you to stay in the larger house, if there be means for it."⁵¹ Implementing Nerinckx's suggestion challenged the Sisters' customary living

arrangements and required moving bedding and preparing a new space for living. Such changes, however, affected only the residents of the Loretto motherhouse and did not challenge the Rules, which did not describe a dwelling space. Flaget and other ecclesiastics proposed altering the clothing of the order, a more difficult decision that promised to affect all branches and conflicted with the Rules. Eighteenth and early nineteenth century medical opinion pronounced a common connection between consumption and lingering colds. William Buchan described the cold factor: “More consumptive patients date the beginning of their disorders from wet feet, damp beds, night air, wet clothes, or catching cold after the body had been heated, than from all other causes.”⁵²

As Flaget recounted in September 1824 to the bishop of the Diocese of St. Louis, “According to the advice of our best doctors, there are two usages in [the Loretine] community which are extremely injurious to the health of these poor ladies[:] the first of going bare-footed in the dew, the rain, and the mud and 2d of sleeping with their entire habits.” The Rules prescribed that sisters wear a half scapular over two dresses, belted by a leather girdle, and a cotton veil, with the addition of shoes in the winter.⁵³ Flaget explained the result of sleeping in these multiple layers: “in summer [their habits] have been saturated with their perspiration and in winter are often encircled by a coat of ice.”⁵⁴ Chilled by their sweat, the Sisters rose without sufficiently thick cloaks to perform their morning prayers. “If they are covered immediately with a good mantle and go to prayers in a chapel well heated by a fire-place or by a stove, I see no inconvenience [in sleeping in the full habit],” Flaget informed Rosati. But “as their prayers are in common open to all the winds and that they are without mantles at least they have colds and fever and

finish by being in poor health and by ending a consumptive.” Flaget connected the outbreak to the Sisters’ living conditions: “Suffice in the space of eleven years we have lost 24 religious and not one of these had attained the age of thirty years—more than twenty religious from the same family that we have here in Kentucky. There are at this moment twenty-eight who are in disabled health and who have perhaps not four years to live. . . . All these deaths and these maladies so multiplied, do they not prove in an evident manner that the rules are too severe and that it is prudent to reform them? . . . All the doctors whom we have consulted, all the priests who have some contact with these good ladies and finally the law of Rome itself are of same advice.”⁵⁵

Spiritual concerns also fueled the debate over the proposed changes to the Rules. Members who feared the changes would affront God and jeopardize the order’s and pupils’ collective salvation suffered significant anxiety. From their time as postulants, members learned from the Rules that obedience to the order’s dictates was critical, and the Rules emphasized that the order should not improve its material quality of life: “Should the Lord ever bless the present *poor SOCIETY* with wealth or abundance, no alteration shall creep in any of the present RULES of food, raiment, labour, &c.”⁵⁶ The Rules concluded by stressing members’ commitment to God to fulfill their original work with the lower class: “The Sisters of Loretto being by vow and necessity obliged to all kind of labour for their own support and that of poor orphans, must take it for a certain principle, that next to spiritual duties, their first, their most important, and their most solid devotion, is their particular charge or office. . . . [A]ll particular devotions, that interfere with this, are illusions.”⁵⁷

Diligently following monastic rules, they believed, ensured obedience to God's will: "By regular observance, all our actions bear the mark of obedience, that is, of the will of God."⁵⁸ The Loretines lauded revered saints who committed themselves to the spiritual rules of their orders: "God himself . . . expressly told St. Mary Magd. De Pazzi: *You shall esteem your rule and constitutions thereof, together with your vows, as I will have you esteem myself.* She owned, she would rather die a thousand deaths, than that the least of her rules should be broken by herself or others."⁵⁹ A member's lack of diligence in following the Rules exhibited ingratitude for all God had done for them and the order, while adherence to their Rules marked a member as likely to enter heaven: "Your rules then, and their spirit, ought to be your constant meditation; the exactness in this performance, your only ambition; the love of God above all, your main intention; and may the reward of this be your eternal salvation!"⁶⁰ But a sister must anxiously persist in obedience since previous diligence did not secure salvation. As the Rules noted, "in the abyss of the judgments of God, many have fallen in to great sin and damnation, from negligence and tepidity in the like actions, after having been long in a course of perfection."⁶¹ "[T]he fear of falling into eternal torments should make you watchful in each action against the dangers of tepidity."⁶²

Personality clashes further ignited the debates as the contending ecclesiastics believed their designs for the order reflected a better understanding of the intentions and needs of the society. In April 1823, Nerinckx revealed his frustration with what he perceived as the overreach of Bardstown Diocese clerics in the affairs of the Loretines. He noted to an ecclesiastic of the St. Louis Diocese as they prepared to establish a colony in Missouri: "I felt extremely pleased, when I heard [the bishop of St. Louis Diocese's]

resolution & determination not to meddle with their Rules or religious practices.”

Nerinckx continued: “I think, that, when the lord starts an institute for his particular designs, he also animates it with a special spirit, not easily communicated nor perceived by privates out of the institute, and there, I believe, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat* [The Spirit breathes where He will] and after all it will matter little, if the good be really done, how it happened to be procured.”⁶³

Extant records leave unclear the timing and extent of changes effected, but Nerinckx’s letters provide hints. Following his expression of relief that the St. Louis Diocese would not alter the Loretine Rules in late April 1823, Nerinckx acknowledged that the order resigned itself to some changes: “Our only and sole view in starting the poor institute was, to provide or procure a Catholic School to the females of common & lower classes & to separate them from the boys; providence seemed to interfere, we tried to follow its motions till it became what it is now; please the merciful god to accept of it & to make use of it for his greater honor and glory!”⁶⁴

