



**Directors of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions:  
2. Reverend Joseph A. Stephan, 1884-1901**

Kevin Abing, 1994

Brouillet's successor, Father Joseph A. Stephan, was known as the "fighting" priest. Perhaps the sobriquet derived from Stephan's Civil War experience. More likely, however, the name reflected Stephan's personality. Whereas Brouillet favored negotiation and compromise, Stephan actively sought confrontation. As director, Stephan infused the BCIM with a "new and aggressive energy."<sup>1</sup> Stephan's combativeness often served him and the Bureau well, but all too often, his stubbornness and volatile temper hindered the cause he served so faithfully. As Charles Lusk wrote, Stephan's "zeal for the Indians was unbounded and his courage great." But, Lusk mused, sometimes Stephan's "zeal might have been tempered with greater discretion."<sup>2</sup>

Joseph A. Stephan was born on November 22, 1822, at Gissigheim, in the duchy of Baden. His father was of Greek descent, and his mother was probably Irish.<sup>3</sup> As a youth, Stephan attended the village school in Gissigheim and later served an apprenticeship in the carpentry trade at Koenigsheim. Apparently, the life of a carpenter did not suit Stephan for he eventually joined the military, eventually becoming an officer under Prince Chlodwig K. Victor von Hohenlode. To further his military career, Stephan studied civil engineering at Karlsruhe Polytechnic Institute and philology at the University of Freiburg.<sup>4</sup>

While studying at Freiburg, disaster struck. From some unknown cause, Stephan was struck blind for two years. Similar to Saint Paul, Stephan turned to God during this trial. He reportedly pledged to become a priest if his eyesight returned. Stephan was true to his word. Upon his recovery, Stephan commenced studying scholastic philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1845. It was here that he heard some distressing news. In 1847, Stephan received word that his father, who, sometime earlier, had emigrated to the United States, was dying. Stephan departed in May to be at his father's deathbed and arrived just in time to see his father one last time. Shortly after Stephan reached the United States, his father passed away.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Lusk, "Retrospect of Fifty Years," 4-5.

<sup>3</sup>*TIS* (1902-1903), 2; Rev. Anthony J. Prosen, "Joseph Andrew Stephan: Indiana's Fighting Priest," *Social Justice Review* 69 (September 1976), 150. Prosen notes that one study of Stephan refutes the Irish descent of Stephan's mother.

<sup>4</sup>*TIS* (1902-1903), 2; Prosen, "Stephan," 150.

<sup>5</sup>*TIS* (1902-1903), 2-3; Prosen, "Stephan," 150.

Rather than return to Europe, Stephan decided to finish his theological studies in this new land. He was accepted into the seminary for the Cincinnati diocese under the guidance of Bishop John Baptist Purcell. Bishop Purcell ordained Stephan into the priesthood on March 19, 1850.<sup>6</sup>

Although settlement within the Cincinnati diocese proceeded rapidly, there were barely enough priests to minister to the Catholics in the area. Therefore, Stephan served several parishes scattered over a wide area. From 1851 to 1855, he was the first pastor to the Church of the Fourteen Holy Patrons in Reading, Ohio. In 1852, he guided the Mailton County, Ohio, parish and acted as assistant priest at Holy Trinity Church in Cincinnati. The following year, he assisted Father John Henry Luers at Saint Joseph Church in Cincinnati in addition to his duties as pastor at the Reading and Lockport, Ohio, parishes. Soon Father Stephan's duties extended even farther geographically. When the parishioners of Saint Boniface in Lafayette, Indiana, needed a German-speaking priest in 1854, Father Luers asked Stephan to fill the vacancy. In addition to his new parish, the 1856 *Catholic Directory* listed Father Stephan as assistant pastor at Saint Aloysius Church in Cumminsville, Ohio. He also served as chaplain at the Saint Aloysius Orphan Asylum for German-speaking boys and worked at orphanages across the Ohio River in Campbell County, Kentucky.<sup>7</sup>

