“Daniel Rudd: Calling a Church to Justice is an engaging introduction for those who have never heard of Daniel Rudd and a fascinating study for those who already know a good deal about the man and his mission. Using Daniel Rudd’s newspaper, The American Catholic Tribune, as his primary source, Gary Agee allows readers to hear in Rudd’s own words why he was committed both to the Catholic Church and the African American community, and learn how Rudd came to his absolute conviction that Catholicism truly lived, understood, and applied was the best chance for justice for people of African descent in the United States. Daniel Rudd is one of the most intriguing and inspiring U.S. Catholics of the 19th century. Agee’s book helps us to see why this is so.”

—Cecilia A. Moore  
University of Dayton

“Black Catholicism is personified in the life and legacy of Daniel Rudd. Gary Agee masterfully chronicles the successes and struggles, the opportunities and obstacles that Rudd encountered as he made his mark on both the Church and society as newspaper publisher, founder of the Black Catholic Congress movement and advocate for racial justice. Present-day Black Catholics are forever indebted to the nascent visionary actions of Daniel Rudd.”

—Rev. Maurice J. Nutt, CSsR, DMin  
Director, Institute for Black Catholic Studies  
Xavier University of Louisiana
People of God
Remarkable Lives, Heroes of Faith

People of God is a series of inspiring biographies for the general reader. Each volume offers a compelling and honest narrative of the life of an important twentieth- or twenty-first-century Catholic. Some living and some now deceased, each of these women and men has known challenges and weaknesses familiar to most of us but responded to them in ways that call us to our own forms of heroism. Each offers a credible and concrete witness of faith, hope, and love to people of our own day.

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Acknowledgments

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In May of 1890, *The Christian Soldier*, an African American newspaper published from Lexington, Kentucky, declared “Dan A. Rudd of the Catholic Tribune” to be “the greatest negro Catholic in America.” If you do not know the name Daniel Arthur Rudd, you will find yourself in the company of many Catholics who have yet to discover this visionary’s important contribution to the Catholic Church and to the cause of social justice in the United States. Over the past few years, however, more and more attention has been paid to Rudd as the church has become increasingly aware of the contributions of the persons making up the rich diversity within her. It is to the credit of historians including David Spalding, CFX; Cyprian Davis, OSB; and Joseph Lackner, SM; that Rudd’s life and work have been uncovered for succeeding generations to consider.

I first became acquainted with Daniel Rudd while working to complete a reading course on black Catholics in the United States. Having an interest in the scourge of racism infecting the American church, I found Rudd’s critique of the country’s drift toward Jim Crow and racial segregation compelling. His insistence that the Catholic Church would play a leading role in the recognition of the full equality of African Americans was unique among black journalists of
his era. Rudd promoted this church-centered program of justice in his weekly newspaper, the *American Catholic Tribune*, published from 1886–1897. Because of my interest in Rudd’s life and work, his understanding of justice became the subject of my PhD dissertation completed at the University of Dayton in 2008. This present biography is the fruit of that research.

It is fitting that the “People of God” series of biographies honoring important twentieth- and twenty-first-century Catholics would make room for a volume on Rudd; he is deserving of such attention. His success as a newspaper proprietor places him among the most able black journalists of his day. At the height of its popularity in 1892, as many as ten thousand copies of the *American Catholic Tribune* (*ACT*) were being distributed across the Midwest and eastern United States. In fact, Rudd’s newspaper seems to have been so successful that in 1893 he would be called on to serve as president of the Afro-American Press Association,² an organization made up of the proprietors of the two hundred or so black newspapers being published at that time.