By January 1824, Nerinckx acted on his long held wish to leave the Bardstown Diocese and wrote to Bishop Rosatti about his upcoming transfer to the St. Louis Diocese. His letters expressed his disapproval of additional changes: “I understand, that shortly some remarkable alterations are to take place in [the Loretine] schools & I doubt not also in the rules, for the spirit of innovations & for common, not for bettering the religious rules & principles, which is the spirit of the age. I will not oppose it, to avoid dissensions, but I wish not to share in it; it will still cause me to make more diligence in leaving these parts.”⁶⁵ In April 1824, Nerinckx repeated his “displeasure arising from innovations and novelties planned and introduced into our poor Society & schools,

which I always wished to keep in its original simplicity and humility,” as a reason for his move to Missouri.⁶⁶ The uneasy Sisters had acquiesced to the experiment of adding grammar to the curriculum at the new Bethania branch in Nelson County under the supervision of Father Guy Ignatius Chabrat. Nerinckx reluctantly recognized the success of Bethania in attracting more pupils. Flaget retrospectively described the dispute and experiment in September 1824:

Mr. Nerinckx . . . has been so alarmed that I have consented to what had been suppressed to be taught in all the monasteries which were confided to his immediate care. What has happened? In the three convents which he directed after there were five or six pupils who paid while Mr. Chabrat made from 900 to 1,000 coin a year with the pupils that he had, by which in this community Mr. Nerinckx himself consented that there they assign the grammar.⁶⁷

In the wake of population dispersal between the branch houses, loss of labor due to disease, and changes to the Rules, some of the order’s enslaved women pushed for greater recognition of their spiritual and physical contributions. By May 1824, three women of color at the motherhouse voiced their call to Loretine life.⁶⁸ The experiences of enslavement and racism made the order attractive for the prospective postulants. Black women sought admission to Catholic sisterhoods because membership publicly declared their virtue and capacity for chastity, upending racist white assumptions about the licentiousness of women of color. Claiming the protection of chastity associated with white nuns offered women of color an opportunity to assert control over their bodies and subvert the sexual abuse and pressure to reproduce rampant in slavery.⁶⁹ Slaves also believed convent membership elevated the meaning of their work from a coercion-based economic endeavor to a chosen spiritual path. Professed women religious received public recognition of their labor as benefiting God and by extension the broader Catholic community—including slaves—rather than work that only met the needs of white sisters

and pupils.⁷⁰ Membership also enabled women of color to devote more time to their spirituality than normally allowed slaves.⁷¹ The Sisters catechized their slaves twice on Sunday and once every other day, and allowed slaves to pray for fifteen minutes in the morning and at night. The order expected slaves to frequent the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist at least monthly, based on the availability of priests. The Loretine regimen for enslaved spirituality reflected the order's expectation that their slaves practice the faith with a greater devotion than other Catholic bondspersons, but white members devoted more of their daily routine to rituals and prayer.⁷²

Recognition of the difficulties of enslaved family life might also have led the women to seek single status without biological children. While the identities of the three black women interested in joining the order are not recorded, the life of Loretine slave Nancy illustrates the tumultuous reality of enslaved motherhood and families in the border South. In 1803, Nancy experienced the upheaval of her Nelson County slave owner's death. Her master, Catholic widower John Clements, willed that his executors separate his sixteen slaves among his nine children.⁷³ Control of Nancy transferred to Clement Hamilton, a Washington County Catholic and guardian of the minor daughter to whom Clements willed Nancy. From 1804 to 1815, Nancy awaited Hamilton's annual trip to Bardstown to learn who had hired her for the ensuing year.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, she had five children.⁷⁵ From year to year she faced the uncertainty of whether she would be hired near her children or her partner, and if Hamilton would sell one of her family members further away. John Clements's estate also faced numerous suits between 1806 and 1814, raising the risk that others would claim Nancy or her children as property or that Hamilton might decide to sell the slaves to settle debts.⁷⁶ Nancy's owner, Christina

Clements, turned sixteen in 1816 and thereafter was old enough to make decisions about her inherited property as stipulated in her father's will.⁷⁷ Clements entered the Sisters of Loretto in 1816 as Sister Angelica and transferred legal control of Nancy and her children to Nerinckx for the use of the order. Nancy and her children moved away from the personal networks they had forged while hired in Nelson County to yet another post in Washington County.⁷⁸ Nancy and her children certainly heard the debates about the Loretto's rapid expansion and they knew that the order's leadership could separate their family across an increasingly broad geographic area. The three black women who sought entrance to the Sisters of Loretto chose a path that would avoid the stressful motherhood Nancy experienced.

The religious devotions of the order also appealed to the enslaved women. Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, served as the patron saint of the order. The Sisters connected to Mary through devotions to her suffering at the foot of the cross of Jesus, the Sacred Hearts, and the Seven Dolours ("Pains"). These powerful and emotional devotions to the grief of a mother witnessing the death of her son offered parallels to enslaved parents who could not protect their children from white violence. In a prayer on the Fourth Dolour, the participant empathized with Mary's experience of witnessing Jesus's torture and journey to Calvary:

Most afflicted Mother of God! [S]uffer thy servant to remind thee of that grief which wounded and pierced thy sacred heart, when the sorrowful tidings were brought thee that thy Son was seized, bound, and inhumanely treated; but above all, when with thine own eyes thou beheldest him all covered with blood, and fainting under the weight of a heavy cross. I bear a sensible part and feeling in thy affliction, most tender and distressed Mother!⁷⁹

Witnessing the numerous deaths in the order also could have prompted the enslaved women's concern for their souls. By dying as a member, the women of color

could claim the order's funerary practices and assistance in purgatory. Catholic slaves in other regions of the Americas expressed fear that the living would not remember them after death, leaving them to suffer longer in purgatory.⁸⁰ The disruption of slave communities and families characteristic of the border South reduced the number of individuals who would know of a slave's death. Anxiety over lack of assistance in death led people of color in the Americas to found their own confraternities, but such organizations were not available in the less dense Catholic black population in Kentucky.⁸¹ By pushing for membership in the order, the women of color could better protect their souls in eternity.