After 1856, the center of Stephan's activities shifted to northern Indiana. Pope Pius IX incorporated that area into the newly created Fort Wayne diocese in 1857. Archbishop Purcell ordained Father Luers as the diocese's first bishop on January 10, 1858. Until recently, the Potawatomi Indians occupied this section of Indiana. But, as demands for Indian land grew, the federal government removed the Potatomis to the Indian Territory by 1840. Subsequently, white settlers, primarily from Pennsylvania and German-speaking countries in Europe, poured into the vacated lands. Thus there was a great need for a priest who could speak German. Stephan eagerly took up the call. Indeed, he became intimately involved in the settlement of northern Indiana. In 1858, he initiated a Catholic colonization project. Stephan purchased between three and four thousand acres of land near Rensselaer in Jasper County. He then encouraged Catholic settlers to locate on those lands. Stephan utilized his engineering background to further aide Catholic emigrants. He surveyed the Kankakee Valley for the government to insure that homesteaders acquired proper titles to their new homes.<sup>8</sup>

Secular concerns did not completely monopolize Stephan, however. From Rensselaer, Stephan supervised missions at San Pierre, Kentland and Remington, among others. By 1862, he established new parishes in Carroll, Benton and Fountain Counties.<sup>9</sup>

Stephan's impressive achievements were not surprising. He embarked upon all assignments with limitless zeal and energy. He possessed excellent administrative qualities and an inspirational personality. Bishop Luers commented on these characteristics to Archbishop Purcell in 1858. Luers had assigned Stephan to the San Pierre congregation, which was a "complete wreck." But, Luers noted, Stephan had done "remarkably well." People "years estranged from their duties have returned and again receive the sacraments, his school flourishes,...and the church which before could easily contain both congregations, is now getting too small already for his own."<sup>10</sup> By all accounts, Stephan was a remarkable, if not eccentric, individual. In addition to his extensive education and engineering skills, he was a talented musician and cook. Some parishioners,

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<sup>6</sup>Prosen, "Stephan," 150.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 151-52.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>10</sup>Luers to Purcell, April 17, 1858, quoted in Prosen, "Stephan," 153.

however, believed Stephan was rather odd because he occasionally wore blue suits or clothing thought inappropriate for a Catholic clergyman. Even worse, Stephan occasionally missed Sunday mass. He was an enthusiastic hunter, and several times he strayed too far to return in time to say mass!<sup>11</sup>

The outbreak of the Civil War struck a patriotic chord within Stephan. Despite his extensive missionary field, he eagerly volunteered to serve in the Union army. On May 18, 1863, President Lincoln commissioned Stephan an army chaplain. He was among the commissioned officers of the Indiana Forty-seventh Regiment, attached to the Army of the Cumberland under the command of General George H. Thomas. Typically, Stephan embraced his new duties with a great deal of enthusiasm. George E. Cooper, an army surgeon stationed at Nashville, praised Stephan's efforts as post chaplain. Stephan, Cooper wrote, "took charge of all the Catholic troops in the city & vicinity, in Hospitals, in the encampments, at the Post & in the Quartermaster's Department." Cooper believed Stephan performed invaluable services and was a "zealous & exemplary man & has rendered universal satisfaction."<sup>12</sup>

Stephan's services extended beyond spiritual matters. During the war, he again had the opportunity to employ his engineering skills, helping construct a pontoon bridge. His superiors were so impressed with the bridge that they offered Stephan a promotion and permanent military assignment, but Stephan refused both offers. Instead, he returned to his missionary endeavors within the Fort Wayne Diocese in Indiana.<sup>13</sup>

During this time, Stephan became increasingly interested in the Church's efforts among Native Americans, especially among the Sioux Indians in the Dakota Territory. The Standing Rock Agency was one of the agencies assigned to the Catholic Church by government officials. Conditions at Standing Rock, however, were less than satisfactory to the government and to the BCIM. Both suspected the agent at Standing Rock, William T. Hughes of Chicago, of corruption. Thus the BCIM began searching for a possible replacement. Stephan was undoubtedly interested in the position. In 1877, he had a lawyer contact General Charles Ewing, a Civil War acquaintance, to express Stephan's interest. Ewing and Father Brouillet both believed Stephan a suitable candidate. When Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ezra Hayt finally removed Hughes as agent in the summer of 1878, the BCIM nominated Stephan for the position. The Indian Department eventually accepted Stephan, and he arrived at Standing Rock on October 16, 1878.<sup>14</sup>

