The history of Catholic education in the United States

PLENARY COUNCILS OF BALTIMORE AND MASS CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION FROM EUROPE
What does Plenary mean?

Unlike a synod, which can take place in a diocese or Archdiocese, a Plenary council includes bishops and representatives from every diocese in the country.

The Plenary Council was called for by a consensus among American bishops with permission from the Vatican.

There were actually 3 plenary councils: 1852, 1856, 1884.

It was at the third council that the largest independent school system in American history was created: American Catholic schools.
PLENARY COUNCILS OF BALTIMORE

- Was the cultural reality for Catholics in the United States when the Councils were called? Catholics were:
  - majority immigrants
  - The majority spoke the language of the land of their birth
  - With few exceptions, were poor;
  - RESULT of their culture reality:
    - XENOPHOBIA
    - ANTI-CATHOLIC SENTIMENT
    - ATTEMPT TO INTEGRATE CATHOLIC CHILDREN INTO PUBLIC SCHOOLS which promoted Protestant values
PLENARY COUNCILS OF BALTIMORE

- Why BALTIMORE:
  - First Catholic Diocese in the United States
  - Founded by a Catholic, Cecil Calvert, second Lord Baltimore of the Irish House of Lords and founding proprietor of the Province of Maryland
  - “Baltimore” comes from Baile an Tí Mhóir, meaning “town of the big house”
  - First Bishop of Baltimore: John Carroll
  - First Catholic College: Georgetown Academy
When New York, Boston and Philadelphia were made dioceses, Baltimore was made an archdiocese. (1808)

Before the Councils were called, there was a recognition that Catholic children in public schools were being flooded with "inaccurate knowledge on Catholicism," such as usage of the term popery. Protestant-run common schools were causing Catholic children to fall from their faith.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric, offered by many politicians, entered into public or "common" schools. There was a fear that Catholics, with their allegiance to a foreign pope, would undermine American democracy.
PLENARY COUNCILS OF BALTIMORE

- Sentiment: to “Americanize” the increasing number of foreign immigrants, their children should be “Protestantized.”
- (There had been some violence between working class Catholics and Protestants)
- “to see that those frequenting public school do not use the Protestant version of the Bible or sing sectarian hymns... [and that they] employ their influence against the introduction of such practices into the public schools.” (This incited some Protestant Americans)
- declared “bishops are exhorted to have a Catholic school in every parish and the teachers should be paid from the parochial funds.”
- Bishops were further recommended to “begin these schools whenever possible in their dioceses, since Catholic boys and girls are in grave danger in educational institutions which are not directed by [Catholic] religious motives.”
St. John Neumann, consecrated as Bishop of Philadelphia in the same year as the first Council, was the first American bishop to organize an official diocese-sponsored school system. Under his leadership, Philadelphia again became the leader of Catholic education in the United States.

After the First Council of Baltimore, there were protests by Protestants in Philadelphia, NY and Boston out of fear that Catholics were becoming increasingly influential and that their schools were one means to promote such “dangerous” influence.

Massachusetts created a law in 1855 requiring compulsory reading of the Protestant Bible alone in public schools.

As Catholic schools opened, Catholics attempted to get public funding of their schools, which was usually rejected.
A new political party is established in reaction to growing Catholic influence (increasing Catholic immigration and the creation of Catholic schools)

“New American Party” – “Know Nothing Party”

Prevent Catholic voting

Suppress Catholic immigration

1855: had 75 delegates in U.S. Congress

Some successful attempts to strip Catholic churches of their land titles

Successful attempts to deny any public funding of Catholic schools
New American Party/ Know Nothing Party

- Native Americans. Beware of Foreign Influence.
- Help Wanted. No Irish Need Apply.
- American (Know-Nothing) Party:
  
  This party feared that Catholic immigrants from Germany and Ireland threatened Protestantism and democracy. By 1854, the party claimed a million members nationwide and led Jefferson Co. govt. They split over slavery and by the end of the Civil War they had vanished from politics in Louisville and Jefferson Co.

Philadelphia Nativist Riot: July 5, 1844
Attack on a Church rumored to be armed
THE PROPAGATION SOCIETY. MORE FREE THAN WELCOME.
The hand that would rob us of our freedom.

Curtain of Religion

Shall he be allowed to rule America?

Rome Suppressing Free Speech by Bloodshed

Campaign to Make America Catholic Brings About Sad Tragedy at Marshall, Texas—Ex-Priest Wm. Black Murdered in Cold Blood by Knights of Columbus—One Knight Killed and Another Fatally Wounded—Revival of Terrorist Tactics Indicates That Rome Prefers War to Peace
Intense anti-Catholic riots and violence:

- i.e. Louisville KY: “Bloody Monday” riots left 100+ dead
- Maine: priest was torn from rectory tarred, feathered and paraded around town
- Archbishop Hughes sent a letter in 1858 to the Holy See, noting that even non-Catholic immigrants openly proclaimed “that there was no hope of freedom for the downtrodden people of Europe until the Catholic Church and its clergy, from the Pope downwards, should be overthrown, and if necessary, annihilated.”
Bloody Monday riots

Election day, Aug. 6, 1855, known as Bloody Monday due to riots led by "Know-Nothing" mobs. This political party was anti-Catholic and nativist. Attacks on German immigrants east of downtown and Irish in the west caused at least 22 deaths, arson, and looting. Catholic Cathedral of the Assumption & St. Martin's Church were threatened with destruction.
Degree from 2nd Council included:

- a call for Catholic teachers working in public schools to be employed in parish schools whenever possible,
- parochial schools “should be erected in every parish.”
- for those parents who could not afford the cost of Catholic schools, “catechism classes should be instituted in the churches,” “especially in preparation for First Holy Communion and Confirmation.”
CATHOLIC IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

- Radical increase in Catholic population:
  - 1776: 24,000
  - 1850: 1.7 million
  - 1866: 2.5 million
  - 1870: 3.55 million
  - 1890: 7.3 million
  - 1920: 17 million (6,500 parochial schools)
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS INCREASE

1875: President Grant’s “annual message to Congress recommended a constitutional amendment prohibiting...the “granting of any school funds or school taxes...for the benefit or in aid, directly or indirectly, of any religious sect or denomination”

Congressman James Blaine proposes “Blaine Amendment” which passes congress, failed in the Senate by 4 votes, but adopted eventually by 34 states.

1880s: public schools begin removing (Protestant) religion from curriculum

Bishop of Cincinnati: “all pastors are bound, under pain of mortal sin, to provide a Catholic school in every parish or congregation subject to them.”
FACT:
Blaine Amendments are found in 37 state constitutions.
3rd Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1875 stated: “we not only exhort Catholic parents…but we command them with all the authority in our power, to procure a truly Christian education for their dear offspring…[and] send them to Catholic…schools,” unless they otherwise obtained permission from their local bishop.

Promoted the establishment of Catholic High Schools

1900: 100 Catholic High Schools in the US (1873: Incarnate Word Academy; 1900: St. Thomas High School in Houston!)

1920: 1500 Catholic High Schools in the US

Given that not every parish could support a high school, What became the #1 name for a Catholic high school in the United States?
HOUSTON

The Early Years (1878-1905)
Next week (Thursday, April 30):

- Bringing Catholic schools to record enrollments: the hard work of religious sisters, brothers and priests.
89% of American children who attended a private elementary school were enrolled in a Catholic school in 1965.

Source: “Who Goes to Private School?” Education Next, Fall 2018