Also important to Rudd’s legacy were his visionary efforts to bring Catholics together in order to address the challenges facing African Americans both in the church and in society. To this end, he worked to establish the Colored Catholic Congress movement that held its first gathering in Washington, DC, in 1889. The movement would go on to hold five congresses in the nineteenth century. This organization was established to aid members of the Catholic clergy (overwhelmingly white) in their efforts to evangelize African Americans. A bold and sometimes more controversial aspect of the work of the congress was to address the grievances of black Catholics, including those occasioned by instances of racial discrimination within the Catholic Church. This
more contentious aspect of the work sometimes brought the congress movement into conflict with church leaders. Evidence from the ACT also seems to show Rudd may have been the primary instigator behind the formation of the Congress of Lay Catholics movement, an interracial initiative that sought to harness the gifts and talents of the laity for use in the work of the Catholic Church in the United States. In honor of the centennial of the establishment of the American church, the first meeting of the Congress of Lay Catholics was held in Baltimore in November 1889.

As a result of his work, Rudd won the confidence and praise of many important Catholic Church leaders both within the United States and abroad. Some of these individuals include Cardinal James Gibbons, archbishop of Baltimore; Cardinal Henry Edward Manning of Westminster, England; and Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, archbishop of Carthage and Algiers and primate of Africa. This is not to say that Rudd did not have his critics. For example, Joseph R. Slattery, the head of the American Josephites and the unofficial leader of the African American apostolate in the United States, worked at times to undermine Rudd’s ministry, demonstrating that he had little confidence in the editor. Yet after extensive study, it appears this lack of confidence may have owed more to a streak of paternalism in Slattery than to any real deficiency in Rudd.

Throughout Rudd’s ministry he retained a positive view of the Catholic Church. In his editorials and speeches he communicated a persevering hope that the church would live up to its egalitarian ideals. Even when this divine institution denied educational opportunities to black students or was slow to ordain African American priests, Rudd remained faithful, placing the blame for the racial prejudice he encountered among his coreligionists on wayward individuals.
within the flock rather than on the official doctrine of his beloved church.

Rudd’s confidence in the Catholic Church showed itself in his efforts to evangelize African Americans. His newspaper, the ACT, was published to recommend the Catholic faith to black Americans, the vast majority of whom attended Protestant churches during the period. But Rudd’s faithfulness to Catholicism did not get in the way of his close collaboration with religious leaders of other denominational groups. In this regard he was a man ahead of his time. When there was a perceived injustice that called for redress, for example the lynching of a member of the black community, Rudd could be found among his Protestant brothers and sisters, standing shoulder to shoulder, adding his voice to a chorus protesting the injustice.

Though a study of Rudd’s life and work is a worthy project, such an undertaking must not lead one to believe Rudd was the only noteworthy, nonwhite Catholic of his generation. A critical study of Christian history reminds us of the fact that individuals from nondominant groups, persons of color, women, and those whose earnings place them in the lowest economic income strata, have sometimes been slighted by historians. Daniel Rudd was part of a larger, active, albeit sometimes overlooked, black Catholic community.

Some other notable black Catholics making up this community include Bishop James Augustine Healy, the second bishop of Portland, Maine, and the first of African American heritage in the United States; Father Augustus Tolton, the first openly recognized priest of African American descent; Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, who founded the country’s first black religious order, the Oblate Sisters of Providence; and Mother Mathilda Taylor Beasley who founded the Third Order of St. Francis, a group of African American sisters, a
school for black children, and subsequently an orphanage. More recent gifts to the church include, among others, Sister Beatrice Jefferies, vice president of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and Sister Thea Bowman of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

During the years Rudd published the ACT, he claimed there were not less than 200,000 black Catholics living in the United States. When individuals calculated a lesser figure, the editor pushed back. Rudd fought hard to defend his estimate because he wanted his readers, black and white, to realize African Americans were not an insignificant portion of the US Catholic population. Moreover, he wanted to make the case that large numbers of black seekers were moving into the church.