Stephan was acutely aware of his twin responsibilities as Catholic priest and civilian Indian agent. Shortly after he assumed control at Standing Rock, he notified General Ewing that if he, as a Catholic priest, failed to carry out his duties in an impartial manner, "the whole of Protestantism from the great grandfather Martin Luther down to Susan B. Anthony would squeal like the hogs, which jumped into the sea, when our Lord drove the devils in them."<sup>15</sup> Stephan subsequently immersed himself in the myriad duties of an Indian agent. He tried to maintain a fragile peace

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>12</sup>Cooper to Asst. Surgeon General, June 7, 1865, quoted in Prosen, "Stephan," 153.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 154; *TIS* (1902-1903), 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 155; Rahill, *Catholic Indian Missions*, 252-53, 260-63; Charles Ewing to Stephan, July 23, 1878, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 8; Stephan to Ewing, October 23, 1878, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 8.

<sup>15</sup>Stephan to Ewing, November 14, 1878, and December 19, 1878, quoted in Rahill, *Catholic Indian Missions*, 266.

between the Sioux, the army and frontiersmen. It was his responsibility to distribute government annuities, to regulate trade and to promote civilization among the Sioux.

The latter occupied a good deal of his time. Stephan, similar to all reformers, employed a three-pronged approach to transform the Indians into carbon copies of industrious white citizens. The first component involved the Sioux forsaking their communally-held lands for individual plots. To Stephan, this process had several benefits. It fostered a stronger work ethic among the tribe because those men who farmed no longer wasted their time hunting or engaging in warfare. Farming also insured a more stable food supply and would make the Sioux less dependent upon government rations. And lastly, adopting land in severalty would help break the power of the Sioux chiefs. Stephan issued annuity goods to "farming Indians" and not to the chiefs; thus, the Sioux who possessed individual plots no longer owed their allegiance to any chief but to the United States. Stephan wrote that as soon as the traditional chiefs were deposed and the "farming Indian treated as his own chief, the nearer the end will be of all Indian troubles." Stephan had some success in this endeavor. During his stint as agent, 284 out of 589 families staked claims to individual farms.<sup>16</sup>

The second and third prongs went hand-in-hand. Stephan, like most Americans, believed no Indian could be truly "civilized" unless they were educated and embraced Christianity. Consequently, he devoted much energy to establishing schools and recruiting Catholic missionaries to staff them. Standing Rock included three schools--boarding schools for boys and girls and an industrial farm school, located fifteen miles south of the agency, in which the boys learned trades such as farming, carpentry, shoemaking and tailoring. In his annual reports, Stephan praised the students' progress and their capacity to learn.<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, Stephan's relationship with the Benedictines who worked at the schools was a stormy one. Stephan was not a patient man, and he was too quick to criticize when plans went awry. In September 1879, Stephan contacted Father Brouillet, urging him to come to Standing Rock at once. The industrial farm school, Stephan regretted, was floundering due to poor management. According to Stephan, the major problem was the "irregularity of the work and out of season." As an example, Stephan pointed to the past summer: "When the boys should have pulled and hoed weeds out of the field, the brother sent them to cut wood." Stephan traveled to the school and "set 20 squaws to work in order to get the field in a respectable plight for any inspection. I can tell you I had my troubles!"<sup>18</sup>

The situation was no better two years later. Indeed, the relationship between Father Stephan and the Benedictines seems to have deteriorated. In June 1881, Stephan complained to Brouillet that the schools in the agency were "not in the condition as they ought to be." A litany of difficulties followed. A new school building was not yet completed because of the brothers' mismanagement. Another "serious drawback" impeding the civilization process was the "constant conversation in the Indian language with the boys instead of english." Every time Stephan upbraided the Benedictines, he was "sneered and laughed at." Stephan then raised one more example of the brothers' ineptitude. "When I was sick in spring 1880," he wrote, "the brothers

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<sup>16</sup>*Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1879*, 46-47; *Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1880*, 51-54; *Annual Report, Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1881*, 57, 59. Quote is from 1881 report, p.59. [These reports are hereafter cited as *Annual Report* followed by the appropriate year.]

