

# The Associates World

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## Evening With Fr. Hecker

### Mother Church Hosts Hecker Bicentennial Event

To help mark the bicentennial of the birth of Paulist founder, Servant of God Isaac Hecker (1819-1888), the Paulist Mother Church, St. Paul the Apostle in New York City hosted “An Evening for Fr. Hecker.” on Sunday October 20.

The evening featured a talk Patrick Hayes, archivist for the Redemptorists order, called “Isaac Hecker, Spiritual Savant: The Redemptorist Years, 1845 – 1858.”

The evening also included the debut of a new organ composition by St. Paul’s organist Daniel Ficarri. The piece, entitled “Visions of the Holy Spirit,” depicts five specific visions of the Spirit that Fr. Hecker recorded in his diary.



St. Paul's organist Daniel Ficarri performs the piece he wrote for the bicentennial celebration



Redemptorist archivist Patrick Hayes chats with Frank Desiderio, C.S.P. after his talk at the Hecker celebration

## Isaac Hecker: The Search Continues

The third installment of a talk given as part of the Hecker Bicentennial Pilgrimage to Saint Patrick's Old Cathedral: The Continuing Significance of Isaac Hecker's Early Life and Vocational Discernment on May 17, 2019.

*By Fr. Ron Franco, C.S.P.*

There were two 2 phases or movements to Hecker's Search:

The first, of course, was his 1842-1844 search for Church, discerning which Church, culminating in Conditional Baptism, First Confession and First Communion at Old Saint Patrick's.

As far as we know, first exposure to Catholic Mass was on Easter Sunday 1843. The way he described the experience shows that this was always more than an intellectual journey. In his *Diary*, he wrote of how he found the experience "impressively affecting." He was especially struck by how the priest pointed ... to a painting of Christ's rising from the tomb "with a few touching remarks turning all eyes towards it which made his remarks doubly affective."

In the process, he became convinced that the Church offered the solution both to his personal problems and to society's social and political problems.

Continuing his inner exploration and comparative study of different churches, Hecker (as already noted) studied the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* and was especially impressed by Article IX, on the doctrine of the communion of saints. Then, in June 1844, Orestes Brownson suddenly announced his intention to become a Catholic. A few days later, Hecker visited the Bishop of Boston and his coadjutor, who in turn gave him a letter of introduction to the Coadjutor Bishop of New York, John McCloskey, who received Hecker into the Roman Catholic Church on August 1, 1844. On the following day, he made his first confession.

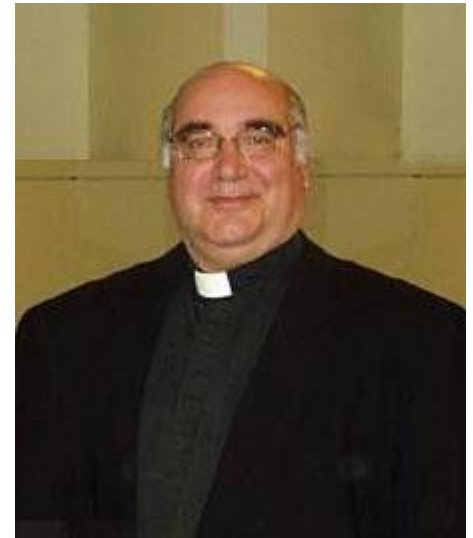
The second movement to Hecker's spiritual search was what followed in the year after his conversion. From 1844 to 1845, he had to discern his vocation within the Church, how to live out this new experience which he believed was not just for him but for the whole country.

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

*Here let me offer myself to Thee for Thy service oh Lord. Is it not what I should? ... O let me offer myself in a greater degree than I have ever done for the Good of the Kind of which I am a part.*

Hecker's immediate practical task as a new Catholic was to resolve his vocation within the Church. Very quickly this became a question of whether to become a diocesan priest or to join what he imagined was the more challenging and demanding life of a religious order. Once framed that way, the outcome was not big surprise. But which order?

Very importantly for the success of his future work, Isaac's brother George joined the Catholic Church during that year, and the two of them received the sacrament of confirmation together at Saint



Patrick's Old Cathedral on May 18, 1845. He took as his confirmation name Thomas, after Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Around the same time, he met two other new Catholics, James McMaster and Clarence Walworth, both former Episcopalians, who were planning to travel to Europe to enter the Redemptorist novitiate in Belgium. Once again, he followed the lead of trusted friends and decided to join them. He took an overnight train to Baltimore, showed up at the Redemptorist house at 4:00 a.m., and met with the Provincial after morning Mass. Having persuaded the Provincial that he knew enough Latin, he was accepted on the spot – on the first anniversary of his baptism. Taking the morning train back to New York, he said a quick goodbye to his family, then set sail for his new life in Europe. In the words of one of recent biographer, “at the most crucial moments of his life, leaving home, entering the church, joining a religious order, Hecker acted suddenly and decisively and never turned back.”

