

Library Signpost

The Epic Of Catholic America

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

The Rev. Benedict Ehmann, professor of Church History at St. Bernard's Seminary, has kindly agreed to inspect the review of Theodore Maynard's book on Catholicism in the United States.

The Story of American Catholicism

By THEODORE MAYNARD, Macmillan Co.

Nobody would be so absurd as to call the United States a Catholic country. Yet to defend the contention that the United States is wholly Protestant in culture would be equally absurd and unjust. The golden threads of Catholic faith and thought and influence may constitute only a small part of the strands out of which our history is woven, yet they are golden and they are as indelibly a part of the web as the threads of Protestant thought and life.

To identify these threads which are Catholic and to determine their true influence, however, is another and a more difficult thing. That Catholic thought has had its influence here not merely among Catholics but among Americans cannot be gainsaid. This is because as Christian is indebted to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages which brought not only the Christian faith but also an appreciation of Christian gentleness to our barbarian ancestors. Now, could the fact of the Reformation keep our founding fathers honest, prepared they might be against the Church, but unfortunately our country is a mixture of the two. The work of the Reformation was to give expression to the American Declaration of Independence and the American Declaration of Independence and the American Declaration of Independence and the American Declaration of Independence.

On the other hand it is evident that the American Catholic contribution to American life to illustrate it by instances of our religious contributions made to our development and progress. And here we have a wealth of facts to prove just how great this contribution has really been.

Because of a lack of popular works on the subject of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States most Catholics have not hitherto realized the important and honorable part in American history. Therefore they will have at least a vague concept of early Catholic Missions of the

Sursum Corda

Theater As Religion

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

It is not often that I surrender the column to a "guest conductor" but I think that this time I will permit an outsider to have critically all the space allotted to me. In the Sunday New York Times for October 25 and November 2 there appeared the verbatim transcription of an address delivered by Maxwell Anderson at the one hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary of Rutgers University. It caught my eye as something unusually good and as I read it seemed more and more excellent. It was gratifying to have my own opinion of the article confirmed by Brooks Atkinson (also in the New York Times for November 2). He said:

"Mr Anderson's research into the nature of the theater based on a working experience of 20 years is the most vital thing that has been written about the theater for a long time."

But let us have a minimum of comment or criticism and permit Maxwell Anderson to have his say in his own words, though I should make the preliminary observation that when he speaks of religion he means not exactly religion but the morality which is based upon religion. He says:

"In brief, I have found my religion in the theater where I least expected to find it and where fear will credit that it exists. The theater is the central artistic symbol of the struggle of good and evil within men. Its teaching is that the struggle is eternal and unremitting that the forces which tend to drag men down are always present, always ready to attack, that the forces which make for good cannot sleep through a night without danger."

"It denies the doctrine of the Nineteen Twenties emphatically. It denies that good and evil are obverse and reverse of the same coin; denies that good can win by waiting. It affirms that evil is what takes man back toward the beasts; that good is what urges him up toward the god. It affirms that these struggles of the spirit are enacted in the historic struggles of men—some representing evil, some good. It offers us criteria for deciding what is good and what is evil."

Again: "If an artist believes that there is good and there is evil, and in his work favors what seems to him good, and expects ultimate victory for it, then he is morally sound. If he does not believe in the existence of good and evil or if, believing in them, he asks, or even anticipates, the triumph of evil, he is morally unsound."

"The purpose of the theater is to find and hold up to our regard, what is admirable in the human race."

"The theatrical profession may protest as much as it likes, the theologians may protest and the majority of those who see our plays would probably be amazed to hear it, but the theater is a religious institution devoted entirely to the exaltation of the spirit of man. It is an attempt to justify, not the ways of God to man, but the ways of man to himself. It is an attempt to prove that man has a dignity and a destiny, that his life is worth living, that he is not purely animal and without purpose. There is no doubt in my mind that our theater, instead of being, as the evangelical ministers used to believe, the gateway to hell, is as much of a place of worship as the theater of the Greeks and has exactly the same meaning in our lives."

"The great plays of the world those accepted by civilizations as part of a great heritage and played

Catholicism of early Maryland, of the Catholicism of Charles Carroll, of Carrollton, of the substantial part played by Catholics in civil and military life since the Constitution went into effect.

But few, I am sure, are aware of the fact that the first Catholic diocese in North America was established at Gardar, Greenland, in 1122, to care for the Norsemen to whom Leif Ericson had brought the faith, or that Catholic Scandinavians penetrated as far as Minnesota in 1332. Few are aware either that once America had been rediscovered by the Catholic Columbus, his Spanish successors came with missionaries to our Southland, shed their blood for the faith in Kansas, established schools and missions in Florida and Georgia, and a generation before Jamestown was founded by the English had preached and suffered in Virginia. Or to vault over a couple of centuries, how many Catholics, we may well ask, are aware of the part which the Church played in the last century in that century's burning questions of slavery and labor?"

