

Library Signpost

The Epic Of Catholic America

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann.

(Dr. Robert McNamara, professor of Church History at St. Bernard's Seminary, has kindly acceded to my request for a review of Theodore Maynard's new book on Catholicism in the United States...)

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.

To identify these threads which are Catholic and to determine their precise influence is, however, another and a more difficult thing. That Catholic thought has had its influence here, not merely among Catholics, but among all Americans, cannot be gainsaid.

On the other hand it is evidently easier to consider the Catholic contribution to American life to illustrate it by instances of concrete contributions made to our development and progress.

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 Catholicism's ancient and honorable part in American history.

Sursum Corda

Theater As Religion

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

It is not often that I surrender to a "guest" conductor, but I think that this special permit an outsider to have virtually all the space allotted to me in the Sunday New York Times for October 28 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.

"Mr. Anderson's research into the nature of 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.

In brief, I have found my religion in the theater where I least expected to find it and where few will credit that it exists. The theater is the central artistic symbol of the struggle of good and evil within men.

It denies the doctrine of the Nineteen Twenties emphatically. It denies that good and evil are obverse and reverse of the same coin. It affirms 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.

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.

"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 1152, to care for the Norsemen to whom Leif Ericson had brought the faith, or that Catholic Scandinavians penetrated as far as Minnesota in 1352.

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.

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.

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 saves 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 an important phenomenon of American life.

There is an appendix which gives the date of foundation and the successive 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.

Beginning next week copies of this book will be available at the Catholic Bookstore, 1000 Broadway, New York City.

For centuries there has almost always been concerned with the conduct of exceptional men or women in positions of great responsibility, men with tragic faults and weaknesses but with moral and strength enough to overcome in the struggle with evil forces both those within themselves and those without.

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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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.

Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From Nov. 19, 1936, Edition

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's Church, Auburn, of which the Rev. Dr. William F. Cowen 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 laymen 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

Kid in Chief, Catholic Action of the South

Of course Cedie you love to hear me brag about my pastor but really, this time he engineered a poppin'.



Go head Fran startle me with your pastor's rare ingredients flabbergast me for my mouth wide open in wild-eyed wonderment.

No kidding, dearie it really was a pleasant innovation. He was getting pretty well fed up with the women of the parish always giving lotto bingo 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 Cedie, that has nothing to do with it, for he does not want benefit parties or fairs 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.

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 \$500 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?

Cedie will you subdue the green-eyed monster for a few minutes so I can tell you I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts you will agree that it was a clever stunt.

Go ahead proud thing, but on one condition if I lose you eat 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 infant at times in the home of her husband even if she can afford to hire a kitchen mechanic. But let's hear about your pastor's smart trick in raising the berries.

He has a priest friend in the East whose niece is the famous Mary Louise Hickey, a solo dramatist of Peabody Massachussets. 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, rare 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, Cedie? You know, that young woman artist held them spellbound for over an hour and a half."

Just she alone acting, Fran? "Yes ma'am, but not acting the way it is 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, Cedie."

And pray tell me young lady, why wasn't I let in on this? "First of all, Cedie you have been away from home quite a bit the last few weeks, so I hardly saw you and secondly, I had my misgivings about my pastor's intellectual treat in that form. I couldn't figure out how it could be an entertainment to wife home about."

Will Miss Hickey appear again soon, Fran? "Most assuredly Cedie because hundreds of people there the other night begged the pastor to sign her up for a return engagement; they were simply wild with enthusiasm."

Was your pastor able to annex the needed fifty laurels? "More than enough, Cedie. The beauty of it was that he did it in a nice respectable, refined way, and the dollar bills were a little cleaner than the ones fingered by nervous champagne players and not as dampish as the ones passed over a beer counter."

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

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

At one occasion an orderly galloped up to him to hand him a message. Just at that 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."

Enthusiasm

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 duration 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 own 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 falling 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."