The enslaved women had to meet the expectations of the white leadership to gain admittance. Leaders of the Sisters of Loretto and Nerinckx assessed the religious devotion and suitability for membership of the three slaves in 1824. According to the process described in the 1820 Rule, the slaves begged for admission before the Superior and fielded her questions. The next in rank, Sister Eldest, and two of the oldest members of the community witnessed the questioning. If they decided to admit the postulant, Nerinckx as ecclesiastical supervisor gave the final approval or disapproval.⁸² In a letter to the superior of another branch house, Nerinckx described the three unnamed postulants as receiving "nearly all the votes," revealing that tension existed over their admission to the society.⁸³

Theology and local culture shaped the decisions of white women religious in the Americas to admit, segregate, or exclude women of color from communities. Christianity called on the faithful to imitate the servile humility Jesus and Mary exhibited to counter prideful insults to God. As described in a Catholic meditation book in relation to the

incarnation of Jesus: “Man sinned through pride, vainly affecting an equality with God. . . . This vice was to be cured by the Redeemer, who *debased himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men* (Phil. 2. 7.).”⁸⁴ The meditations on Mary stress her consent to carry and birth Jesus by her declaration “*Behold the handmaid of the Lord* (Luk. 1. 38.),” and reiterate that “[t]he quality of handmaid, or servant, though contemptible amongst men, in relation to God, is honorable.”⁸⁵ Another meditation on the birth of Jesus invoked his debasement: “He was the God of heaven and earth, and equal to his Father: yet, he humbled himself to the despicable condition of a slave, *despised and the most abject of all men* (Is. 53. 3.).”⁸⁶ Women religious in particular pursued servile humility and some interpreted the inclusion of women of color in their ranks as a worthy triumph over white pride. In 1819, the local superior of the Society of the Sacred Heart in Missouri wrote to her superior in France proposing the admittance of black girls in the school and the order. She advocated the creation of a lower status for “‘a few girls of color, desiring a religious life,’” who would wear the same habit as the white sisters and perform the labor associated with lower-class sisters in the order in France but rank below them. “The admission of black sisters (and pupils) ‘would degrade us greatly,’ she admitted at one point, ‘but I cherish this degradation,’ seeing it as part of her apostolic mission.”⁸⁷

Since the colonization of the Americas, European and Euro-American Catholics struggled to reconcile their belief in the spiritual equality of all before God and the racial assumptions that shaped white attitudes toward people of color and undergirded slavery. This tension shaped decisions about the propriety of women of color entering religious orders.⁸⁸ In colonial Spanish America, white arguments against women of Native

American and African descent entering convents centered on women of color's supposed inability to adhere to the vow of chastity.⁸⁹ In the United States, ecclesiastics and convent leaders expressed concern that prospective white members and pupils would refuse to associate with orders that granted entrance to women of color.⁹⁰ In response to the 1819 proposal to admit black girls in the school and order of the Society of the Sacred Heart in Missouri, the French superior warned: “Do not make the foolish mistake of mixing the whites with the blacks. . . . [Y]ou will have no more pupils. The same for your novices, no one would join if you were to receive black novices.”⁹¹

White Catholics in Kentucky exhibited a similar concern for appropriate racial behavior. In 1801, Washington and Nelson County Catholic women raised money for the diocese to replace a scandalous priest whose transgressions included threatening the racial order. As reported by Father Stephen Badin in 1799, “[John] Thayer, ‘blindly & publicly devoted to their cause,’ was declaring slaves as fully virtuous as the white people of his congregation” in Scott County.⁹² In early national thought, his racial impropriety highlighted his capacity to flout other social norms, including aggressively antagonizing Protestants and standing accused of sexually assaulting women. Following Thayer's scandal, Kentucky Catholics were careful to avoid challenges to the southern racial order. They maintained the early nineteenth century pattern of racial segregation in Catholic spaces to preserve white respectability.⁹³

The Loretto leadership debated the issue and decided that maintaining the order's respectability and adhering to the southern racial hierarchy outweighed the benefits of more full members despite the increased demands on the Sisters. However, the enslaved women managed to negotiate a compromise and thereby gained recognition below the

status of full members.⁹⁴ Catholics in the Americas built on long-established European models of convent hierarchies to differentiate women of color within American orders. In European contemplative orders, classes of nuns developed based on the size of the dowry and social capital the women contributed at their entrance. Higher-class women devoted more of their time to prayer, had access to leadership positions, performed respectable work, and wore black veils, while lower-class women performed more of the undesirable and strenuous labor and wore white veils. Tactics varied as racially mixed orders adapted European class hierarchies to developing ethnic and racial stratification, but all exhibited concern for maintaining the respectability of the white sisters.⁹⁵ The sixteenth century Santa Clara convent in Peru, for example, relegated women of color to the status of *donadas*. These lay sisters maintained some similarities with nuns, such as performing a trial period as a novice, professing vows, and contributing a dowry. But *donadas* performed heavier labor and spent less time cultivating their spirituality, freeing white women to devote more time to prayer. The order also barred *donadas* from leadership positions and participating in elections. The *donadas*' veil differentiated them from nuns; nuns wore a black veil, while servants, novices, and the *donadas* wore a white veil.⁹⁶

