

IN REVIEW

Books detail religious sites

Zondervan Publishing House is introducing a new series of guidebooks aimed at the burgeoning Christian travel market, a niche it said was largely ignored until now.

The first four books in the *Christian Travelers Guide* series focus on Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain and were compiled by a noted Canadian religious studies professor who has traveled widely.

"Christians and other religious travelers are handicapped when they visit Europe because traditional guidebooks pay scant attention to religious sites other than major cathedrals and the occasional graveyard," said Irving Hexham, the series general editor and professor at the University of Calgary.

"We want to fill that void and offer travelers an opportunity to easily enjoy the rich and bountiful religious history and heritage of England and Europe," said Hexham, a native of Manchester, England, who studied in Germany.

Hexham noted why the guidebooks break new ground:

• Almost all Christian guidebooks focus on the Holy Land. But with turmoil in Israel, the books offer Christian pilgrims an opportunity to travel elsewhere and do it knowledgeably.

• No one disputes the increased secularization of North American society. Travel to noteworthy Christian historic sites provides another tool for cultural evangelization.

• The majority of the millions of people who visit England and Europe annually are either Christian or have a Christian heritage. Christian travel is on the increase as people seek to either fortify their faith or to answer important questions about humanity's spiritual roots and traditions.

• Other guidebooks tend to take a specific denominational perspective. These books are written by an ecumenical team of believers who are academic experts with roots in the countries discussed. They look at the history and culture of the countries in terms of the impact of Christianity on a region. Half of the authors are Roman Catholics, the other half Protestants.

The pocket-size guides, which sell for \$16.95, can supplement a standard guidebook, said Hexham. He has written seven books and edited 12 others.

Each 250-page guide contains a general history of each country, along with information about the country's art, music, literature and architecture. It also contains information about visiting a traditional European church, a list of the top 10 Christian sites in each country and a glossary of religious terms. Finally, along with maps and illustrations, there's a city, town and village site-by-site tour through history showing how people and events influenced Christendom throughout the past two millennia.

Visit Bedford, England, and spend time walking the streets and visiting the church frequented by John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In Halle, East Germany, learn about the enormous influence of Halle-Pietism during the 17th century.

"Excellent, we can all learn from these books ...," says Terry Muck, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary and former editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*.

The *Christian Travel Guides* and *Christian Travelers* has a Web site at <http://www.christian-travelers-guides.com/index.html>

Priest walks readers through D.C.

One Nation Under God: Religious Symbols, Quotes and Images in Our Nation's Capital, by Father Eugene F. Hemrick. Our Sunday Visitor Books (Huntington, Ind., 2001). 142 pp., \$6.95.

Reviewed by Thomas N. Lorusung
Catholic News Service

"Virtues everywhere on Capitol Hill" — now that would be news.

But that happens to be the title of one chapter in the new guidebook by Father Eugene F. Hemrick, *One Nation Under God: Religious Symbols, Quotes and Images in Our Nation's Capital*.

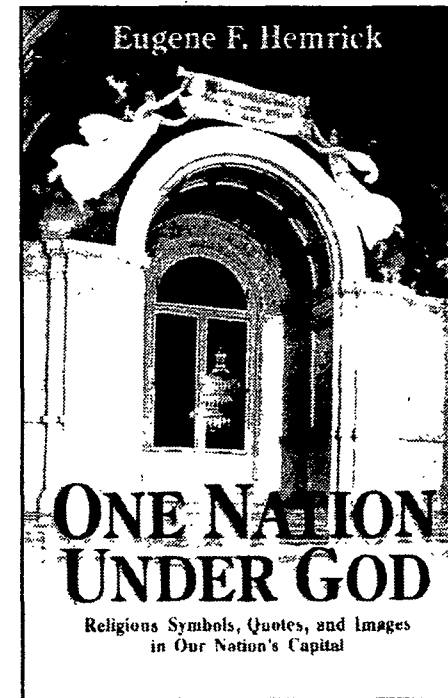
Father Hemrick, a researcher, author and columnist who lives at St. Joseph's parish on Capitol Hill, gives readers a spiritually uplifting walking tour of some famous landmarks in the nation's capital. He sees these places through the eyes of faith and tells those who walk along with him where to look for the religious sym-

bols that are part of so many important buildings from the Capitol itself to the National Gallery of Art.

