

« A GOOD MAN BUT CRAZY ON SOME POINTS »

FATHER THOMAS FARRELL AND LIBERAL CATHOLICISM IN 19th-CENTURY NEW YORK

Introduction

On July 19, 2000, the Archdiocese of New York celebrated its sesquicentennial as a metropolitan see. Although a tyro by European standards, during the past 150 years it has been the most important archdiocese in the United States for a variety of reasons. First of all, for most of that period, it was the most populous and reputedly the wealthiest see in the country. Moreover, early in its history, the Archdiocese of New York emerged as a bellwether and model for American Catholicism by becoming a bastion of ecclesiastical and political conservatism.

The tone was set by the first Archbishop of New York, John Hughes (1842-1864), who established an authoritarian regime that allowed little place for the participation of the clergy or laity in the governance of the Church. When some Irish-American priests in New York urged him to follow proper canonical procedures, Hughes reportedly said that « he would teach them [County] Monaghan canon law: he would send them back to the bogs whence they came ». Another New York priest quoted Hughes as saying that « there was no canon law in this country ». (1) John Hughes also promoted a robust ultramontane ecclesiology which made not only the Roman primacy, but also the temporal power of the Roman pontiffs, the litmus test of orthodoxy. Hughes' ultramontanism was shared by the great majority of New York Catholics, clerical and lay alike. The more vociferously that anti-Catholic bigots like the « Know Nothings » denounced the Papacy, the more strongly Catholics reacted by exalting the role of the Papacy in the Church.

(1) ARCHIVES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK (Hereafter AANY), *Burt-sell Diary* July 26, 1865.