Two days after the slaves tried to gain admittance, Nerinckx wrote to inform a local superior of the order's decision. He reported that the black women's "dress is to be different" to distinguish the slaves physically from white members.⁹⁷ Distinctions in the habit originally marked the level of one's acceptance in Loretine society, with postulants and novices wearing different clothing than full members. Postulants and novices, however, could perceive a time when they would don the black habit, while the black women would always wear different clothing and thereby always hold an inferior

status.⁹⁸ Nerinckx also reported that white and black members of the sisterhood would not labor in the same physical space or perform the same work. The order expected the women of color to “keep the main Rules,” but Nerinckx also noted that “their Rules are set apart,” implying that the Sisters decided on a new set of rules for the enslaved members. To test the resolve of their commitment, the order barred the women of color from professing perpetual vows before they had served for twelve years in the new membership status. As Nerinckx noted, “they take vows, not for life before 12 years.”⁹⁹

The Loretines scraped through the challenges of the 1820s, striving to strike a balance between the call to expand their missionary work with the limitations imposed by the lingering economic crisis and the turmoil of fatal illness. They questioned the providential meaning of their trials: Had they offended God? Would changing their way of life please Him or further drift the Sisters from His intentions and risk their collective souls? After a difficult debate shaped by concerns for the order’s survival, the Loretines settled on a series of changes to their school curriculum, material way of life, and membership. They added one advanced subject to attract pupils, altered the clothing requirements for members in the hope that the Sisters’ health would improve, and formed a lower-status membership option for black women to recognize their contributions without threatening the racial hierarchy. Success in the border South required that the Sisters adhere to the racial and cultural values of the broader society and shaped their decisions on how best to achieve their spiritual mission.

¹ Isabella Clarke, “Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke,” unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box I, folder 4, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky (hereafter LHC); “Bethania Convent, Fairfield, Nelson County,” RG-Sch VIII, box III, folder 2, LHC.

² Nerinckx summarized Rosati's November 26, 1822 letter in his response. C. Nerinckx to R. Mr. Joseph Rosati, January 15, 1823, RG Spec I Nerinckx, Box IVa, Barnes translations, LHC.

³ Nerinckx to R. Mr. Joseph Rosati, January 15, 1823, RG Spec I Nerinckx, Box IVa, Barnes translations, LHC.

⁴ Isabella Clarke, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke," unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC; "The Sisters of Loretto In Kentucky," *The Record* (Louisville, Ky.), December 25, 1921, 37, in RG-Sch VIII, box 1, folder 1, LHC.

⁵ C. Nerinckx to Louis Valentin William DuBourg, April 29, 1823, RG Spec I Nerinckx, Box IVa, Barnes translations, LHC; Isabella Clarke, "Statement of Mother Isabella Clarke," unpublished 1874, RGIII-2, box 1, folder 4, LHC;

⁶ Charles Nerinckx to J. Nerinckx, June 9, 1823, Nerinckiana box, folder 5, LHC.

⁷ For the diagnosis of tuberculosis, see Benedict Joseph Flaget to Joseph Rosati, September 11, 1824, Francis P. Clark Collection (hereafter CFCL), box 10, folder 4, University of Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame, Indiana (hereafter UNDA); Benedict Joseph Flaget to "Most Eminent Father," February 4, [1825], *Scrittura Riferite Nei Congressi America Centrale*, in *Documents: Nerinckx—Kentucky—Loretto, 1804-1851*, in *Archives Propaganda Fide, Rome*, eds. Augustin C. Wand and M. Lilliana Owens (St. Louis, MO: Mary Loretto Press, 1972), 58.

⁸ Charles Nerinckx, 1820, quoted in Camillus P. Maes, *The Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx* (1880; London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 408.

⁹ Mortuary List Ledger, 138-39, Mortuary List box, LHC.

¹⁰ *Rules of the Society and School of Loretto, Kentucky* (London: Keating and Brown, 1820), ch. 3, section 13, 13.

¹¹ For common symptoms of nineteenth century tuberculosis, see Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (1999; New York: New York University Press, 2000), 22-23; Emily K. Abel, *The Inevitable Hour: A History of Caring for Dying Patients in America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 15; Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 214. For the experience of antebellum caregivers, see Abel, *The Inevitable Hour*, 14. For evidence that the Sisters of Loretto called on doctors, see "Compendium of Instructions of Charles Nerinckx," March 25, 1823, Loretto, no. 34, RG Special I, box 1, folder 1, LHC.

¹² "Compendium of Instructions of Charles Nerinckx," March 25, 1823, no. 33, RG Special I, box 1, folder 1, LHC.

¹³ *Rules*, ch. 3, section 22, 25.

¹⁴ For Catholic anxiety over receiving confession and the Eucharist before death, see "A Prayer to Implore the Grace of Worthily Receiving the Blessed Sacrament at the Hour of Death," in *The Devotion and Office of the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ, with its Nature, Origins, Progress, etc.; Including the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, &c. &c. &c.; To Which is Prefixed, The Recommendatory Pastoral Letter of the Lord Bishop of Boulogne* (12th ed., London: Keating and Brown, 1821), 176-78. For the practice of extreme unction, see J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman,

1848), 104-106. For the long-duree of deathbed rituals in convents, see Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 199.

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CONCLUSION

The Sisters of Loretto used faith to understand and respond to unfolding events in the early nation. From 1812 to 1826, Kentucky Roman Catholic women and girls interpreted local Catholic institutional instability, the global Protestant evangelical movement, and a trans-Atlantic economic crisis as threats to morality and affronts to God. The desire to counteract moral slippage and restore providential favor motivated unmarried women to create a religious society and for others to join. The Loretines determined that they could best achieve their spiritual mission to serve God by educating girls, catechizing poor whites and people of color, assisting the worthy poor, praying for humanity, and demonstrating model-worthy behavior. They established branches in Kentucky and Missouri to expand their missionary reach and employed prayer to benefit the global Catholic mission movement. In the 1820s, the women turned their religious lens inward as they debated God's intent behind a fatal tuberculosis outbreak at all of their houses.

