

PRESS PROGRESS

1932 — *The Catholic Courier Looks Forward As Well As Backward* — 1939

By HOWARD W. KLIPPERT
Manager, Catholic Courier

The Catholic Press itself is basically and fundamentally important. It will, obviously, become proportionately more important as more and more people discover that intrinsic value for themselves. In the light of this truism, the Catholic Press as a whole is no more than at the threshold of its growth. In the same way, proud as we may be in our more sanguine moments of the relative degree of progress of the CATHOLIC COURIER we know that we have done not much more than prepare a foundation on which a more imposing, more effective institution must be built. The 50 years which are gone mean little unless they are viewed in this perspective. Their full importance can be measured only in terms of the progress which should be made in the next fifty.

At this midway point, where we can so easily look backward, where we can so easily do much "second guessing," where we can so easily ponder on what might have been, where we can so readily formulate criticisms of what has been done and alternative bright outlines of what should have been done, at this point, be it observed, this anniversary will mean less than nothing unless we are able correctly to evaluate the 50 years which are herein celebrated. Only then shall we be able to use properly the foundation which those years have built.

Such a correct valuation must necessarily involve the removal of some misconceptions and the substitution of accurate perceptions.

Like any other human enterprise, the Catholic Press has numerous faults,—and here and there critics not reluctant to point them out. Their criticisms are not necessarily confined to statements of opinion concerning the content, appearance, or business conduct of the newspaper. Rather they involve broad generalities. A statement and refutation of some of these generalities might be included here.

Some critics seem to forget that the one and only purpose of a Catholic paper is to serve the religious and moral interests of the clergy and laity of the Catholic Church. They lose sight of the fact that every worker on the paper is serving the Church and through this service meriting a livelihood.

Others may feel that in presenting a news service to meet the needs of clergy and laity, the paper may lean too much to one side. Just as the paper needs all elements in the Church on its subscription list, so it must strive earnestly to minister to all according to their needs.

And we find an occasional critic who would question even the importance of the Catholic Press itself! With the continued statements of the long list of Popes who have declared the Catholic Press is essential to the welfare of the Church and the growth of religion, with the urgent recommendations of our Bishops both in N. C. W. C. meetings and individually, that every Catholic home should have a Catholic paper, we are quite willing to rest our case on this point. We therefore pass over the many signal acts of outstanding service to the Church in America that are so well known as to need no emphasis.

In this entire Golden Jubilee Edition supplement, only about a dozen pages are occupied with the past and current history of the CATHOLIC COURIER. Perhaps in our desire to avoid boring the reader, we have bent over backward, falling into the error of being overly brief while seeking to avoid being overly loquacious. With the press deadline crowding us, it is now too late even to reconsider much less to reshape our content. Somehow this page must at least indicate all that has been left untold while adding to the sum total of pertinent facts concerning this newspaper which this edition contains, and without which it would lose much of its point and purpose. In any case we must remain constantly aware of what, 50 years ago when the Courier was young, was known as "the gentle reader." The available multitude of facts, and thoughts, and ideas about the CATHOLIC COURIER can scarcely be as interesting to the reader of these pages as they are to those who live and move and have their being in the production of this newspaper. Yet this page, as well as this edition, will have been published in vain if it does not build some slender bridge across the gap.

Some extremists declare themselves in favor of permitting the diocesan newspaper to fade from the local scene and of replacing it with distribution of a chain newspaper (or alternatively, an out-of-the-diocese newspaper in which is inserted "a page of local news").

Any diocese will prefer its own paper to one from outside, just as a city will want its own paper in preference to a metropolitan paper: the outside paper may supplement, but it can not supplant the local paper. Our loyal army of subscribers from every part of the diocese is a living testimonial to the recognized need that is served by our diocesan paper. Constructive criticism helps us improve, while appreciative cooperation spurs us on to more effective service.

