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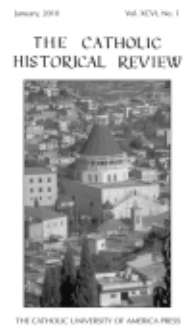
The Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York, 1808-2008 , and: Catholics in New York: Society, Culture and Politics 1808-1946 (review)

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Boston Catholicism. Given Boston's importance, this volume will also prove valuable to readers with a more general interest in American Catholic history.

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JOHN F. QUINN

The Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York, 1808–2008. By Thomas J. Shelley. (Strasbourg: Éditions du Signe. 2007. Pp. 623. \$65.00. ISBN 978-2-746-81945-0.)

Catholics in New York: Society, Culture and Politics 1808–1946. Edited by Terry Golway. (New York: Fordham University Press and the Museum of the City of New York. 2008. Pp. 206. \$34.95. ISBN 978-0-823-22904-8.)

Ostensibly, the showpiece event for the bicentennial of the Archdiocese of New York was the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to New York City in April 2008, when the Holy Father celebrated both the bicentenary of the archdiocese at Yankee Stadium, as well as the third anniversary of his own election as Supreme Pontiff at St. Patrick's Cathedral. But, in long-range terms, perhaps the most significant element of the New York bicentennial celebration was the publication of what the archdiocese has lacked for so long—a comprehensive, scholarly, readable history. The Strasbourg-based Éditions du Signe has been mining American Catholic history for over a decade, producing dozens of diocesan histories of the coffee-table variety, heavy on the visuals, with at least one photograph of every parish in the diocese. But make no mistake: The New York volume is not a typical coffee-table book.

There is good reason why authors have shied away from writing a New York archdiocesan history: There is too much Catholic history in New York. This single diocese includes in its story the first American-born saint, the first American citizen saint, the only canonized American diocesan priest, the first American cardinal, the first Catholic presidential candidate, and the first papal visit to the United States. Its significant figures and institutions include the United Nations, Ellis Island, Catholic universities and colleges, Maryknoll, *America* magazine, Isaac Hecker, Dorothy Day, and Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. Volumes have been written about each of these, but painting all of them into a single canvas has proved too daunting for most authors. Thomas J. Shelley—a priest of the archdiocese, professor of historical theology at Fordham, and formerly professor of church history at the archdiocesan seminary at Dunwoodie, Yonkers—has a long reputation as a respected historian of the local church. Shelley is an excellent writer with a broad knowledge of the historical sources for his subject. In twenty well-developed chapters, Shelley takes the reader from the earliest appearance of French missionaries in New York in the seventeenth century to the triple challenges facing Cardinal Edward Egan's administration in the early days of the twenty-first century: 9/11, the priest sex-abuse crisis, and the parish-realignment initiative. Shelley's handling of the sex-abuse crisis may well become a template for

other diocesan historians seeking an honest yet nonsensational way to cover this aspect of a diocese's history. His treatment of the parish-realignment issue reveals the depth of Shelley's knowledge of his subject, placing the issue within the context of a century-long call for parish reassessment, and balancing it with stories of successful parish resurrections as they adapted to demographic shifts and new populations.

It is something of a tribute to Shelley's skill as a writer and historian that he did not succumb to the temptation of multiple sidebars in the book, but instead deftly wove together the personalities, movements, and currents that have made Catholic New York nationally and internationally known, while at the same time never losing sight of the story taking place in the hundreds of parishes of the archdiocese. In a sense, this is actually a history of the Catholic Church in the United States viewed through the prism of one very vibrant local church.

This five-pound volume is lavishly illustrated, even for an Éditions du Signe book. There are more than 600 photographs and historical illustrations. Published at a time of parish realignment, the photographs of churches about to be closed or demolished may prove particularly valuable. More than twenty well-drawn maps chart the growth of the archdiocese. These are particularly helpful for those unfamiliar with the geography and development of Manhattan and the Bronx, and for those who forget that the archdiocese travels 180 miles upstate. The illustrations are balanced by nearly 800 footnotes, as well as an impressive list of abbreviations of sources (p. 5) that remind the reader that this is a scholarly book.

Catholics in New York is a different type of book, conveyed by the title of Pete Hamill's opening essay, "Confessions of a 'Retired' Catholic." It was produced to accompany an exhibition of the same name at the City Museum of New York. Although the exhibition was mounted in conjunction with the archdiocesan bicentennial, both the exhibition and the book depart from the bicentennial in two important ways: they focus entirely on New York City, eliminating the upstate counties but adding the Diocese of Brooklyn; and they end with the effects of the G.I. Bill in 1946.

The book is a collection of sixteen topical essays by various authors grouped into four sections: Family, Parish, and Community; Institutions and Organizations; Catholics in Labor and Politics; and the New Catholic New York. To the extent that there are common threads connecting the essays, these would appear to be the immigrant experience, Catholics as outsiders, and the "big tent" approach to Catholic diversity. As Terry Golway remarks in his introduction, "... this collection of essays ... ought to demonstrate once and for all that only a brave soul would dare speak of an entity called Catholic New York" (p. 13). While the essays are well written and interesting in themselves, one could argue, as always with this type of book, with the choice of topics. The massive Catholic educational enterprise in New York City has no

chapter of its own and receives only passing references in various essays. Remarkably for a book published by Fordham University about the history of Catholicism in its own hometown, the university is only mentioned once (on p. 184). Although Brooklyn is described as “the borough of churches,” and Manhattan has an entire public museum dedicated to medieval church art and architecture at The Cloisters, there is no reference to the architectural impact of the city’s 500 Catholic churches. Nor is there a chapter that describes New York’s role in the wider American and international church.

On the other hand, Tyler Anbinder’s essay, “Saving Grace: The Emigrant Savings Bank and Its Depositors,” provides a window on the life of immigrant Catholics that is seldom explored. The essay, “Sanctified Lives,” on the New Yorkers who have been proposed for official church recognition as saints does not mention St. John Neumann, ordained a priest of the New York Diocese in 1835; Father Solanus Casey, O.F.M. Cap., who worked for seventeen years in the archdiocese; Sheen; nor Cardinal Terence Cooke, all of whose causes have been introduced. Remarkably, the final essay, “Green Grass, Cape Cods, and Suburban Catholicism,” departs from the book’s focus and centers on the impact of the G.I. Bill on suburban Long Island. It would have been more consistent had it dealt with the impact of the G.I. Bill on the city—the emptying-out of once Catholic neighborhoods; the phenomenal growth of the city’s Catholic colleges such as Fordham, Manhattan, and St. John’s; and the ultimate impact the G.I. Bill would have on future parish realignment.

This volume, like the previous book, is beautifully illustrated with some 170 photographs and illustrations. Remarkably, only eight illustrations were also contained in the Shelley book. The illustrations, presumably garnered from the museum exhibition, are a real strength of this book and convey a genuine flavor of Catholic life in the city. The illustrations are less institutional than in the Shelley book and more oriented to Catholics in the pew. In a book that does include illustrations of Maria Monk, Marlon Brando, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, only five of the twenty ordinaries of New York and Brooklyn made the photographic cut. In particular, Archbishop Michael Corrigan (1885–1902) would not be happy to see his image tucked discreetly in a chapter entirely devoted to his nemesis, Father Edward McGlynn.

Catholics in New York is more of a tasting menu, serving up small samples of the New York Catholic experience. While it does not stand on its own as a comprehensive history, it does serve as a very fine spice rack, helping to bring out the flavor of the full course meal provided by Shelley’s *Bicentennial History of the Archdiocese of New York*.

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