



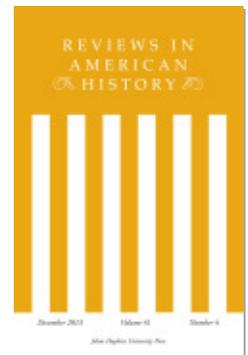
PROJECT MUSE®

More than a Building, More than a Miracle

Margaret M. McGuinness

Reviews in American History, Volume 40, Number 4, December 2012,
pp. 656-660 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/rah.2012.0112



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/rah/summary/v040/40.4.mcguinness.html>

MORE THAN A BUILDING, MORE THAN A MIRACLE

Margaret M. McGuinness

Thomas A. Tweed. *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 391 pp. Figures, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00.

Nancy Lusignan Schultz. *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow, and the Cure That Shocked Washington City.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. 274 pp. Appendix, notes, and index. \$30.00.

As recently as the 1970s, United States Catholic history tended to be written from the perspective of the “great men” credited with building the church in this country. Institutional histories focused on the priests and bishops responsible for the establishment of dioceses, colleges, and hospitals—if women religious were involved, they may have received a nod for their contribution to the process. Even commemorative volumes celebrating significant anniversaries of parishes revolved around pastors, all of whom, it seems, were competent, pastoral, and blessed with a keen sense of financial acumen. Over the last several decades, historians have taken a new approach to the writing of Catholic history. *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836–1920* by Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith (1999); James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (2008); and James T. Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie, and the Soul of the Port of New York* (2010) are all fine examples of studies that focus on women religious, the laity, and the role of the church in the labor movement with an eye toward the larger stories of both Catholicism and U.S. culture.

Two recent books, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* by Thomas Tweed and *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle: The Prince, the Widow, and the Cure That Shocked Washington City* by Nancy Lusignan Schultz, each take a very different—and unique—approach to the study of Catholicism, and they contribute markedly to our understanding of its place in U.S. culture. Although the subjects of both books are situated in the District of Columbia, any similarity between the two ends there. *America's Church* places the Basilica National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (BNSIC) within the story of twentieth-century Catholicism; Schultz’ work

revolves around a reported miracle that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. The methodologies used by each author allow readers to move beyond the basic narratives and gain a better understanding of the broader issues that run throughout the two studies, such as the role of women, race, and anti-Catholicism.

America's Church is about much more than the bishops who managed the construction of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The first major point of this work, according to Tweed, is that "Catholics of all sorts had a presence" at the shrine (p. 8). Residents of the District of Columbia and its surrounding suburbs were able to attend Mass regularly, but Catholics living outside of the area contributed to its financial support as well and visited if and when they were able. During the early stages of the planning and building of the BNSIC, laywomen in particular "had more of a presence" than they would after 1953 when the process of soliciting contributions became more centralized (p. 12). Tweed's second point is that, between 1909 and 1959, most American Catholics shared a similar worldview that was propagated from the pulpit and reinforced in the parish school. The priests and bishops responsible for the design and implementation of the Shrine are the focus of Tweed's third point: although these clerical leaders may have differed on details of construction and maintenance, they all agreed on the main goals relating to a significant Catholic presence in the nation's capital.

Six chapters, each devoted to a specific topic, help develop the book's three major themes. Chapter one examines the building itself and explains the connection between the construction of the BNSIC and what has been called the "age of Mary,"—the period from 1850 until 1950 when Marian devotion rose to new heights in American Catholic spirituality and life. Since it was impossible to even conceive of the dedication of a national shrine without raising a considerable amount of money, promoters used the advertising techniques of the day, including magazines, newspapers, and direct mail, to solicit contributions from various constituencies. Women were a special target of the BNSIC's fundraising efforts, and they are the focus of the next chapter, "Mobilizing 'America's Marys.'" Tweed mines previously unexamined sources to illuminate the role women played in financing the new shrine. In order to gain a better understanding of Mary Downs, for instance, who as a young girl suggested that "every Mary in America make a donation for a statue of Mary to be added to the National Shrine" (p. 68), Tweed studied census records, correspondence found in the BNSIC archives, newspaper clippings—many of which were in the possession of her family—and college records to provide readers with a profile of one of the Basilica's most enthusiastic supporters. The presence of children at the NBSIC is the subject of the third chapter, and Tweed utilizes parochial school records, textbooks, and even Catholic comics such as *Treasure Chest* to obtain more information about a group that has

received relatively little attention. Parochial school children not only made pilgrimages to the BNSIC, they also donated their spare pennies and nickels to assist in its building.

The following three chapters focus on the role of Protestants, the place of the shrine in the nation's capital, and the influence of immigrants on the BNSIC; but the broader narratives of U.S. religious, cultural, and social history are interwoven into each discussion. Chapter five, for example, "Claiming Civic Space," places the National Shrine within the context of Catholic struggles to develop a civic presence in Washington, D.C. Despite their best efforts, church leaders were unable to "position the Shrine as the nation's central site for civic celebrations" (p. 159); that honor was eventually bestowed on the Washington National Cathedral. Catholics involved in work relating to the economy and social justice, such as John A. Ryan and Dorothy Day, worshipped in the building at various times during their careers; and Ryan was officially named Monsignor during ceremonies held at the NBSIC. "Incorporating Catholic Immigrants," the subject of chapter six, moves beyond the traditional focus on European immigrants—although these groups are included in Tweed's discussion—and places African Americans, Native Americans, Latino/as, and Catholics from the Philippines and Korea within the context of the Shrine's story.

