

## Mission Leader Visitor at Aquinas

By FATHER JOHN R. WHITLEY, C.S.B.

For over a decade Bishop Fulton J. Sheen was a regular visitor to Aquinas Institute. From 1940 until 1950 Bishop Sheen (then a Monsignor) appeared at Aquinas to deliver one of the lectures in the Christian Culture Series. In 1953 Bishop Sheen visited Aquinas in his capacity as national Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Basilian Father Hugh Haffey, founder of the series and later first president of St. John Fisher College recalled those visits in the 1940's. "I remember Monsignor Sheen for his graciousness and kindness. He was most interested in the Culture Series and was quite willing to do anything I asked by way of promotion. Sunday afternoon, prior to his evening lecture, he would be guest of honor at a tea given for patrons of the series. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Ford, Mr. and Mrs. David Lawless, Mr. and Mrs. Harper Sibley and Mr. John Cunningham were a few of the prominent Rochesterians who opened their homes to the articulate churchman."

"Often times," Father Haffey continued, "I would ask Monsignor Sheen to stop in after his lecture at one of the city rectories where a group of priests would be gathered. Monsignor John Sullivan of St. John the Evangelist parish was often the host. In

spite of the hour Monsignor Sheen would entertain and inspire to the delight of all."

Father Haffey recalls one occasion rather vividly. He was driving Bishop Sheen from the station to the Basilian monastery and apparently exceeded the speed limit. When stopped by a policeman Father Haffey attempted to explain that his passenger was to speak at Aquinas and he was hurrying to be on time for the engagement. The young officer was showing no compassion so Father Haffey, remembering that his companion was a master of the English language, asked Monsignor Sheen to speak to the officer. So impressive was the explanation that the charge was dropped and the officer wished him best of luck in his talk. Little did the officer know that he was talking with the future Bishop of Rochester.

Bishop Sheen has always been good magazine and newspaper copy, especially since his debut in television where his incisive and cold-steel logic won the hearts and minds of American TV audiences.

Father Haffey recalled that Time magazine carried an article on the popular television apostle. The talk-about-town according to Father Haffey was that the editors of Time decided against assigning the piece to a Catholic writer to keep from being accused of "slanting" the story. The journalist who drew the assignment was Jewish. The last time Father Haffey heard the reporter was taking instructions in the Catholic faith from Bishop Sheen.

Father Whitley is a member of the faculty at Aquinas Institute, Rochester.



Bishop Sheen has been a frequent visitor at Aquinas Institute.

### GREETINGS

and a

### SINCERE AND A PRAYERFUL HOPE

for a long, spiritual career

as

### OUR BISHOP

### Our Lady of Lourdes

Elmira, N. Y.

### The Prayers of the Entire CONGREGATION

of

### ST. ANN'S, HORNELL, N. Y.

express

the joy that is in

Our Hearts

### GREETINGS

and

### SINCERE AND PRAYERFUL HOPE

for a long spiritual career as

### OUR BISHOP

### BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH

Rochester, N. Y.

### PRAYERS

and

### GOOD WISHES

from the

### Priests and People

of

### Our Lady of Victory Parish

Rochester, N. Y.



The Sheen eloquence includes clear handwriting.

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possible that he is the finest orator since Peter the Hermit." She referred to the fiery monk whose oratory launched the Crusades to recapture the Holy Land from Moslem control, a battle never really won.

Milton Berle, whose ratings slipped as the Bishop Sheen series took a sizeable toll, stately admitted, "If I'm going to be edged off the top by anyone, it's better that I lose to the One for whom Bishop Sheen is speaking."

Bishop Sheen is not completely captivated by the television technique, however, despite his obvious ease before the camera. He still prefers to speak to a live audience and usually has one—and speaks to the people there and through them to the television audience.

This was apparent in the famed Life is Worth Living series.

In Manhattan's Adelphi Theater, off Broadway, the audience would wait hushed as the countdown approached the 8 p.m. hour—30 seconds, 25 seconds, 10 seconds. Spotlights flooded the set, soft music filled in the background of the announcer's introduction and onto the set and into 2,000,000 homes came the 5 ft. 8 in. prelate with the red cape and the resonant voice.

The audience responded naturally but somewhat muted—they laughed or applauded properly, not on cue but because New York archdiocesan authorities screened applicants for tickets to avoid any squealing hero-worshippers, a hazard every famous person fears.

He had his moments of humor on television too.

To emphasize his points he'd write them in a flowing script in chalk on a blackboard.

He'd move away to let a stage-hand erase the board for his next points but, of course, the television audience never saw how the board was erased. Learning that many were puzzled by the seeming "miraculous" situation, Bishop Sheen referred to "my angel" who rendered the service for him, a subtle

bit of strategy to break up a serious line of thought to relax his listeners for a moment, but he soon had them back on his intended track.

Bishop Sheen's ease at the microphone comes from at least 40 years experience in front of one. Prior to his television fame, he had been 22 years on the Catholic Hour radio broadcast as well as the churchman most in demand for commencement lectures, cathedral sermons and street corner talks such as he gave in a covert campaign in Alabama.

He was once described as "a unique product of two unique historic forces—the Roman Catholic Church and the United States of America" and that "into the making of Fulton J. Sheen went St. Paul and Thomas Jefferson, Savonarola and George F. Babbitt."

The "making" of the man took, as he himself quipped once on television, close to 30 years—that he was still studying when his priest classmates had been at work close to 10 years. He said it was because "I was in the third grade for three years" that he was initially delayed. Actually his school record was brilliant.

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At American Legion meeting.

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