

FEATURE

Book recalls bishop's strengths, struggles

America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen, by Thomas C. Reeves. Encounter Books. 479 pages. 8 pages of photographs. Hardcover, \$25.95.

Reviewed by E. Leo McMannus
Guest contributor

This biography, not hagiography, of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen is the first in-depth portrait of America's premier celebrity churchman (1895-1979) and Rochester's sixth bishop (1966-1969), whose appointment was announced 35 years ago, in October.

Its author, Thomas C. Reeves, a Catholic convert since 1997, is a Wisconsin historian and author of six other books that deal with American culture, politics and religion in the last two centuries, with specific studies of political figures as varied as Joe McCarthy (1969, 1982), Chester Alan Arthur (1975), and John F. Kennedy (1991).

Sheen's every public appearance was a performance: in his classes at Catholic University (1926-1950) — except when he was absent because of other speaking engage-

ments — where his lectures were so stunningly lucid that student questions were unnecessary, and discussion was not invited; in the pulpit, especially at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York; on stage; on the air (1930-1952) or on camera (1952-1957).

But there was, too, another Sheen: the unseen Sheen, on his knees, in the chapel, in prayer and meditation, daily and faithfully, before the Blessed Sacrament.

Reeves, in his admirable account, records Sheen's impressive scholarship and learning, the volumes of his books published, the amounts of money collected for the missions of the church, and some of the celebrated converts whom he instructed. Also he refers to the inner struggles of Sheen as he revealed them: the loneliness that he felt, the burden of celibacy that he bore, the pride and ambition that he sought to conquer. Perhaps that temptation helps to account for his "darkest secret": the unearned theological degree (doctor of sacred theology) that he gave himself to facilitate his desired promotion at Catholic University.

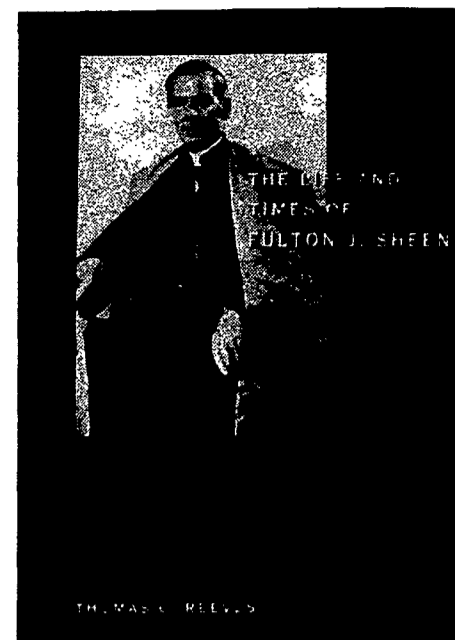
In 11 detailed chapters, and in 1,452

endnotes, Reeves documents numerous interviews that he has conducted with, among others, Sheen family members and those who have worked closely with Sheen or known him — insofar as one could know such a very private person. Wherever he could locate them, dispersed as they are, he has sought out Sheen letters to complete the man's life that John Henry Newman used to insist "lies in his letters."

It is in the penultimate chapter, Chapter 10, after Sheen's considerable accomplishments, that Reeves considers his "banishment" from New York, the site of so many of his earlier triumphs, allegedly at the hands of Cardinal Francis Spellman, the "American Pope." The chapter is entitled, "Exile."

And so Sheen came to Rochester in 1966. "I have an ardent desire to spend myself and be spent, to get my arms around Rochester," he told a welcoming crowd of about 3,000 at the Rochester airport.

He came with the enthusiasm of his ideas, fresh from Vatican II (1962-1965), and with the hopes that he might make Rochester a showcase for the rest of the



American church.

But he who pledged to act democratically failed to act consistently. He who had been the performer found difficulty in being just a listener. His pastoral inexperience showed. His ideas too often turned out to be impractical: for example, unilaterally giving St. Bridget's parish to the federal government for low-cost housing; sending a dozen young priests as "foot-loose apostles" to live in rental flats in the inner city and carry on as missionaries; buying space for Catholic news in selected secular papers around the diocese and thus forgoing a diocesan newspaper.

Crestfallen, pained, hurt by the failure of his priests to support him, a "man of ideas," he resigned his bishopric in October 1969. As a young priest, and for years thereafter, Sheen had prayed that one day he would be a bishop. Father Albert Shamon, one of his vicars, and today an actively retired priest and long-time columnist for the *Catholic Courier*, recalled driving him to the airport to leave Rochester for his beloved New York, where he would spend the last decade of his life as what Reeves calls a "Frail Defender." Sheen told him, "Vicar, it used to be a glory to be a bishop. But today I would not wish it for my best friend."

Perhaps Father P. David Finks, the first of his vicars, who came to clash with him, perceptively summarized Sheen's Rochester contributions: "It is enough that he helped when he did. In a time of ambiguity, he did some good things. That is not a bad epitaph for a man, or a bishop."