As with other Catholics of color, Rudd has been sometimes overlooked by historians. Though Cincinnati was the geographic center for much of Rudd’s work, he is not even mentioned in John H. Lamott’s History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821–1921. One is left with the question “why?” Because a key theme traced throughout the work is the spread of Catholicism throughout the region, Rudd’s evangelistic work among African Americans would seem a fitting bit of history to include. Perhaps Lamott did not know Rudd or his work. Or maybe the omission can be explained by the distance between blacks and whites within the church in the first decades of the twentieth century. On the other hand, it may be that the author simply did not think his white readers would have an interest in the African American apostolate.

A focus on Rudd and his promotion of justice is not simply a matter of learning history—Rudd’s dogged pursuit of justice seems relevant to the challenges facing twenty-first century society’s most vulnerable individuals, including
Daniel Rudd

people of color. Topics addressed 130 years ago in the ACT appear in today’s news cycle with disturbing regularity. Among these are racial and ethnic discrimination, voter access, fair wages, safe affordable housing, immigration policy, economic opportunity, and gender discrimination.

Rudd’s concern for the evangelization of people of color at the end of the nineteenth century also rings true to similar efforts being promoted by church leaders today. As a part of the New Evangelization initiative encouraged by Pope Benedict XVI, the US Catholic bishops have initiated a program meant to provide a welcome atmosphere to the broad spectrum of diverse peoples entering Catholic churches around the country. At a recent training event funded by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)—an event designed for trainers being equipped to promote intercultural competencies in parishes—I stumbled across a framed photo of Daniel Rudd prominently displayed in the session classroom. The presenter explained she was using the photo to illustrate the diversity within the Catholic Church.

The editor of the ACT trumpeted a similar message. He imagined the Catholic Church to be a universal body—one seeking to make room within her sanctuary for all races of people. Even as the nation moved headlong toward Jim Crow segregation, Rudd raised his voice in opposition to the discrimination being witnessed in the surrounding culture. He declared what he believed to be the foundational teaching of the church: the “Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man.” Familiar with Rudd’s campaign for racial justice, it was encouraging to see a section on racism had been included in the USCCB training manual titled Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers. The kind of advocacy for justice and racial equality mirrors the work Rudd believed the church might take up in his own day. The editor
of the ACT’s hopeful spirit attends the efforts of contemporary church leaders.

Telling the story of Daniel Rudd presents a number of challenges. For unlike other subjects in this “People of God” series whose biographical wanderings are easy to trace, Rudd’s are not. He left for posterity no journal or collection of biographical notes. Having no heirs to fill in gaps in what we don’t know of his life and work, we are sometimes left to speculate. But what Rudd did leave us are his letters, transcribed speeches, and more importantly his newspaper editorials. These we find printed in the extant issues of the ACT. At times his words are instructive, sometimes inspiring, and even challenging. They are important in that they give voice to a segment of the church from which little was heard during this period of time. It is for this reason that in this book, his words will be pushed to the fore. If we care to give him an ear we may yet hear him speak across the generations to our time, calling God’s faithful to take up the cause of justice.
CHAPTER ONE

Enslaved in Catholic Kentucky

Daniel Rudd was born in Bardstown, Kentucky, some forty miles southeast of Louisville. Catholics settled this portion of the Bluegrass State making the difficult journey from Maryland in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Church leaders believed this portion of the country would become a leading population center and established the first inland diocese to serve those adventurous pioneers settling the vast territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. As the community was being established, the inspiring steeple atop the Basilica of St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral was raised; the structure’s white columns made up the portico facing the road that ran through the community. Upon the basilica’s completion, one observer described the church as the “most stately and capricious house of worship in the state.” In the shadow of St. Joseph’s steeple a few hundred yards to the southeast, was “Anatok,” the estate of Charles and Matilda Haydon. Tax records indicate it was on this farm that young Daniel served as a slave. In 1858 the future editor of the American Catholic Tribune was four years old; at the time he was valued at $250.
The Commonwealth of Kentucky permitted its citizens to own slaves. Statistics show many Catholics did traffic in human beings. In 1810, of those living in the state’s most populated Catholic region, the Cartwright Creek area, 70 percent would own slaves at some point during their lives.\(^3\) Though some Catholics opposed the so-called “peculiar institution,” many saw no conflict of conscience between meeting religious obligations on the one hand and owning slaves on the other. Catholic teaching merely prescribed that slaves be treated humanely. Their religious needs were to be attended to; slaves were to be fed and clothed; and slave owners were not permitted to cruelly beat their charges. There is little evidence, however, to suggest Catholics treated their slaves any more humanely than did the region’s non-Catholic population.

