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The Catholic Church and the American Idea by Theodore Maynard

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There are still many Catholic priests and laymen such as these: heroes in war and, when the occasion demands (as in the recent elections), heroes in peace. I wish Mr. Tiempo could come to know some of them: he would then like us better. For my part, I like some of his writings, and hope for another (a better) novel from his pen.

MIGUEL A. BERNAD

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE AMERICAN IDEA. By Theodore Maynard. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York. 1953. Pp. 309. \$3.50.

In 1941 Mr. Maynard published a popularized history of the Catholic Church in America under the title *The Story of American Catholicism*. The present volume is in large part a retelling of that *Story*. Its publication was undoubtedly due to the public interest aroused and ignorance revealed by Mr. Paul Blanshard's attacks on the Catholic Church as constituting a menace to American freedom. One of the book's objectives is to show that such attacks have no foundation in history. Another is indicated by the author himself in the following words: "... to this day the majority of Americans think of the country as one in which Protestantism is and ought to remain in an ascendancy, and that only Protestants really belong, while all Catholics ought to be considered 'outsiders' who are here on sufferance. To inquire what degree of truth there may be in such an idea is one of the purposes of this book."

The work is divided into three sections of almost equal length: "The Consonance", "The Components", and "The Contribution." In "The Consonance", a brief survey is made of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States from colonial days to the twentieth century. A selective but frequently very detailed account is given of the activity of individual Catholics in the colonies, on the frontiers, among the Indians, and later, among the immigrants when the floods from Europe began to swell the New World's population. The survey tends to show that Catholicism is not something alien or inimical to the "American Idea" (the principles of American democracy as contained chiefly in the Constitution) but has existed in harmonious agreement with it from the very beginning. Also recorded are the troubles the Church had to weather from internal dissension and external attack.

How much the author's purpose will be furthered by the story of the Church's internal troubles, or why he included

irrelevant and not very edifying details of squabbles among members of the hierarchy, it is difficult to see. His account of the attacks from without, however, by such movements as the Nativists, the A. P. A., and the Ku Klux Klan reveals that current attacks follow practically the same pattern as their predecessors, and that like them they will in the impartial light of history appear much more un-American than the institution against which they are directed.

The second section, "The Components", contains a brief history of the principal national groups which compose the Church in America. The Irish, the Germans, the Italians, the Poles and the Negroes are each allotted a chapter. There is an additional chapter to cover all the other national bodies and a final one on American Catholics of the Eastern Rites. Filipinos merit two paragraphs in the chapter "Other National Bodies." The author is concerned not with the student visitors or wealthy tourists about whom we are accustomed to read, but with the ordinary Filipinos who migrated to America, there to make their home. His personal estimate of them is sympathetic and sound, though his description, meager as it is, makes one feel that the lot of such Filipinos in the United States is a not too happy one.

Most readers will find the second the most interesting section of the three, and also perhaps, since it discusses national traits and characteristics, a bit provoking. Its purpose seems to be to exhibit the Church in the role of an Americanizing agency. The author asserts more than once that the Catholic Church was in fact one of the more potent forces at work in the amalgamation of the foreign groups, but he does not prove it very effectively. Many a reader may be left wondering if their Catholic religion was not rather an additional bond binding such peoples as the Poles and Germans more compactly together, thus increasing their resistance to assimilation.

The final section examines "The Contribution" which Catholics have made to America in the fields of social work, education, general culture, politics and labor. Mr. Maynard finds their contribution to culture rather slight, while to social work, labor, and education on the lower levels it has been considerable.

The book contains an amazing amount of information about Catholics in America, and in general is very readable. It furnishes data sufficient to show that Catholics cannot justifiably be considered "outsiders" or recent arrivals in the United States. They have been an essential part of its development right from the start, and as a body, by their whole-hearted loyalty and solid religious principles, have contributed

no little to the country's strength and stability. At the same time, American political institutions have provided the Church with an atmosphere so congenial that she has grown and flourished in phenomenal fashion. As a result Catholics have been in the past, and are today so well content with the Constitution, that although they may at times seek a more reasonable interpretation of some of its provisions, they do not by any means desire to see it discarded or radically changed. The fear therefore, which would regard the Catholic Church as constituting a menace to the "American Idea", is quite groundless.

It should be noted however, that the theological problem underlying Church-State relations, which is the subject of current controversy among Catholic theologians, cannot be solved by a study such as Mr. Maynard's, restricted as it is to the history of the Church in America.

The author writes more in the style of an essayist than a historian. He proposes a wealth of historical data, but colors it almost constantly with his own personal interpretations and opinions. True, his years of study and the information he has amassed make Mr. Maynard better qualified than many another man to pronounce judgment, yet his work might be more acceptable, and proportionately more effective, if he did so less frequently. Surely he will antagonize almost as many as he will please by advising Catholics "to refuse to give any countenance whatever to the Catholic Senator Joseph McCarthy". There was little point in expressing lack of sympathy for Franco, and still less in his implied reflection on the ex-Communists who "cash-in" on their former comrades as though they could have no higher motive than the number of dollars gained by their disclosures.

Other minor points that might be mentioned are: the dramatic critic of the weekly *America* whom Mr. Maynard calls "Theophilus Williams" signs his column "Theophilus Lewis". The magazine published by St. John's Abbey, which he so laudably recommends, is no longer *Orate Fratres* but has been called *Worship* for over two years. The existence of the Philippines' CWO seems to render inaccurate Mr. Maynard's statement that no other nation possesses any organization corresponding to the American NCWC.

The book contains a select bibliography but no index.

JOSEPH J. KAVANAGH