"The 'Sheen heritage' in Rochester," as Rochester's iconic church historian, Father Robert F. McNamara, puts it in his history of the diocese, "was therefore not so much a bequest of achievements as of focus."

It was a focus on the correct diocesan postconciliar direction, with its obligation to the world's poor, and its anticipation of the varied needs of the local church in what would be a world of vertiginous changes.

Leo McMannus, a native Rochesterian, lives in Venice, Fla.

Reeves will lecture and sign books at St. John Fisher College's Basil Hall, Room 135, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 29.

Author gives tips on faith in workplace

Spirituality@Work: 10 Ways to Balance Your Life on the Job, by Gregory F.A. Pierce. Loyola Press. 168 pages. Paperback, \$17.95.

Reviewed by Julie McCarty
Catholic News Service

Have you ever tried to integrate your spiritual life with the work you do Monday through Friday? In the midst of difficult co-workers, phone interruptions, crashing computer systems, or loud construction noise, recalling God's loving presence is no easy task.

Gregory Pierce tackles this challenge with ingenuity in *Spirituality@Work: 10 Ways to Balance Your Life on the Job*. Coming from a wealth of experience in business, publishing, community involvement and family-raising, the author is well aware of the difficulties encountered in trying to follow Christ in the marketplace.

Pierce reminds us that traditional spiritualities were often written in view of the religious life, particularly that of a cloistered monk. Trying to apply monastic advice to the vocation of business can produce difficulties. Some classic spiritualities encourage one to flee the world rather than engage in making it a better place.

On the other hand, Pierce cautions us about spiritualities that might not challenge us enough. He writes that corporate



culture sometimes promotes worker-spirituality that risks becoming a "soft, individualistic, emotional 'fix' used merely to make people feel better about the status quo or work harder for less money."

In *Spirituality@Work* Pierce seeks to develop a genuine spirituality of work that is grounded in the actual task of work itself. As Christians, we must seek awareness of God throughout the day, whatever our personal situation. We are called to bring God's presence more fully into the here-and-now, and that includes the workplace.

Pierce also examines many concrete ways to integrate spirituality and work, recommending particular work-related "disciplines." He gives tips on juggling work with the rest of life, dealing with co-workers, and transforming unjust systems. He suggests ways to surround yourself with physical reminders of the sacred without drawing attention to yourself or coming across as a religious fanatic.

Among this book's many positive attributes is the use of language that the gen-

eral working public can readily grasp. One need not be a spiritual guru to understand the concepts of living with imperfections and deciding what is enough (saying no!), while still striving for quality performance.


Having worked a number of jobs, I found myself admiring this book for its creative yet practical approach. My only critique is that I still have unanswered questions. Is it enough to pray on the run at the workplace, or should every Christian also have a specific, intentional prayer time at home? Are monastic spiritualities really that removed from the experience of those in the world? Might cloistered nuns or monks learn something from this book?

The author readily acknowledges that this book is only a beginning at formulating the spirituality of work. He invites others to enter the conversation, contributing their own insights on seeking holiness in the work environment.

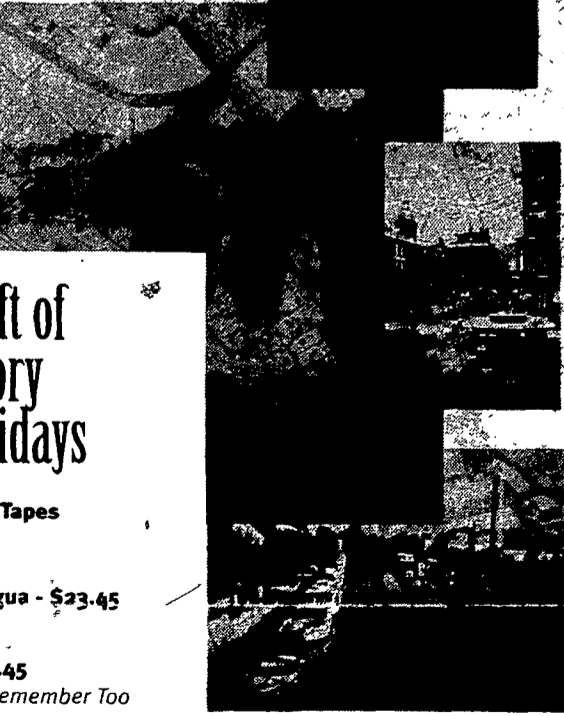
The book also features reflections by Maureen McCarron, of St. Joseph/Livonia and St. William/Conesus, and others. McCarron, a speech pathologist for the Rochester City School District, has been a part of the "Faith and Work in Cyberspace" Internet dialogue that Pierce mentions in his introduction.

Overall, *Spirituality@Work* contributes greatly toward the fuller development of a viable lay spirituality. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the call of all to deep holiness. In addition, the council fathers viewed the laity as agents of transformation in the world, like yeast in dough. *Spirituality@Work* provides some specific ideas about how to be that yeast in the dough.

A former teacher and director of religious education, McCarty is a free-lance writer with a master's degree in theology.



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