<sup>17</sup>*Annual Report, 1879*, 49-50; *Annual Report, 1880*, 56-57; *Annual Report, 1881*, 59.

<sup>18</sup>Stephan to Brouillet, September 13, 1879, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 8.

sowed wheat and oats in the ground without ploughing a furrow. The consequence was that they raised nothing and I had to cover it up in order that the contract was saved."<sup>19</sup>

Stephan's relationship with the military garrison at Fort Yates was no less volatile. He believed that the soldiers were a disruptive influence and complained the soldiers cut too much of the area's scarce timber, depriving the Sioux of much needed materials and a source of revenue. Stephan also charged that the soldiers had a pernicious effect on the morals of his Indian charges, especially among the children. The situation became so bad that he moved the girls' boarding school away from the agency to the industrial farm school some fifteen miles away. Stephan campaigned to have the entire military garrison removed, claiming that a recently instituted Indian police force was all that was needed to maintain peace at the agency. There was, however, little chance of the troops being removed. Tensions in the area were still high so soon after the 1876 Sioux uprising led by Sitting Bull. They increased when Sitting Bull and his followers finally surrendered and were located at Standing Rock in July 1881.<sup>20</sup>

The soldiers at Fort Yates naturally opposed Stephan's efforts and retaliated in kind. The commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel W.P. Carlin, argued that Stephan was "too old and too infirm of body and too irascible in mind, to be a safe or an efficient Agent for this Agency."<sup>21</sup> In June 1880, Stephan notified Brouillet that he was sure "that some devilment would be played on me." The "devilment" occurred at the cattle scales a few miles from the agency. Stephan and some officers discovered that the scale had been tampered with. "Of course," Stephan wrote, "I was branded by them [the officers] as the criminal, but neither the whites nor the Indians believe the story, all say it was done out of mischief to blacken my character."

In addition, Stephan remarked, the army had been disseminating "inflaming stories against me and the Indians." They spread rumors that five hundred warriors left the agency on the warpath or that a number of Indians killed two white men and stole six mules. On another occasion, a lieutenant told Stephan that eleven Indians left Standing Rock to join the hostile camp at Red Cloud. When Stephan asked the officer for names, he could provide none. "The simple fact [was] this," Stephan commented sarcastically, "I gave to 4 Indian women passes to visit their relations at Cheyenne River agency and this constitutes the whole war brigade. What a horrible massacre we can expect no civilian is able to describe!"<sup>22</sup>

Stephan's tenure as Standing Rock agent was a short one. He informed General Ewing on March 31, 1881, that he intended to resign his post. One reason for his departure was his declining health, stemming from an old Civil War injury. The physical demands of the job and the frigid winter weather were additional factors.<sup>23</sup> But undoubtedly, the primary reason for Stephan's resignation was the frustration arising from his bitter interaction with military officials. In his March 31 letter to Ewing, Stephan commented that the agency Indians were "peacable, industrious

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<sup>19</sup>Stephan to Brouillet, June 11, 1881, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 9.

<sup>20</sup>*Annual Report, 1879, 47-48; Annual Report, 1880, 55-58; Annual Report, 1881, 57-60; Rahill, Catholic Indian Missions, 303.*

<sup>21</sup>Carlin to Adjutant General, Department of Dakota, April 12, 1880, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Record Group 75 (M234), Roll 852, National Archives, Washington, D.C. [hereafter cited as M234]. The animosity between Stephan and Carlin most likely an extension of the contest then going on between the Interior and War Departments over control of Indian affairs. For a discussion of this issue, see Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, 72-102.

<sup>22</sup>Stephan to Brouillet, June 25, 1880, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 9.

