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Catholic America: Essays in the American Catholic Tradition

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There is a final chapter, "Is the Church too Western?", which answers the difficulties of the non-Westerner, whether Asian or African, in accepting Christian influences since Christianity appears to be essentially a Western thing and there is at present a nationalist reaction against anything Western. Christianity is a universal religion which has assimilated in its culture Oriental as well as Western institutions.

The Church as a divine society possesses an internal principle of life which is capable of assimilating the most diverse materials and imprinting her own image upon them. Inevitably in the course of history there are times when this spiritual energy is temporarily weakened or obscured, and then the Church tends to be judged as a human organization and identified with the faults and limitations of its members. But always the time comes when she renews her strength and once more puts forth her inherent divine energy in the conversion of new peoples and the transformation of old cultures. At no time can we expect this work to be unopposed, for the very fact that the Church represents something entirely different—the intervention of a supernatural principle and the coming of a divine Kingdom—must inevitably arouse the fierce opposition of all those human societies and powers which claim absolute power over man and refuse to admit a superior or rival. One of the strongest and most aggressive of these forces in the modern world is nationalism and here Christians cannot expect to avoid a conflict. But the conflict is not really one between East and West: it is the old conflict between the spiritual and temporal powers, which was formerly confined largely to the Western world and has now emerged as a burning question in the East, largely owing to the introduction of the political ideologies of the West into Asia and Africa. But East or West it is basically the same conflict, and alike in East and West the Church stands neither for East nor West but for the universal spiritual society which is destined to embrace them both: "And the nations shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honour into it" (Apoc. 22:24).

This book is immensely valuable for its penetrating insight into the nature of the modern crisis and the arduous way to salvation if modern man should choose to be saved. Clarity of vision is imaged in a lucidity of expression which makes even so serious a book a delight to read. One may not agree with all the details of his thesis, but his general conclusions are a challenge which even the most thoroughgoing secularist must take into account.

ROLANDO N. QUINTOS

CATHOLIC AMERICA

ESSAYS IN THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC TRADITION. Edited by P. Albert Duhamel. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1960. xiii, 271p.

People, without giving the idea much thought, accept the statement that the United States is founded upon a Protestant tradition. It is not "hair splitting" to question this theory because in actuality only twelve of the thirteen colonies forming the nucleus of the early republic were actually Protestant in tradition. The Mississippi area, the area of the Louisiana Purchase and the Spanish South West, had all received the influence of Western civilization from Catholic explo-

ers and missionaries, such as Fray Junipero Serra, La Salle, Père Marquette and Joliet. From the discovery of America to the present day, Catholic tradition has influenced the bulwark of democracy in the West positively in politics, sociology and literature. The very Declaration of Independence, embodying the democratic ideals of both Protestant and Catholic colonists, is based upon the principles of the individual dignity and rights of man formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas.

In editing the book under review, P. Albert Duhamel has done a unique work in proving not only the existence but also the influence of Catholic tradition in the United States. As he points out in his introduction, the position of Catholicism in the intellectual, social and political life of the United States can no longer be ignored. Catholics form more than one-third of the population. They have taken their place as leaders in all walks of life; in each era some have won high recognition for their contribution to the development of arts and sciences in the country.

Editing the essays to show the wealth of the Catholic tradition seems to be a far more forceful tool than if Mr. Duhamel had written a whole book on the Catholic tradition. Here we not only find proof in the historical facts actually written into the essays but proof of the existence in each era of men and women who contributed to the tradition through their own literary work.

Mr. Duhamel has left the judgment of the effect of Catholic tradition on United States history, sociology, literature and education to the readers of his essays. The choice of authors was made with this aim in view. This he distinctly brings out in his introduction when he says: "No essay was chosen simply because it was a significant piece of apologetics or because it was a fine piece of writing. Each essay was intended to represent an authoritative consideration of some aspect of American Catholic culture as well as a successful use of form itself. The collection as a whole is not intended, however, to reflect any particular conception of the nature or evolution of either the tradition or the form. On the contrary, the collection was intended to provide students of literature and history, general readers and conscientious citizens, with material for making up their own minds.

With the help of such authors as Francis Parkman, Bishop John Carroll, Father Isaac Hecker, George N. Shuster, Father James M. Gillis, Father John LaFarge, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis and Bishop Fulton Sheen as well as others the editor has carried out the aim of his work. After reading the selections one must come away with the overwhelming conviction that Catholic tradition has played and is playing a tremendous role in American life.