Hecker was nothing if not decisive!

In a letter to Brownson a week earlier, Hecker had expressed “the need of being under stronger Catholic influences than are so far as my experience goes in this country.” Thanks to his Redemptorist formation, his spirituality underwent what one biographer has called “a thorough catholicizing process.”

Despite difficulties with his studies, what he himself described as a “helpless inactivity of mind in matters of study” that made him “a puzzle” both to himself and to superiors, Hecker found in religious life what one biographer called “a conceptual structure to make sense of his own experience.” In the Ignatian spirituality of, for example, Louis Lallement, he found confirmed his sense of the presence of God in his daily life.

His academic difficulties continued to present a problem; but, convinced that he had a vocation to labor for the conversion of his non-Catholic fellow countrymen, he successfully persuaded his superiors that, if left to study at his own pace, he could yet “acquire sufficient knowledge to be ordained a priest.” Regarding this “supernatural detention of his faculties,” a Jesuit once asked me if Paulists believe Hecker’s explanation of his inability to study. I replied that much more important was that his Redemptorist superiors trusted him and allowed him to continue and be ordained.

He went to England to finish his formation at the Redemptorist house in Clapham, where, on October 23, 1849, he was ordained a priest. Six months later, he preached his first sermon; and, after a brief period ministering as a priest in London, he was sent back to the United States as part of a new English-speaking, Redemptorist mission band, which included Clarence Walworth and two other American ex-Protestants, Augustine Hewit and Francis Baker. On March 19, 1851, the 31-year old Father Hecker was home in New York – in his old neighborhood, at the Redemptorist house on East 3rd Street.

So, what was Hecker looking for in each phase? What did he find? And what stayed with him?

In 19th-century Europe, the Church was struggling to survive as an institution against an increasingly liberal, irreligious political order. It sought to counteract the social fragmentation associated with liberalism and to reconnect increasingly isolated individuals into a community by preserving, repairing, and restoring religious bonds. Their way to do this was to assert the Church’s claims to authority as vigorously as possible and to insist upon its political privileges and institutional rights in relation to the state.

In contrast to that time-honored political approach of the union of throne and altar, Hecker's alternative saw in the American experience a social solution in which citizens - converted to Catholicism and thus more fully opened to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their lives - would combine true religion and democratic political institutions. Thus, at his very first audience with Blessed Pope Pius IX, on December 22, 1857, in response to the Pope's concern about factional strife in the United States, "in which parties get each other by the hair," Hecker confidently replied that "the Catholic truth," once known, "would come between" parties "and act like oil on troubled waters."

In one of his last Catholic World articles, published in the year he died, Hecker, quoting an anonymous acquaintance, said "he didn't care for union of church and state if he could have union of church and people." Such comments convey how important the transformation of society through the conversion of individuals was for Hecker, and how he confidently expected this to accomplish what others looked for in politics.

The unique role of religion in American society was one of Tocqueville's most important observations. "There is no country in the whole world," Tocqueville famously concluded, "in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America; and there can be no greater proof of its utility, and of its conformity to human nature, than that its influence is most powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth, ... In the United States religion ...directs the manners of the community, and by regulating domestic life, it regulates the State."

*(Fr. Franco's description of Hecker's journey will conclude in the December issue of Associates World.)*

## **Renewing Promises and Updating Lists of Associates**

We are always happy to hear about new Associates taking promises as well as current Paulists renewing theirs. Please post notices and photos on Facebook and let us know so we can add the information in this newsletter.

When these renewals take place, it would be helpful to all if the local coordinator would send an updated list of Associates to Kathleen Lossau so she can keep our contact list current. Please email contact information for those taking first promises and those renewing promises as well as a list of those who have opted not to renewing promises to Kathleen Lossau <klossau@austin.rr.com>.

## **Looking for Newsletter Input**

New material for Associates World is always welcome. We would love to hear what is going on with your local organization. If you have material for the newsletter please contact Denis Hurley <dhpc18@gmail.com>.



## Upcoming Pilgrimages, Retreats, Events

### Landings 40th Anniversary Pilgrimage to Rome - April 28-May 3, 2020

Visits to the Vatican Museum, Catacombs of Santa Priscilla, Tre Fontane, and St. Paul's Outside the Walls. Possibility of private audience with Pope Francis or Mass with Pope Francis. Daily conference on reconciling and welcoming returning Catholics. Pilgrimage limited to 20 registrants. Full details will be posted here and will be e-mailed to Landings International and Paulist Pilgrimages newsletter subscribers as they become available.



### The Splendors of Eastern Europe and Oberammergau - Sep 19-Oct 1, 2020

An 11-day pilgrimage with Paulist Father Thomas A. Kane on an unforgettable pilgrimage to Eastern Europe. See the once-a-decade performance of the world-famous Oberammergau passion play and explore the breathtaking cities of Budapest, Prague, and Vienna.