Driven by faith, the organization nevertheless faced financial, social, cultural, and political pressures that shaped how the Sisters executed their benevolent and educational missions over time. The Loretines' Catholicism and celibate, communal lifestyle marked the women as social deviants in a culturally Protestant nation that valued family formation and reproduction. Backlash against the nearby Shakers, a celibate, communal group, and local anxiety over the entrance of marriageable young women into the order highlighted the Sisters' continual need to safeguard their local respectability. The Sisters crafted and reworked acceptance based on their visible service to the border South social

order. The order educated girls to fulfill their expected gender future roles within a patriarchal society and over time introduced new subjects to meet changing social expectations. The Sisters separated the education and catechism of orphaned and paying white pupils from services provided for lower class whites and people of color to maintain their own respectability in and teach proper adherence to the border South social order. The women highlighted their assistance to elderly women and disabled slaves—groups whose needs were exacerbated by the War of 1812—as a means to support the social order and white justifications of slavery. While their faith led the Loretines to interpret events like the growth of Protestant missions and Panic of 1819 as further justifications of their work, the ability of the order to shape morality, save souls, and serve God depended on careful financial management. Although anxious to extend their reach, the Sisters' concern for financial stability mediated decisions on their ability to accept more members and expand their missions to new locations.

The establishment and early years of the Sisters of Loretto complicate narratives that distance American-born communities of women religious from their European counterparts. The Loretines saw themselves as engaged in the global Catholic mission against declension and Protestant evangelism. Furthermore, they valued and cultivated a spiritual economy with European donors. The first native-born order in the United States did not succeed because of local enculturation of its members alone. Like immigrant European women religious, the Loretines struggled to gain social and political acceptance and remain financially stable in the early republic. Collectively, the women and girls who founded and joined the community from 1812 to 1826 also provide insight into how rural unmarried women interpreted popular conceptions of femininity in the

early Republic. The women illustrate how faith shaped the world view and decisions of religious individuals in the early national period.

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Pellegrino, Nicholas John. "Reviving a Spirit of Controversy: Roman Catholics and the Pursuit of Religious Freedom in Early America." Ph.D. diss., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2015.

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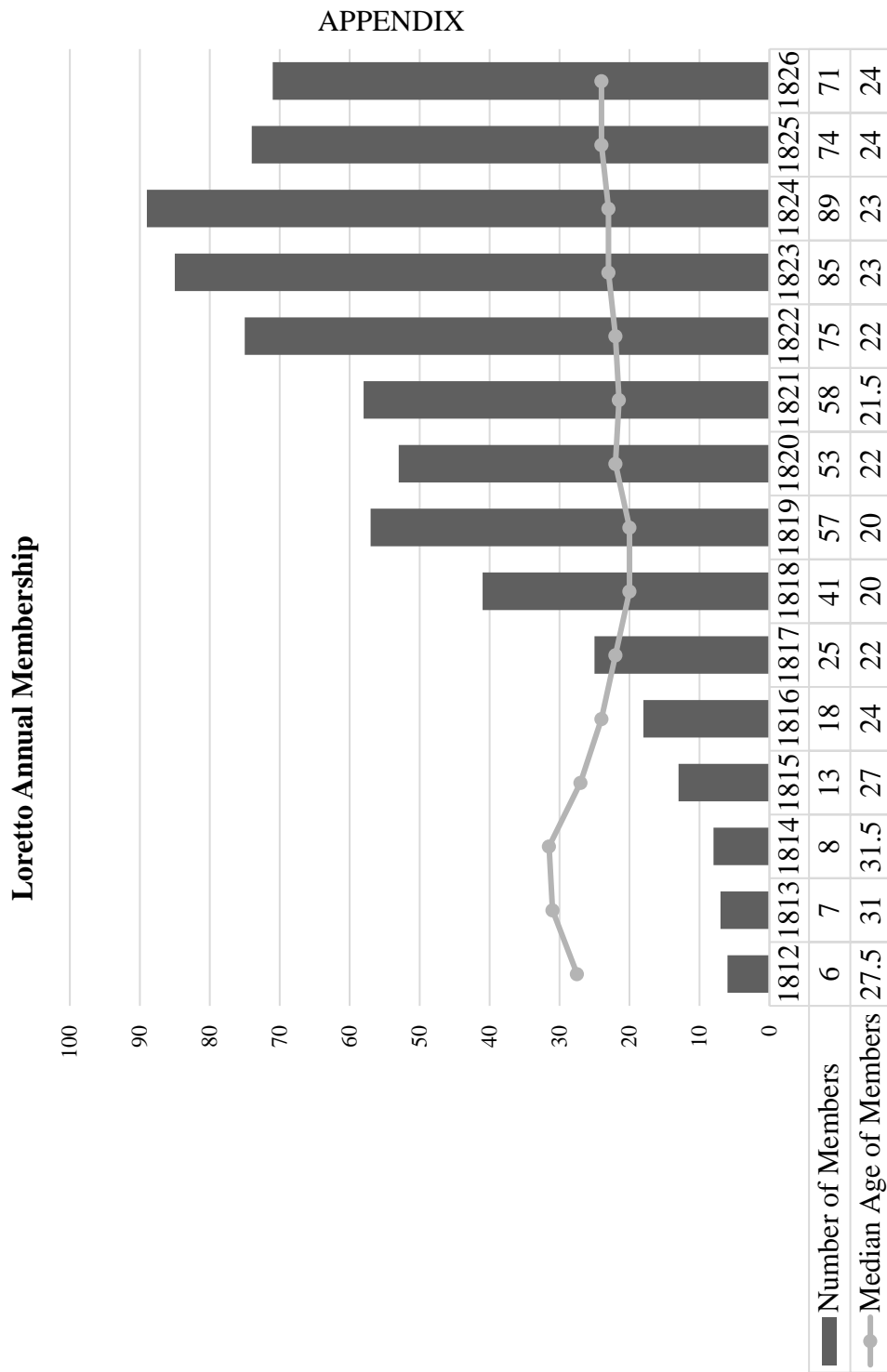


Figure 2

Source: Calculated from "Register, Sisters of Loretto," Register box, vault, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, Kentucky (hereafter LHC).