<sup>23</sup>Prosen, "Stephan," 156; Rahill, *Catholic Indian Missions*, 313.

and good, with only few exceptions. Our mutual relations [were] of the most amicable and friendliest kind." Whites, however, were the "troublesome element and the constant harrassing, backbiting and lieing [sic] from those men, makes me disgusted with the place." In frustration, Stephan pleaded with Ewing: "I hope you will do me the favor to help me to get out of it." Several weeks later, Stephan wrote Brouillet that he would be "really glad when I am relieved from here." The commanding officer "meddles constantly with the agency affairs and thus trys [sic] to exercise a guardianship over the Indian Agent sitting the Indians in confusion and detain them from working. As long as he is here there is no use for an agent."<sup>24</sup>

Stephan finally left the agency at the end of 1881, but his work among Native Americans was far from over. For a time, he ministered to white settlers in the Dakota Territory. From 1882 to 1883, Stephan served at Fargo, and, in 1884, he was at Jamestown. Bishop Martin Marty also named Stephan his vicar general and consultor during this time.<sup>25</sup> Stephan returned to Indian mission work in 1884. That year, Father Brouillet, BCIM director, died. Archbishop James Gibbons of Baltimore, upon the recommendation of Bishops Marty and O'Connor, named Father Stephan as director on May 14, 1884. The Church's Third Plenary Council confirmed Stephan's position on December 20.<sup>26</sup> For the next seventeen years, Stephan worked tirelessly to advance the cause of Catholic Indian missions.

Thanks in large part to Father Brouillet, the Bureau itself operated under more advantageous circumstances. The Plenary Council of 1884 regularized the Bureau's structure. Council members recognized the BCIM as an official institution within the Church. An episcopal committee of five would direct the Bureau's activities and name its officers. Moreover, the council dealt with the chronic problem of financing the Bureau's activities. An annual collection would be taken up on the first Sunday of Lent in every diocese within the United States. The proceeds would be used to finance the BCIM's operations and to assist missions among Indians and African-Americans alike.<sup>27</sup>

Again, thanks in large part to Brouillet's work, Stephan's relationship with government officials in his early years as BCIM director were harmonious, although he faced a different set of circumstances than did his predecessor. The federal government abandoned the Peace Policy in 1882. Despite the policy's good intentions, turning agencies over to religious denominations neither ended the corruption and abuses in the Indian Department, nor was it very effective at maintaining peace--with the Indians or between the various religious sects. Determined to reaffirm federal control, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller ended the policy.

The Peace Policy's demise, however, did not curtail the government's efforts to "Americanize" Native Americans. Government officials were convinced that a system of non-sectarian, public schools was the best way to affect the desired changes among Indian children. But such a system was still in its infancy. Consequently, the government depended on "contract schools" to pick up the slack. The government signed agreements in which religious denominations furnished school buildings and teachers to educate Indian children, while the government provided financial support to offset tuition and boarding costs.

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<sup>24</sup>Stephan to Charles Ewing, March 31, 1881, and Stephan to Brouillet, May 3, 1881, BCIM, Series 1-1, Box 4, folder 9. Lieutenant Colonel Carlin was removed from Fort Yates in the summer of 1881. See, *Annual Report, 1881*, 60.

<sup>25</sup>Prosen, "Stephan," 156.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>27</sup>Rahill, *Catholic Indian Missions*, 337-43.

No longer limited to specific agencies, Stephan and the Catholic Bureau eagerly applied for government contracts. Although the various Protestant denominations had, for the most part, diminished their work among the Indians, Stephan was convinced that a non-sectarian government school was virtually the same as a Protestant school. Determined to curtail Protestant influence, Stephan launched an aggressive campaign to expand the number of Catholic schools. The Bureau's efforts were extremely successful. In 1883, the Catholics conducted eighteen boarding schools which received \$54,000 in government support. By the end of the decade, the government expended \$394,533 for thirty-eight Catholic schools.<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, the Catholics' success proved to be a curse. Protestant reform organizations, led by the Indian Rights Association, became alarmed at the growing Catholic influence. This tension was but one part of a larger scene. Throughout its history, the United States was, by and large, a Protestant nation, and by the late nineteenth century, Protestantism and Americanism had become virtually indivisible. To many citizens, the massive influx of Catholic immigrants to America and the growing number of Catholic schools threatened the country's social fabric. Thus, it was not surprising that the BCIM's good fortune sparked an anti-Catholic backlash. Protestant reformers demanded the end of all contract schools, claiming they were a breach of the hallowed separation of church and state principle. These claims may have been sincere political concerns, but they were equally manifestations of anti-Catholic bigotry.<sup>29</sup>