Tweed's excellent research methodology, including his willingness to painstakingly connect names on donor lists to census records to school records to newspaper accounts, sheds new light on "Catholics in the pew" during the first six decades of the twentieth century and helps readers appreciate the diverse membership of this group. During the 1920s, for instance, *Salve Regina*, the Shrine's magazine, reported that contributions had even been received from the Papago Indians (Arizona) and "two aboriginal residents of Alaska" (p. 209).

In *Mrs. Mattingly's Miracle*, Nancy Lusignan Schultz recounts the story of Ann Carberry Mattingly and her miraculous cure from breast cancer in 1824. Unlike traditional miracle stories in which the person in need of divine intervention comes into direct contact with the one able to heal, Mattingly never met German Prince Alexander Hohenlohe, the reported miracle worker. In fact, Hohenlohe never even traveled to the United States. The Prince had acquired a reputation for performing miracles in Europe, and in order to respond to the many requests he received from those seeking his healing powers, he had developed a printed form offering instructions to those hoping to find relief from suffering. Friends and family members hoped that his intercession would allow Mattingly to be cured, and they followed the directions for "distance healing" (p. 16), which included a nine-day novena culminating with the celebration of a Mass on the tenth day timed to coincide with a liturgy presided over by Hohenlohe. After Mass, Reverend Stephen Dubisson arrived at the home that Ann Mattingly shared with her brother, Thomas Carberry, mayor

of Washington, D.C., to offer the dying woman Communion. When Mattingly swallowed the Host, "her pain and sickness vanished. She moved her formerly useless arm and propped herself into a sitting position with her elbows, then stretched her arm forward, crying, 'Lord Jesus! What have I done to deserve so great a favor?'" (p. 12)

The story of Ann Mattingly's cure is complicated by a variety of factors, two of which deserve special mention. First, American Catholic leaders disagreed on whether the miracle should be promoted in the popular press, questioning whether it would help or hinder anti-Catholic sentiment. Archbishop of Baltimore Ambrose Maréchal (1764–1828) worried that proclaiming a miraculous cure would ignite anti-Catholicism and "undermine the successful integration of Catholics into the life of the capital city" (p. 123); John England (1786–1842), Bishop of Charleston, on the other hand, was fascinated by the story and claimed it would "elevate the Catholic Church in the United States" (p. 159). Schultz correctly points out that England's prediction was unfounded. "Such dwelling on the female body," she writes, "played into Protestant suspicions about priests and nuns . . . and fueled the rising threat of anti-Catholic violence that would erupt during the next two decades" (p. 160).

Second, the story of Ann Mattingly is part of the more complicated account of race and slavery in the nineteenth-century United States. After combing several sources, including documents relating to the early years of Georgetown College (now University), Schultz determined that Ann's son, John Baptist Carberry Mattingly, left Georgetown, where he was studying for the priesthood, and married Harriet Doyle, a free woman of color. John and Harriet had two surviving children, but there is little evidence that the family enjoyed any relationship with either John's mother or with Thomas Carberry, his rather wealthy uncle. Neither Ann nor Thomas left any part of their estate to John's children, but the two joined other relatives and successfully sued to receive a "portion of Carberry's estate" (p. 215). "It seems reasonable to conclude," Schultz writes, "that the Carberry family's unforgiving attitude towards John's children was based on his interracial relationship with Harriet" (p. 215).

Like Tweed in his book, Schultz draws on a wide variety of sources to piece together this story. A member of the nobility, Prince Hohenlohe left behind a number of objects, including the family castle. In addition, primary sources survive to help document the events of his life. Ann Mattingly, however, left few records, and there are no extant photographs. Schultz used a number of archival and private collections and was fortunate to meet several members of Mattingly's family during the course of her research.

The story of how Schultz determined that a Carberry/Mattingly family conflict erupted over the issue of race, for instance, is fascinating. In 2006, as she was conducting research in the archives at the Georgetown Visitation Monastery in Washington, D.C., she was introduced to a Carberry descendent

who invited Schultz to examine a “box of letters and assorted papers, some of them Ann Mattingly’s. . .” (p. 206). She also developed a relationship with the protagonist’s great-great-great-granddaughter, who had not only devoted a considerable amount of time to the family genealogy, but agreed to submit to a DNA test. When the results revealed that she was “11 percent ‘sub-Saharan African,’” Schultz concluded that “this test, in conjunction with a series of family photos in the hands of descendants, reveals a source of the breach”: John B. C. Mattingly had indeed married a woman of mixed race.

Readers of *Mrs. Mattingly’s Miracle* and *America’s Church* will learn much more from these books than their titles indicate. Women, anti-Catholicism, children and family, race, and issues related to Catholicism and culture—to name just a few—are a part of both stories, reminding us that, when diverse sources are placed in the hands of capable historians such as Tweed and Schultz, the story of Catholicism in the United States is greatly enriched.

Margaret M. McGuinness is Professor of Religion and Executive Director, Office of Mission Integration at La Salle University, Philadelphia. She is the author of *Neighbors and Missionaries: A History of the Sisters of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine* (2011) and *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (forthcoming, 2013).