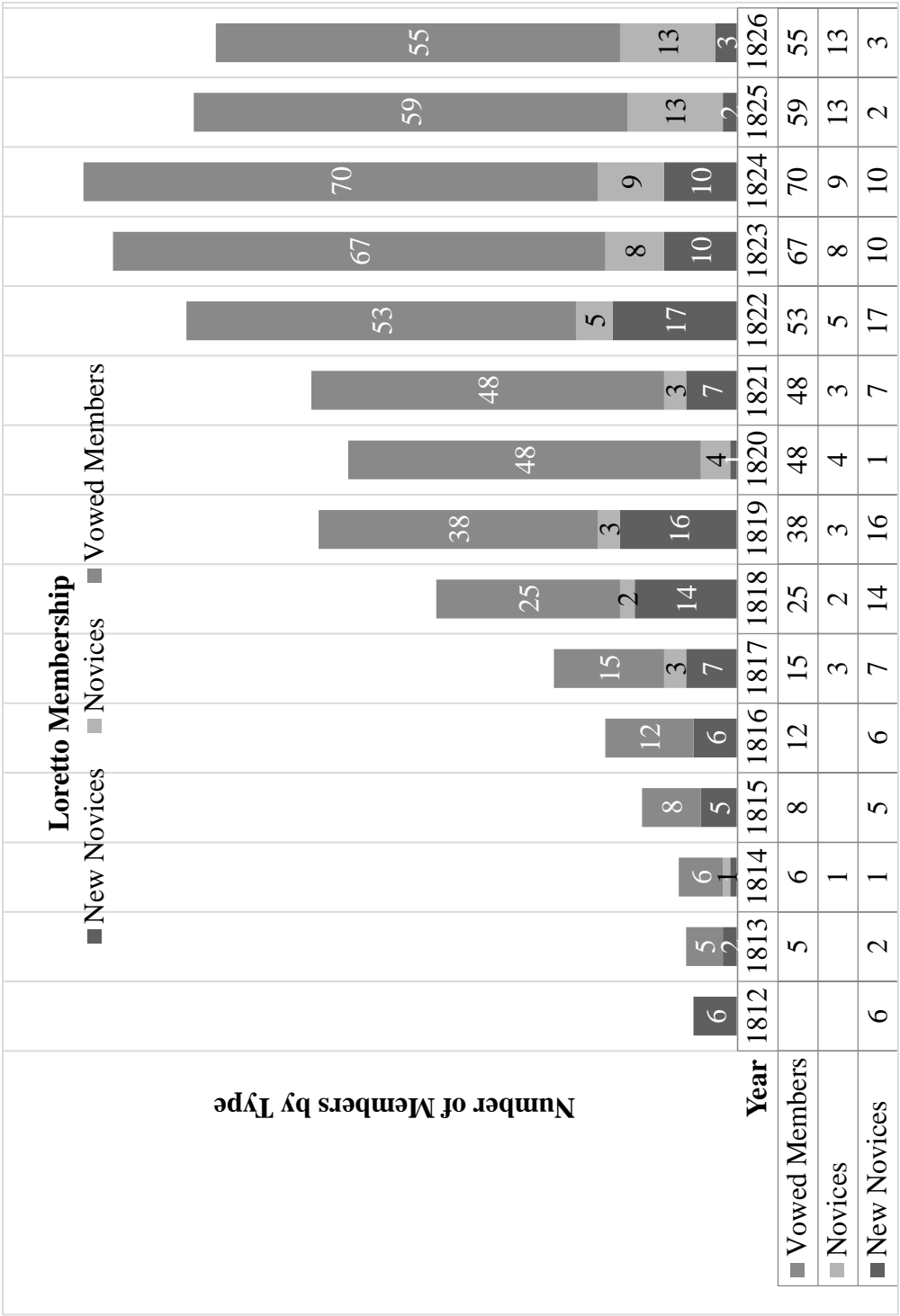


Figure 3

Source: Calculated from “Register, Sisters of Loretto,” Register box, vault, LHC.

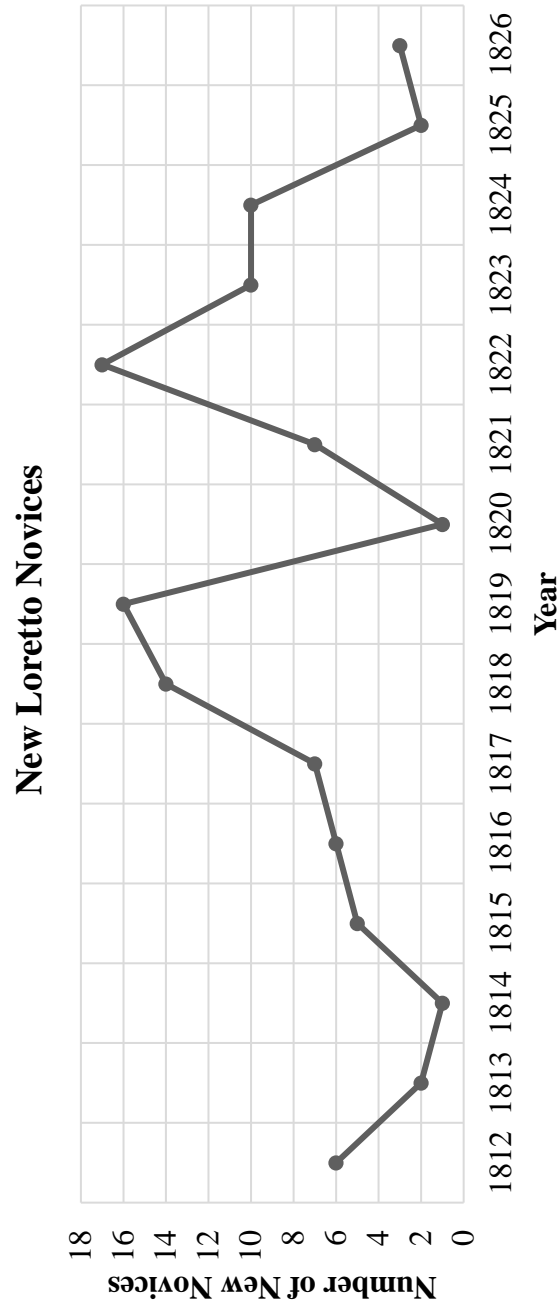


Figure 4

Source: Calculated from “Register, Sisters of Loretto,” Register box, vault, LHC.