Dr. Theodore Maynard, the well known Catholic author, a convert to the faith some years ago and a convert to American citizenship only recently has been working for a couple of years on a book which would tell, in a popular manner, the life story of the Church in the United States. This book has just been published by the Macmillan Company with the title, *The Story of American Catholicism*.

Dr. Maynard, in choosing to write a one-volume history of our Church in America chose a gigantic task, one that has never been undertaken before at least for many years. There is so much of interest and so much of beauty that his chief problem was one of selection a problem which he has even more difficult for him as he approached contemporary times in which the role of the Church cannot yet be viewed in complete perspective.

Nevertheless, I think it will be generally admitted that he has succeeded. Following the plan of running narrative rather than the valuable but necessarily disjointed scheme of diocesan history he has produced an account which, save towards the end of the book, runs off smoothly and presents in a well-organized yet surprisingly detailed manner, the history of American Catholicism as American as any important phenomenon of American life. Some may not agree with certain of the personal opinions expressed but I think that all in general will find in Dr. Maynard's book a complete, cheerful, satisfying and vigorously Catholic reply to the question, what is the Catholic Church mean to America?"

There is an Appendix which gives the date of foundation and the accession of bishops of the various dioceses and archdioceses. There is also a good index. The publishers have printed the book well with the exception of a few typographical slips and they have also chosen an attractive binding. R.M.E.

*Review by Rev. J. M. Gillis, C.S.P. This book will be available at the Catholic Book Store, 117 West 11th Street, New York City.*

for centuries these are the only men concerned with the conduct of exceptional men or women in positions of great responsibility men with tragic faults and weaknesses but with mind and strength enough to overcome in the struggle with evil forces both those within themselves and those without. This is Hamlet, The God, Prometheus. And it is a pleasure to note Abe Lincoln in the

Mr. Anderson came to these conclusions as a result of working for the theater. He was a playwright and had known the theater only from the inside; that is to say from appearances. The appearances were not prepossessing. Broadway in the Twenties in the Thirties and now in 1941 has always worn an air of hard garish cheap professionalism. The lights, the glassy box-office men, the ornate and dirty buildings, the brokers, the groups of actors lingering in drug stores and along side streets, these all proclaim clearly a place of entertainment for sale. The priests and priestesses of these temples are certainly unaware of the nature of their profession. But consider what they sell and you face a different prospect. The plays that please most and run longest in these sin-haunted alleys are representative of human loyalty, courage, love that purges the soul, grief that ennoble."

It is a thoughtful article and since it is such it affords a basis for opinions and judgments contrary to those of Mr. Anderson. Perhaps I may permit myself not criticism but one line of comment. He illustrates the point that the theater is a vehicle for the teaching of morals not only by a brief analysis of a few modern plays but by a reference to the ancient Greeks. He has omitted the mystery plays of medieval and post-medieval times in which it appears that the Catholic Church discovered and utilized the idea some hundreds of years before. Mr. Anderson stumbled upon it.

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Five Years Ago--

-in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER-

From Nov. 15, 1936, Edition

While Chinese bandits who held him captive for nine months battled Japanese troops, the Rev. Joseph Clarence Burns, Maryknoll missionary, made good his escape, according to word received by the United States Consul General at Mukden, Manchukuo.

Constant efforts to enlighten the public in the Catholic attitude concerning state aid for schools was pledged by members of the Department of Superintendents, National Catholic Educational Association in a resolution adopted at the Catholic University, Washington.

A dream of priests and parishioners of St. Mary Church, Auburn, of which the Rev. Dr. William E. Coven is pastor, for a score of years was fulfilled when a new and completely equipped parish hall was formally opened to the public.

That the time was coming when all Catholic men would have to be real practical Catholics was predicted by the Rev. Joseph A. Cirincione, St. Francis of Assisi Church in addressing Rochester Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus honor four of their former leaders.

The English, for centuries the ruling class, produce their best specimens in the form of servants the English butler. (Fr. Feeney)

EDITORIAL FEATURES

Page My Pastor

A Solo Dramatist

By Rt. Rev. Msgr. Peter M. H. Wynhoven

Editor-In-Chief, Catholic Action of the South

"Of course, Cedic, you love to hear me brag about my pastor, but really this time he engineered a pupin."



"Go ahead, Fran, startle me with your pastor's rare ingenuity. I'll bet you'll force my mouth wide open in wild-eyed wonderment."

"No kidding, dearie, it truly was a pleasant innovation. He was getting pretty well fed up with the women of the parish always giving fetto blingo and stale card parties to raise money for their societies."

"I wonder if he was getting tired of it since they did not raise money for his parish treasury."