The simple fact is (and we hope our esteemed contemporaries in the Catholic Press field will not consider this statement a betrayal) that there are no perfect

Catholic newspapers. The task of the self-appointed critic is easy. A more difficult problem of analysis for the not always innocent bystander would be for him to discover and understand the reasons why most Catholic newspapers have progressed to their present improved situations after years of discouraging, even heartbreaking, burdens of neglect, inadequate equipment, and even more inadequate means and manpower. In almost every case, given such discovery and understanding, the critical analyst would realize suddenly, overwhelmingly, that the fault lay as much with himself as with the object of his criticism.

Since no Catholic newspaper is without its faults, it is our work to strive even harder for perfection. Progress has been made.

Further improvements are encouraged and invited by receptivity on the part of our Catholic audience.

Only by considering such points, only by speaking freely

and honestly, may we approach with any confidence the task of understanding and evaluating the half-century lifetime of the Catholic Press in the Rochester Diocese. Only by piling up these facts may one make of this milestone a vantage point high enough from which to see far back—and far forward.

Looking back, one realizes with humble spirit that having a fiftieth anniversary to celebrate is a privilege made available by all those who have gone before. Without their work and thought this milestone would never have been reached; without their courage and resourcefulness this newspaper would have long since joined the legions of defunct newspapers. The fifty years since the "Catholic Journal" was founded have been a long course over which has been run a marathon of the spirit. The torch of bright determination has been passed on from hand to hand. To have received that torch, to be able to

carry it forward, is an honor filled with opportunity, a duty fraught with responsibility.

Not once during fifty long years has this newspaper missed a publication date! Only those who have worked against the implacable march of the hours, only those who have labored to feed the insatiable maws of a battery of linotype machines, only those who have shot the darts of persuasive argument at the target of stony-hearted advertising space buyers, only those who have faced a payroll date with a nearly empty cashbox—only these can know the full meaning of that record of fifty uninterrupted years of publication of a weekly Catholic newspaper.

A fitting tribute has been paid by Bishop Kearney to all those who have made possible the completion of these fifty years, and to all who encouraged them in their divers tasks, when he wrote in a letter concerning this Golden Jubilee Edition:

During fifty years it has never failed to publish regularly—a record which attests as much to the vital need for this publication as to the loyalty and perseverance with which that need has been served.

The vital need for the CATHOLIC COURIER has been the inspiration for persevering effort in the past. In the same moment that tribute is paid to the founders of this newspaper, and to their successors, tribute must be paid to the consistently growing audience of loyal readers without whom their highest courage and hardest work would have been in vain. In that audience the vital need for this newspaper was crystallized and made tangible. In the growth of that audience one may confidently look for inspiration to carry on in the future.

And so we turn our gaze forward, forward to the consideration of those things which can be and must be in the coming half-century if the past half-century is to have permanent and fundamental meaning.

Rightly to understand the possibilities of the future, we need to review briefly and in proper order the component factors which enter into the development and sustenance of an ideally constituted newspaper. First in importance is the editorial and news content which alone can fully justify the publication's existence. Meritorious content creates circulation, the audience for which the newspaper is published. The number, distribution, and responsiveness of that audience determines the degree of acceptance of the newspaper as an advertising medium. In turn, advertising and circulation produce revenues to finance the production of the publication. In this order of things, we move around a circle, to the point that adequate revenues permit of constant improvement in news content, which in turn increases the audience, leading to increased revenues available for continuing the endless upward spiral.

The history of a newspaper, and its future, too, is bound up in the sequence of the factors which enter into its development.

Head of Editorial Staff



THOMAS H. O'CONNOR
News Editor

Well known throughout the diocese, Thomas O'Connor has established numerous friends in his years of journalistic endeavor in the field of Catholic Press activity. With a background of 17 years in news writing, Mr. O'Connor has given to the Catholic Courier that element of stability and understanding in promulgating the Catholic viewpoint through the medium of the Catholic Press which is so vital.