Richard Rudd, the slaveholder who owned Daniel’s father, Robert Rudd, died in 1833. At the time of Richard’s death, his earthly possessions were divided to the satisfaction of the surviving heirs. Included among Richard’s earthly possessions was his livestock—33 oxen, 12 horses, 110 hogs, and 89 sheep. Also numbered among the holdings was a group of slaves including Daniel’s father, Robert. The entire slave lot was valued at $3,055.\(^4\)

Upon the death of the slaveholder, the fate of Robert and the eleven other slaves was in the hands of the heirs. How much thought went into the well-being of these unfortunate souls at this critical juncture is a matter of conjecture. When the maintenance of the peace among squabbling members of a slaveholding family hung in the balance, oftentimes the familial attachments among slaves were deemed less important. In the case of Daniel’s father, it was decided the slaves on Richard’s plantation would be divided into four “equal lots” each valuing $763.75. In the final reckoning no special provision was made to keep families together, but in one of
the lots it appears that a young mother and her seven-month-old child were indeed portioned off together. In two other lots, however, children under age ten were bequeathed with no adult woman in the group.⁵

Daniel’s parents, Robert and Eliza, appear to have been respected in Bardstown’s Catholic community. Records indicate Robert likely served as a sponsor to three African Americans baptized into the faith community.⁶ Born in 1807, Elizabeth (Eliza) Francis Smith Rudd, Daniel’s mother, was known to have been a pious woman.⁷ Following Eliza’s death, Fr. C. J. O’Connell delayed the funeral service because he wanted to be the one who conducted it. In the memorial service the church leader explained how Elizabeth had received the love and respect of the blacks and whites who knew her. He further declared, “If the colored people followed her saintly example there would be no race problem to vex and fret them.”⁸

Despite the respect earned by Robert and Eliza, the institution of slavery placed individuals in bonds in danger of exploitation of the worst kind. Census records indicate both Eliza and her son Daniel were *mulatto*. This term designates one who is of biracial ancestry. Was Eliza the offspring of a biracial relationship? Could Daniel’s birth have also been the result of such a union? The consummation of such a relationship was often not mutual. The mulatto designation leaves open the possibility that the Rudd family was forced to live with the ugly scars of sexual exploitation.

Daniel A. Rudd was born into slavery on August 7, 1854. As a result his future was not his own. Rudd’s God-given gifts—his dreams and ambitions—would all be subjected to the narrow economic interests of his master. Though he later reflected on his warm experiences in the Catholic Church of his youth, nowhere in the *American Catholic Tribune*
during the time he served as its proprietor did Rudd mention the Haydons. And in the 285 extant issues of his newspaper he did not write about his status as a slave. Perhaps the institution was in Rudd’s mind so degrading as to discourage any discussion of it. Or it is possible that drawing attention to the fact Rudd’s owners were Catholic may have worked against Rudd’s editorial agenda. Clues to Rudd’s feeling regarding owning slaves can nonetheless be found in select editorials published in the ACT.

Rudd advocated for the cause of slave reparations in his newspaper. In an editorial published November 18, 1887, he proposed a reparation plan to direct any surplus funds in the US treasury to former slaves as compensation for their unpaid toil. It would be “a step in the right direction” and would demonstrate the fact that the American people had indeed “repented for the crime of slavery . . . and the countless wrongs done the American Negro,” he explained. Rudd concluded that if the money could not be given directly to the survivors, it should be available to educate children in states in which emancipation had left segments of the population in an “abased state.”