He muses: "One has to wonder if the different artists who painted the virtues in the Library of Congress were unconsciously giving us the formula for America's greatness. It goes without saying that as long as America practices the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, the theological virtues of faith, hope and love and the virtues of knowledge, wisdom, truth, mercy and peace, her glory will be secure."

If you are planning a trip to Washington and want more than the usual historical and architectural information, I recommend that you pick up this book and be prepared to do a little walking. You won't be sorry.

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Lorusung is director and editor in chief of Catholic News Service in Washington, which syndicates Father Hemrick's column.



Tedious tale of railroads goes off the track

Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, by Stephen E. Ambrose, Simon & Schuster, 2000. 431 pp., \$28.

Reviewed by Joseph R. Thomas
Catholic News Service

Much like early railroading, *Nothing Like It in the World* by Stephen E. Ambrose is filled with adventure, but it provides a somewhat bumpy ride while taking a gosh-awful amount of time getting to the end of track in telling about the construction of the transcontinental railroad by the Central Pacific, starting from Sacramento, and the Union Pacific, starting from Omaha.

The account is studded with storied names (Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Gen. William Sherman, Brigham Young) and places (the Donner Pass, Salt Lake, Laramie, Cheyenne, the Sierra Nevadas). But while it covers everything from Indian raids to midwinter tunneling to the travails of travel to the West prior to the establishment of the rail link, it does so in sometimes tedious and exasperating style.

Tedious because Ambrose, the noted historian who has given us such outstanding books as *Undaunted Courage* and *Citizen Soldiers*, repeats himself with the regularity of sledgehammer blows on railroad spikes and burdens us with minutia as well.

He does so, it is obvious, because he is filled with the magnitude of the enterprise, becoming a cheerleader rather than remaining an objective recorder. One would have wished, for instance, for an in-depth assessment of the calloused labor practices that led to needless deaths, some of which he records (drownings, snow slides, explo-

sions, accidents, shootings, Indian attacks) without even attempting to estimate what must have been a considerable toll.

So intent is he on the mile-by-mile approach he has chosen for the story that he never provides an overview of the lying, corruption, bribery and fraud or the high-handed Indian policies that accompanied it, although he provides details enough along the way. His conclusion tells us why:

"A choice made is made, it cannot be changed. Things happened as they happened ... and what did take place is grand. So we admire those who did it — even if they were far from perfect — for what they were and what they accomplished and how much each of us owes them."

Among those who are owed, of course, are the Irish laborers, working for the Union Pacific from the East, and Chinese laborers working for the Central Pacific from the West. At times, on each road, as many as 15,000 laborers toiled with primitive tools in harsh lands far from the amenities of civilization except for temporary hell-towns hastily erected at end of the track by saloon-keepers, gamblers, prostitutes and entrepreneurs dedicated to separating lonely workers from their money.

Ambrose is at his best when he is telling the stories of the laborers, even given his self-serving compulsion to compare everything to an army campaign. Especially compelling is his account of the lifestyle and exemplary work habits of the Chinese and their winter tunneling exploits in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, where progress was measured at a foot a day under horrendous conditions.

The railroad founders, of course, were in it for the money and the power and the prestige. While they put most of their own money into the enterprise, they made sure it came back to them by forming the construction companies that, as railroaders, they engaged to do the work. Thus while the railroads themselves were in precarious financial condition, the Credit Mobilier, on the Union Pacific end, was rewarding stockholders with dividends of up to 300 percent.

This is truly an American epic. Ambrose helps put it in context by observing that, until the coming of the railroad, travel was no faster than it was in the time of Julius Caesar. Where once it took months to reach the West Coast from the East, now it took seven days, time and space having been compressed to such an extent that "nothing could ever be the same again."

True enough. But in trying to do justice to his topic Ambrose allows himself to be swept up in history like a runaway locomotive rather than attempting to tame the Iron Horse in a more disciplined manner. Still, the thought occurs that there's a great story line here for a fresh television series to rescue the country from the sappy sitcoms that threaten to engulf us.

Thomas, retired editor in chief of *The Christians* and a former diocesan newspaper editor, is a frequent reviewer of books.

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