"No, Cedic, that has nothing to do with it, for he does not want parish parties or fetto blingo for the parish proper. He maintains that the parochial debt should be taken care of by the regular envelope collection taken up for that purpose every Sunday."

"And is it?"

"Yes, indeed, he has that well and effectively organized. In fact, he collects more funds that way than he had originally anticipated. But let me tell you the story. He needed \$700 for some unforeseen repairs on the church. The finance committee suggested a big parish wide card party. He frowned on the idea. No, he had something better more refined something of an intellectual and cultural nature."

Your wonderful pastor would drift that way, Fran."

"Cedic, will you subdue the green-eyed monster for a few minutes so I can tell you I'll bet you'll agree that it was a clever stunt."

"Go ahead, proud thing, but to my condition if I lose you out the doughnuts and I'll make them."

"That won't be such a hardship or punishment. Thanks to our good mothers, we have learned the trick of the proverbial shortest way to a man's heart."

"Yes, a girl who does not know how to cook must be a pitiful sight at times in the home of her husband even if the can afford to hire a kitchen mechanic. But let's hear about your pastor's smart trick on raising the bucks."

He has a priest friend in the East whose niece is the famous Mary Louise Hickey, a solo dramatist of Peabody, Massachusetts. He engaged her for a night's recital tickets one dollar, please."

"Say, wasn't that taking a chance, Fran? You know how people frown at a dollar admission for a parish benefit?"

"That's it. He did not advertise it as a money-making scheme, he proposed it as a high-class fare treat for intellectuals."

"And did it work, Fran?"

"Now, you know human nature sufficiently to understand that

most everybody is ready to pay one dollar to prove he is intellectual. The hall was filled with intellectuals over six hundred persons."

"Didn't some demand their money back after the show was over?"

"Money back, Cedic? You know, that young woman artist held them spellbound for over an hour and a half."

"Just she alone a thing, Fran?"

"Yes, indeed, but not acting the way it usually done by throwing arms and casting eyes all over the stage, no, just calmly standing there presenting a three-act play, and by slight inflections of voice and changes of accent or dialect impersonating six to nine different characters. She had that audience intermittently laughing and weeping and gasping for almost two hours."

"And she does all that without script or makeup or anything?"

"Yes, indeed, it is almost uncanny, Cedic."

"And pray tell me, young lady, why wasn't I let in on this?"

"First of all, Cedic, you have been away from home quite a bit the last few weeks and I hardly saw you and secondly I had my misgivings about my pastor's intelligence. I just don't know how I could figure out how it could be an entertainment to write home about."

"Well, Msgr. Hickey, appear again soon, Fran!"

"Most amusingly, Cedic, because hundreds of people here the other night begged the pastor to sign their up for a return engagement, they were simply wild with enthusiasm."

"Was your pastor able to annex the new Ed Hurry case?"

"More than enough, Cedic. The beauty of a case that he did it in a most respectable, refined way, and the dollar bills were a little scarce on the ones placed by the crowd. He had a few players and not a single one of the ones placed by the crowd."

Enthusiasm

Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. It is the breath of genius.

What made Napoleon such a great commander was his genius for stirring up and maintaining enthusiasm in his fighters.

At one moment an utterly galloped up to him to hand him a message. Just at this moment the soldier's horse was shot under him.

Napoleon offered him his charger, a magnificent animal. Naturally the orderly felt rather hesitant about taking it. But Napoleon encouraged him by saying:

"Go on, take him. Nothing is too good for a soldier of France."

Snickers

Nurse: You're the father of triplets.

Politician: I don't believe it. I demand a recount!

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 18)

general welfare, is expressed by the Bishops together with full approval of the defense program of our country.

Every Catholic will be moved to study the pronouncement of our Bishops in the crisis that faces Christianity today. Prudent judgment, zealous study, have accompanied the words of direction and advice they have given forth. To them we look for guidance, to them we pay our vow of respectful obedience.

Heaven and Earth Shall Pass Away

In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. In the end, God shall bring them down to destruction. "Heaven and earth shall pass away." They were not made to endure forever, they are material things, subject to the weakness inherent in material things. They are perishable, they wear out.

When the end of the world shall come, no man can say. God alone knows the time. Yet the word of Jesus would warn us that the time before it shall come to pass is short. It is short for every man in this sense, that his days are numbered, soon death shall take him from life, and then shall await him the end of the world to come in God's good time. The wise man is the one who anticipates the coming of the day of death, of the day of the end of the world, and who lives one who would prepare himself well for those days.

God's word shall not pass away! It is the one thing that shall remain to guide and direct and comfort us, when all else shall be fallen into ruin. Because it is eternal, because it is lasting, we should place a high value on it, should never suffer it to be taken away from us. Foolish men may wish to show us something they claim is better, to wean us away from the Word of Christ. If we are true to Christ, we will guide ourselves by His advice: "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My Word shall not pass away."