It is with great pleasure and excitement that I invite you to join us on our Splendors of Eastern Europe and Oberammergau pilgrimage with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attend the world famous Passion Play in 2020. The villagers of Oberammergau first performed the play in 1634 in fulfillment of their promise to God for sparing them from the Black Plague, and it has been presented there every ten years since then. Our journey will take us to some of

Europe's most interesting countries including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and Germany. The scenery is absolutely spectacular as we travel through the plains and valleys of the magnificent Eastern European countryside. The points of interest are very diverse, spotlighting historical places and natural wonders. We will also celebrate the liturgy in some wonderful churches along the way.

## Proposed Program for This Month

*Submitted by David Rooney, Paulist Associate, Chicago.*

*(It is strongly suggested during the Bicentennial Year of Hecker's Birth that all groups follow the basic theme for the designated month as taken from Isaac Hecker for Every Day edited by Ronald Franco, C.S.P.)*

### SUGGESTED READING (AHEAD OF MEETING):

The Paulist Vocation, Chapter 12: Personal Sanctification of the Paulist and His Standard of Perfection

### OPENING PRAYER:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who, by the light of the Holy Spirit, instructed the hearts of the faithful, grant that, by the same Spirit, we may know what is right and always rejoice in the Spirit's consolation, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### THEME: HECKER'S PERSONAL AND PAULIST SPIRITUALITY

### FROM THE WRITINGS OF FATHER HECKER:

The main purpose of each Paulist must be the attainment of personal perfection by the practice of those virtues without which it cannot be secured—mortification, self-denial, detachment, and the like. By the use of these means the grace of God makes the soul perfect. The perfect soul is one which is guided instinctively by the indwelling Holy Spirit. To attain to this is the end always to be aimed at in the practice of the virtues just named. (*The Paulist Vocation*, 124-5)

*Second*, zeal for souls: to labor for the conversion of the country to the Catholic faith by apostolic work. Parish work is a part, an integral part, of Paulist work, but not its principal or chief work; and parish work should be done so as to form a part of the main aim, the conversion of the non-Catholic people of the country. In this manner we can labor to raise the standard of Catholic life here and throughout the world as a means of the general triumph of the Catholic faith. (*The Paulist Vocation*, 125)

Individuality is an integral and conspicuous element in the life of the Paulist. This must be felt. One of the natural signs of the true Paulist is that he would prefer to suffer from the excesses of liberty rather than from the arbitrary actions of tyranny. The individuality of a [person] cannot be too strong, or [their] liberty too great, when [they are] guided by the Spirit of God. (*The Paulist Vocation*, 127)

### SHARE WITHIN YOUR GROUP:

**How do you see Hecker's standards reflective in our Associates' groups? Do his writings change or influence your views toward spirituality? Which standard element, from the three that Hecker writes about is most relatable to your experience? Are there other standards you believe as essential to personal spirituality?**

### CLOSING PRAYER:

Send the fire of your Holy Spirit deep within us, Lord, so that we can serve you with devotion and please you with our hearts, minds, and actions. We pray this through Christ our Lord. Amen

## Contacts

### PAULIST ASSOCIATES WEB SITE

<http://www.paulist.org/associates/paulist-associates>

### FIND US ON FACEBOOK



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/paulistassociates/>

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## PRAYER FOR THE INTERCESSION OF FATHER ISAAC T. HECKER, SERVANT OF GOD

Heavenly Father, you called your servant Isaac Thomas Hecker to preach the Gospel to the people of North America and through his teaching, to know the peace and the power of your indwelling Spirit. He walked in the footsteps of Saint Paul the Apostle, and like Paul spoke your Word with a zeal for souls and a burning love for all who came to him in need.

Look upon us this day, with compassion and hope. Hear our prayer. We ask that through the intercession of Father Hecker your servant, you might grant us (state the request).

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. One God, forever and ever. Amen.

When you pray this prayer, and if you believe that you have received any favors through Hecker's intercession, please contact the Office of the Cause for Canonization of Servant of God, Isaac Hecker at [heckercause@paulist.org](mailto:heckercause@paulist.org). Visit the web site: <http://www.isaachecker.org/> to learn more about his life and the cause for his canonization.



ISAAC THOMAS HECKER

## PAULIST ASSOCIATES PROMISE

*I believe that I am drawn by the Holy Spirit to the spirituality and qualities of the Paulist Community.*

*I have discerned both by prayer and study that God calls me to become associated with the Paulists.*

*I promise that I will pray for the works of the Paulist Society, meet with others, who are also members of the Paulist Associates, for spiritual sharing and formation; and I seek to embody the apostolic qualities of the Paulists in my daily life.*

*Attentive to the Holy Spirit and faithful to the example of St. Paul and the charism of Father Isaac Hecker,*

*I commit myself for one year of membership in the Paulist Associates.*