The Protestants' drive to end the contract schools received a boost when, in 1889, President Benjamin Harrison nominated Thomas Jefferson Morgan as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and Daniel Dorchester as Superintendent of Indian Schools. Dorchester was a Methodist minister and Morgan a former Civil War general, a Baptist minister and a professional educator. Both he and Dorchester strongly advocated public schools as the best means to Americanize Indian children. Shortly after he took office, Morgan began devising plans for a national Indian school system. Contract schools had no place in Morgan's system, but he planned to phase them out gradually rather than ending them abruptly.<sup>30</sup>

Aware that Catholic contract schools were in jeopardy, Stephan addressed a gathering of Catholic prelates in Baltimore, urging that body to take action. A committee, including Stephan, met with President Harrison to voice its objection to Morgan and Dorchester. Harrison, however, supported his nominees, telling the committee that he wanted the Indians educated in government schools.<sup>31</sup>

Unable to sway the President, Stephan decided to fight Morgan's and Dorchester's confirmation by the Senate. The BCIM launched an "aggressive and virulent attack" against the

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<sup>28</sup>Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 3-4; Prosen, "Stephan," 189; Harry J. Sievers, "The Catholic Indian School Issue and the Presidential Election of 1892," *The Catholic Historical Review* 38 (July 1952): 139-40.

<sup>29</sup>Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 4-9; idem., *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, 138-43, 158; Sievers, "Catholic Indian School Issue," 141. For a detailed history of the IRA, see William T. Hagan, *The Indian Rights Association: The Herbert Welsh Years, 1882-1904* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985).

<sup>30</sup>Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 10-11; idem., *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, 293-305; Sievers, "Catholic Indian School Issue," 141-43.

<sup>31</sup>*Report of Rev. J.A. Stephan, Director, to Rt. Rev. Bishop M. Marty, President of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, For the Year 1891-'92*, BCIM, Series 4/2, Box 1, folder 2, p. 2-3; Sievers, "Catholic Indian School Issue," 146-47.

two. Stephan charged Morgan with religious bigotry because he had summarily dismissed Catholic employees in the Indian Department. Furthermore, Stephan dredged up an old court-martial from Morgan's Civil War days. (No action was taken against Morgan, and he was even later promoted.) Protestant organizations vigorously defended Morgan against the Bureau's charges. His efforts to defeat Morgan consumed Stephan, but it was not enough. The Senate confirmed Morgan on February 12, 1890, and Dorchester the next day.<sup>32</sup>

Morgan's confirmation did not end the controversy. As expected, relations between the new Commissioner and the BCIM deteriorated. Stephan was determined to save Catholic schools and tried to bypass Morgan by securing appropriations from Congress. "If we could not extend our work," Stephan mused, "we hoped to maintain its status quo." Although he gained funding for three Indian schools, Stephan encountered much congressional opposition to the appropriations. Naturally, Stephan suspected that Morgan was behind it all and publicly charged him with interference. Both sides stepped up their attacks on one another. The end result was that Morgan severed all relations with the BCIM on July 2, 1891.<sup>33</sup>

Prospects for Stephan and the BCIM seemed to brighten with the presidential election of 1892. A new administration assumed control of the government and both Morgan and Dorchester were removed from office. Stephan hoped incoming officials would cease efforts to civilize Indians on a "strictly non-religious basis." In 1893, Stephan asserted that in order to "civilize the Indian, to awaken and vivify his moral nature, he must be brought to an understanding of the existence, the power, the omnipresence, omniscience, and the perfect justice and goodness of the Supreme Being." The drive to secularize Indian schools, he claimed, was a "dishonest, hypocritical one, whose sole aim and purpose it is to drive the Catholic Church out of the Indian educational and missionary field."<sup>34</sup>

But Stephan's hopes were washed away by the rising tide against Catholic contract schools. The Indian Rights Association and other Protestant groups stepped up their pressure on Congress to maintain Morgan's public school system. As a result, Congress decided to phase out the contract school system. Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith, however, believed it was unfair to end government funding immediately. Therefore, he proposed in November 1894 that government funding be reduced twenty per cent each year until it ended. Stephan was dismayed at the continued opposition to the contract schools. His disillusionment boiled over into outright fury when Smith's twenty per cent plan was put into effect in the Indian Appropriation Act for fiscal year 1896. Stephan desperately lobbied Congress for additional appropriations. On several occasions, he managed to secure funding above the allotted amount, but he could not stop the annual decreases in federal funding. In 1898, Stephan reported that congressional support had dwindled to \$139,987. The figure dropped to \$57,642 in 1899, and the appropriations finally ended in 1900.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>*Report of Rev. J.A. Stephan...For the Year 1891-'92*, p. 3-4; Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 12-17.