Despite the inhumanity of such an economic arrangement, it appears the young Rudd was not impeded in his freedom to worship. Rudd’s parents and two of his brothers worked as sextons at the Proto-Cathedral in Bardstown. Rudd would later recall that at least one of them was engaged in maintenance duties continuously for sixty-five years. Rudd claimed he had been all over St. Joseph Church from foundation to pinnacle without ever being told to move.

Perhaps Rudd also joined in helping his parents maintain the house of worship. It appears clear that his love of the church was forged in these early years. He would subsequently write of his baptism: “The editor was baptized in
August 1854 at the same font where all the rest, white and black were baptized without discrimination except as who got there first.” Rudd expressed the same type of nostalgic sentiment when he spoke of his first communion: “The editor of the Tribune made his first communion there after the long course of study and instruction one must go through with prior to that event and during the time he and all the other Colored and white children sat together and when the late venerable Archbishop Spaulding, then bishop of Louisville . . . administered the sacrament of confirmation, The Tribune man knelt beside as fair a damsel as ever bowed before that rail and thought nothing of it.”

Daniel’s birth in 1854 coincided with a period of intense polarization in the United States. In this year, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed. The legislation essentially dismantled the Missouri Compromise by allowing each future state to vote on whether to enter the Union as a slave or free state. Many northerners were incensed. As slaveholders and opponents of the institution each sought to influence public opinion, clashes became violent. Passions were further enflamed in 1857 when the Dred Scott decision was handed down denying black residents the rights and protections extended to other citizens of the United States.

By Rudd’s seventh year the drumbeats of war had reached the peaceful town of Bardstown. In an effort to protect the important, inland port town of Louisville, the Tenth Indiana Infantry Regiment under the command of General Carlos Buell encamped near Rudd’s home. The Catholic community was called on to bake bread for the encamped soldiers. By the next spring the college students at St. Joseph College, many of whom held southern sympathies, had fled the campus thus freeing up the remaining Jesuits to work in other areas of ministry.
Closing the doors of the school, Fr. John S. Verdin, SJ, settled on two foci of ministry in need of immediate attention. First, convalescing soldiers from both armies needed medical care. Second, Verdin determined to address the lack of African American involvement in catechetical classes. Prior to this shift in focus, the leader of the Jesuit community had complained “catechetical instruction unsupported by other appeal, made but a feeble impression on the Negro mind.” But with the introduction of singing into the programming, which was added in June 1863, attendance increased dramatically.13 Daniel Rudd received his first communion that month.

Though Rudd did not in any detail reveal his early life in Bardstown, his warm remembrance of Fr. Verdin is telling. After running into him at a gathering in Saint Louis, Rudd wrote, “We had the great pleasure to meet our old instructor. . . . How well did we remember the musical sound of his kind voice. It seemed like childhood days again, when in Bardstown at Old St. Josephs we received words of counsel and listened to his matchless oratory.”14 Whether Verdin was simply Rudd’s spiritual instructor or served to teach the young Rudd a more comprehensive course of study is uncertain. In either case, in this caring relationship Rudd appears to have witnessed the best of the Catholic tradition. The editor’s early experiences in Bardstown forged within him a positive view of Catholicism. On the other hand, Rudd’s nostalgic memories of his days in the church of his youth were, on at least one occasion, called into question by an enquiring Catholic, a Canadian whose name was John L. Smith.15 In a letter to the editor subsequently published by Rudd, Smith reported he had heard the parish forced black members to sit in segregated seating. Rudd’s defense of the church of his youth though vigorous stopped short of denying Smith’s claim.16 Throughout his tenure as the
editor of the *American Catholic Tribune* Rudd would work to promote the Catholic Church among African Americans even as he goaded that same church to be more welcoming to members of the black community.