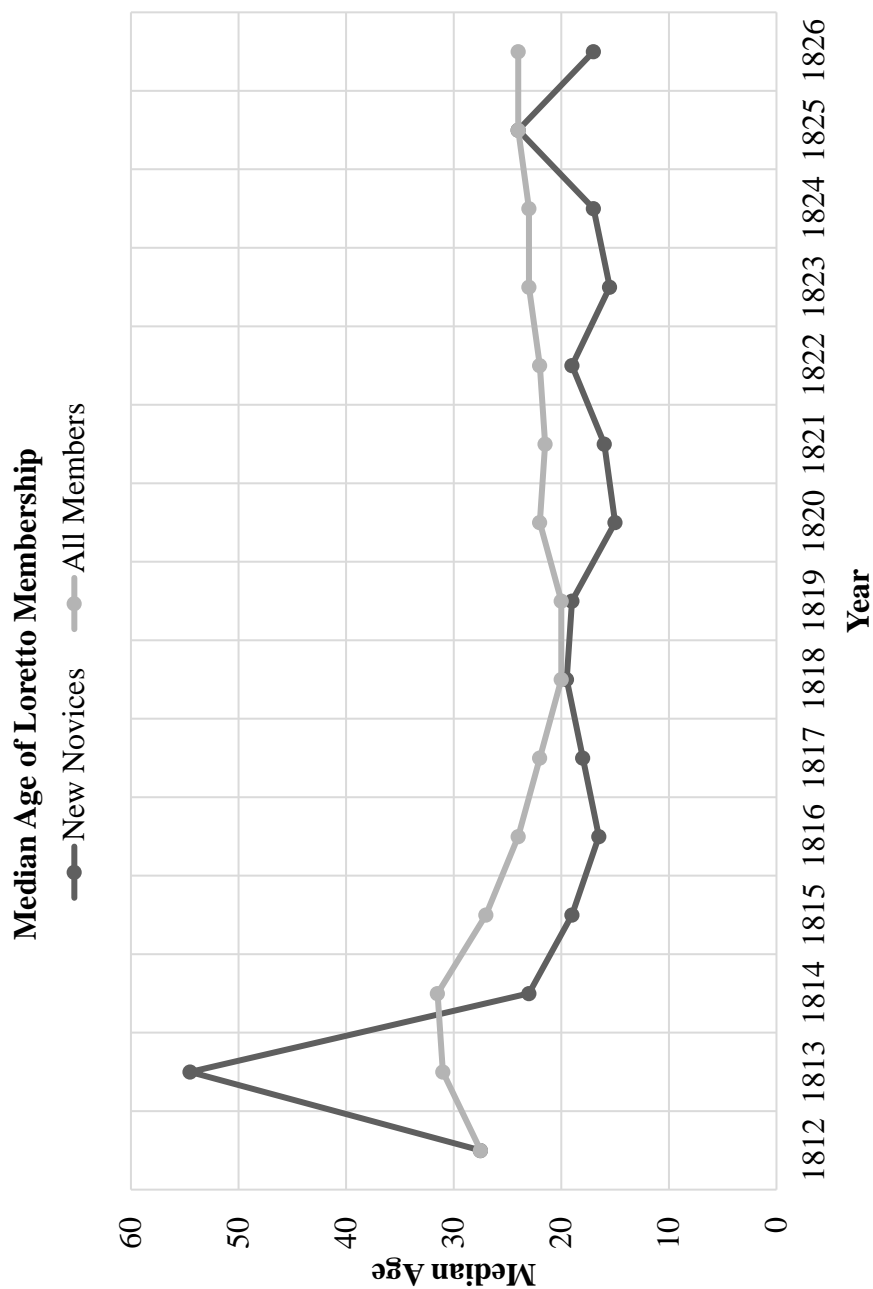


Figure 5

Source: Calculated from "Register, Sisters of Loretto," Register box, vault, LHC.