<sup>33</sup>*Report of Rev. J.A. Stephan...For the Year 1891-'92*, p. 4; Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 18-22; Sievers, "Catholic Indian School Issue," 148-50.

<sup>34</sup>Stephan to General E. Whittlesey, Secretary, Board of Indian Commissioners, December 14, 1893, BCIM, Series 4/3, Box 4, folder 3.

<sup>35</sup>Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 26-38, 41-44; Hagan, *Indian Rights Association*, 182-86; *Report of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, For Year Ending October 1, 1898*, BCIM, Series 4/2, Box 1, folder 4, p. 1-2; *Report of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, For Year Ending October 1, 1899*, *Ibid.*, folder 5, p. 1.



As government appropriations dried up, many Catholic schools closed. Stephan criticized the government because it had made no provision to accommodate the nearly two thousand Indian children who had attended Catholic schools. Stephan presented this fact to Congress in 1900, but to no avail. Congress voiced no criticisms against the Catholic schools, but they still were to be closed. Stephan likened the scene to Christ before Pontius Pilate: Christ's accusers "could show no evil in our Master, but they must have his life, and so the cry went forth, crucify! crucify! And today our schools are being subjected to the same kind of persecution."<sup>36</sup>

Stephan struggled to keep as many Catholic schools open as possible, turning to private funding sources. He found an enthusiastic benefactress in Katherine Drexel of Philadelphia, daughter of the wealthy financier Francis Drexel. She had been an advocate of Catholic mission work since the 1880s, but in the late 1890s, she became the BCIM's primary means of support. In addition to Drexel's generosity, funding came from the Catholic faithful. The annual collection for Indian missions helped a little, but Stephan protested in 1899 that the amount was totally inadequate to meet the needs of Catholic schools. He felt that the collection method left much to be desired. Notices of the collection were read at mass the week before with little or no comment. "It should not be a matter of surprise," he remarked, "that the appeal on behalf of this worthy cause is not responded to with a very great degree of liberality." Bishops visited many of the larger cities across the country, preaching about the Indian question, but that too, helped little.<sup>37</sup>

Stephan was visibly disturbed about the future of his beloved Indian schools. His health had been declining for some time, but the strain of the past few years took an even greater toll. By 1899, Stephan had "more or less" retired to St. Elizabeth Convent in Cornwall Heights, Pennsylvania, the motherhouse of Katherine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. He traveled to Europe in 1900 in the hopes that his health might improve. He returned the following year, and again took up his duties as director. In September 1901, Stephan made his way to Washington, D.C., to attend a conference. On September 11, he died very suddenly. His body was laid to rest in the convent cemetery at Cornwall Heights.<sup>38</sup>

Stephan's years as BCIM director were undoubtedly turbulent. His sometimes intemperate personality often exacerbated relations with government officials. But his devotion to the Indian mission cause was unquestionable. Unfortunately, Stephan did not see the fruits of his labor. When he passed away, the very existence of Catholic Indian schools was in doubt, but Stephan found ways to keep them going. Unable to rely on government funding, he pleaded with and cajoled bishops to increase their fund-raising efforts. He also revived the idea of a missionary lecture circuit. He reasoned that missionaries in the field could best arouse the interest of Catholics across the country. Thanks to his zeal, many Catholic schools endured until Stephan's successor secured adequate financing.

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<sup>36</sup>*Report of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, For Year 1899-1900*, BCIM, Series 4/2, Box 1, folder 6, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup>*Report of the Bureau...For Year Ending October 1, 1899*, p. 2-3; *Report of the Bureau...For Year 1899-1900*, p. 6-7; Prosen, "Stephan," 189.

<sup>38</sup>Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 44; Prosen, "Stephan," 191.