

# Book sheds light on black Catholic Arkansan Daniel Rudd

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

Daniel Rudd championed equality during the post-Civil War era and believed that the Catholic Church was the place where all people could be equal under God.

"A Cry for Justice: Daniel Rudd and His Life in Black Catholicism, Journalism and Activism, 1854-1933" by Gary B. Agee tells the story of Rudd and the impact this little-known man had on the fight for equality after the Civil War and the onslaught of Jim Crow laws.

"I'm happy to be the one to get his story out to more people, so Rudd can continue to inspire and challenge people," Agee said.

Rudd was born a slave Aug. 7, 1854, in Bardstown, Ky. His parents were Catholic and owned by different masters. Rudd was baptized as a baby with the 15-year-old daughter of his owner as his sponsor.

Not much is known about how or why he or his family was Catholic, but Rudd remained committed to the Catholic faith until his death in 1933.

During his lifetime, Rudd was a noted journalist, publisher, speaker and advocate. He established his own newspaper in January 1885, the "Ohio State Tribune." It became the "American Catholic Tribune" in August 1886, and at the height of its popularity had 10,000 subscribers. He founded the National Black Catholic Congress, with the first one held at St. Augustine Church in Washington, D.C. in 1889. He also supported the Afro-American Press Association and Catholic Press Association.

Arkansas was home to Rudd from 1912 to 1932 where he worked for two successful black "farmer-merchants," invented a gravel-loading machine and possibly taught in local schools. He co-wrote a biography of one of the farmers, Scott Bond, who was Arkansas' first black millionaire.

Rudd, who then lived in the Marion area (Crittenden County), suffered a stroke in 1932 and returned to Bardstown, where he is buried in St. Joseph Cemetery.

In Arkansas' black Catholic community, Rudd is not forgotten. The Diocesan Council for Black Catholics named an award after him and hands it out each January during the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Mass to a black Catholic who has made a difference in his or her parish.

As a black Catholic, Agee said, Rudd was a minority within a minority.

"It was another difference he had to negotiate. Being a Catholic, he was an outsider in his own people, as most were Protestant at the time," Agee said. "He made the most of it. He believed the Catholic Church was the answer, but he was realistic and pragmatic. He worked ecumenically for the greater good."

Rudd faced danger not only because of his race and civil rights work, but also his faith. The Ku Klux Klan persecuted blacks during this time, but they also targeted foreigners and Catholics. Agee, an adjunct professor of church history at Anderson School of Theology in Anderson, Ind., "stumbled upon" Rudd in his research. One of Agee's areas of interest is racism in the Church of God tradition, where he is an ordained minister.

His interest in unity and the disconnect that racism causes led him to investigate the issue in other religious traditions, while studying for his doctorate at the University of Dayton in Ohio. "I was fascinated by the character of Daniel Rudd. He was trying to get his own religion to live up to its claims. He believed the 'Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man' was a cardinal

truth of the Church. He encouraged them to be part of the Church and get involved," he said. The Catholic tradition is familiar to Agee, as he studied at Catholic institutions for his graduate work, Xavier University in Cincinnati and the University of Dayton.

The book on Rudd began as his doctrinal dissertation, which he later submitted for publication. The University of Arkansas Press released the book in December 2011.

"This topic has struck a chord. It came out at the perfect time," he said. "Rudd deserves the attention."

In Catholicism, Rudd saw the answer that could transform the "human family" and unify all "at the altar of the Lord." The universal reach of the Church unified people of all races.

The book chronicles Rudd's work and many others who shared his vision for the Catholic Church in America.

"If you consider the way he carried himself and how he worked diligently and tirelessly for people who were under siege, you learn a lot about the man Rudd was. He spoke out against injustice," Agee said. "His was a prophetic message. We need to pay attention and apply his message to our own time and place."