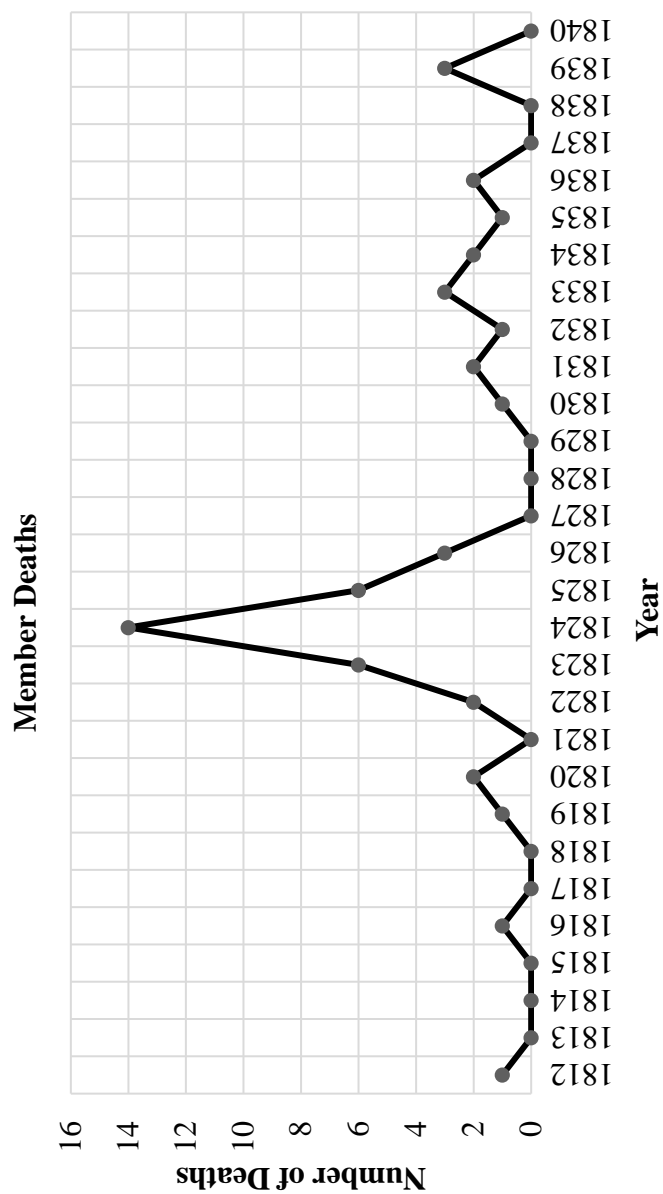


Figure 6

Source: Mortuary List Ledger, 138-139, Mortuary List box, LHC.

Annual Member Deaths per Location

Year	Bethlehem, MO	Bethania, KY	Calvary, KY	Gethsemani, KY	Loretto, KY	Mt. Olivet, KY
1820	n/a	n/a	1	1	0	n/a
1821	n/a	0	0	0	0	n/a
1822	n/a	0	0	2	1	n/a
1823	0	3	1	1	1	n/a
1824	1	5	3	1	4	0
1825*	0	2	0	1	0	1
1826	1	0	1	0	0	1

Figure 7

* Death locations unrecorded for two members in 1825

Source: Mortuary List Ledger, 138-139, Mortuary List box, LHC

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George C. Herring Award, Kentucky Association of Teachers of History, October 2017

History Department Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Louisville, August 2015 - May 2016

History Department Travel Fund Recipient, University of Louisville, December 2015

Public History Program Graduate Assistantship, University of Louisville, August 2014 - May 2015

Department of History Outstanding Senior, Murray State University, May 2014

Honors Program Outstanding Senior, Murray State University, May 2014

Hester College Academic Achievement Award, Murray State University, May 2014

Who's Who Among Students in American Universities & Colleges, Murray State University, 2013-2014

T. Wayne Beasley Award, Murray State University, Spring 2012

Trustee Scholarship, Murray State University, August 2010 - May 2014

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:

“‘It is Doubtful Whether He is Entitled to the Protection of the Law’: Free Blacks in Early National Mercer County, Kentucky,” paper, Ohio Valley History Conference, Richmond, KY, October 2015

“African American Slaveholders in Kentucky: Motivations and Identities,” paper, Kentucky Honors Roundtable, Newport, KY, Fall 2013

“Irish and German Catholic Immigrant Women: A Comparison of Their Lives in Nineteenth Century America,” poster, Kentucky Honors Roundtable, Frankfort, KY, Spring 2011

INVITED PRESENTATIONS:

“American Catholicism, 1780s-1830s,” Religion in American History Guest Lecture, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, April 2016

“Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS): An Introduction,” brown bag session, University of Louisville History Department, Louisville, KY, November 2015

“Memory, Slavery, and the Catholic Church: A Critique of Sister Joan Campbell’s *Loretto: An Early American Congregation in the American South*,” paper, Loretto Motherhouse, Nerinx, KY, August 2015

PUBLIC HISTORY EXPERIENCE:

H. F. L. Boehl Summer Intern, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY, July 2017 - September 2017

Archival Intern, Archives and Special Collections, University of Louisville, January 2017 - June 2017

Graduate Research Associate, Civil War Governors of Kentucky Digital Documentary Edition, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, October 2016 - August 2017

Graduate Oral History Collections Intern, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, June 2016 - September 2016

Research and Archival Intern, Loretto Heritage Center, Nerinx, KY, May 2015 - October 2015

Oral History Contractor, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, May 2015 - June 2015

Oral History Intern, Pogue Library, Murray State University, January 2014 - May 2014

Intern, Wrather West Kentucky Museum, Murray, KY, August 2012 - December 2012

Seasonal Intern, Ephraim McDowell House Museum, Danville, KY, May 2011 - August 2013

SERVICE:

Commissioned Artifact Photographer, published in Ann Taylor Allen, *The Transatlantic Kindergarten: Education and Women's Movements in Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)

Student Participant, Digital Humanities Hackathon Planning Group, University of Louisville, September 2016 - March 2017

Participant, Kentucky Oral History Commission Strategic Planning Meeting, September 2016

History Department Alternate Representative, Graduate Student Council, University of Louisville, August 2016 - April 2017

History Department Representative, Graduate Student Network in Arts and Sciences, University of Louisville, April 2015 - April 2017

Annual Meeting Volunteer, American Association for State and Local History, September 2015

Annual Meeting Volunteer Photographer, National Council on Public History, April 2015, photograph published in the *Public*

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History Day Judge, Kentucky Historical Society, March 2015

Vice President, Honors Program Student Council, Murray State University, April 2013 - April 2014

President, Omicron Delta Kappa Honor Society, May 2013 - May 2014

President, Alpha Chi Honor Society, May 2012 - May 2014

First Year Leader, Hester Residential College, Murray State University, August 2012 - May 2013