that, following wide publicity of his case, Christopher Payi had been released.

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North American: II—The Church

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.

The figures of course are formidable. And the European enquirer can be mesmerized by the catalogue of Catholic achievement in the United States: a population now of forty-five million, with 55,000 priests, 170,000 religious sisters (of whom nearly 100,000 teach in schools), 267 universities and colleges with more than 300,000 students, 10,000 elementary schools with over four million pupils, 850 hospitals of every sort in which more than fourteen million patients were treated in 1960. In the same year nearly 132,000 converts were received into the Church.

The statistics matter, if only because they are the staring facts that declare the vitality of the Church in the only way it can be externally measured. They indicate something too, of the astounding generosity of American Catholics, who, with no help from public funds, have built up a system of churches and schools unparalleled in the Church's history. But the Church is not merely a corporation to be surveyed in terms of its efficiency or of the successful image it presents to the world. It is easy for the visitor from an older and more casual society to wonder a little at the signs of a high-powered organization—the discreet hum of the electric typewriters in the carpeted rooms of the chancery offices, the multitude of monsignori bearing their hide brief-cases, the jet black Chryslers—and to see in it all the ecclesiastical equivalent of the sort of business set-up commended by *Fortune* magazine. Unhappily

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too many observers remain at this superficial level of judgment, which is only to say that the Church uses, as she must, the material means at hand in her temporal mission, here and now.

Nevertheless, the image of the Church as established so firmly in American life, and in a way that Americans readily understand, has its importance. It is a far cry from the Church of the immigrants, for the most part despised as alien, to the Church that has 'arrived' to become one of the most characteristically American of institutions. Robert Cross, an astute non-Catholic observer, can even say that 'Catholicism has at last become part of American culture.'[1] The emphasis here is on 'at last', and with justice. Until quite lately the Church's energies were almost wholly taken up with the problems of providing for the vast army of immigrants—nine million Catholics came to America in less than a century—who brought, from Ireland, Italy, Germany, Poland, loyalties of language and tradition that had little in common with the assumptions that formed the accepted American framework.

The Church indeed had few roots in the earlier—and formative—history of the United States. There had been the colonization of Maryland, of course, and the strange, hidden Catholic life of New Mexico and the Californian missions. And the influence of the French Jesuit missionaries, still to be discerned in Detroit and St Louis, is not to be ignored. But the evolution of American institutions found little place for Catholic ideas or aspirations, and the teeming millions of Catholic immigrants were readily dismissed by New England intellectuals as a lesser breed, certainly without the law as understood on Beacon Hill. It was the great and far-seeing achievement of such men as Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland to prepare the ground for the establishment of the Church in America as the Church *of* America, rooted firmly in a society that was free. Their insistence on the right—and paramount duty—of Catholics to take a full share in their country's life and institutions can seem gratuitous now. But they spoke at a time when the Church was still absorbed in sectional interests, struggling to assimilate its very mixed elements, and only emerging to defend itself against its cruder enemies.

It was inevitable that the political attitudes of Catholics should reflect their national origins; inevitable, too, that the pressures of anti-Catholic agitation should lead to the formation of caucuses whose influence is still an important, and often malign, element in the municipal affairs of

[1]In *The Yale Review*, Summer 1959, 'The Changing Image of Catholicism in America?'

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such cities as Boston and New York. It is instructive in this context to remember that President Kennedy is the grandson of 'Honey Fitz,' a characteristic Boston-Irish boss. The process of moving up is rapid in American life, and Catholics, for the most part late starters, are certainly in the running.

If one tries to analyse the spiritual strength of the Church in America, the danger is necessarily one of generalizations based on evidence that can never be adequate. But at once one can record an impression of robust and uninhibited faith and of a degree of actual religious practice that has surely no parallel in recent European experience. It has to be admitted that church attendance of every sort is at a high level in America. It is a form of social conformity that is specially important in country districts and in smaller towns. But the proof of the vigour of Catholic life is perhaps to be found in such hard facts as the resilience of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and, most notably, in the popularity—in the true sense—of retreats for lay people. When 300,000 laymen make a closed retreat in an average year and do all the organizing themselves, observing silence with a strictness that has its own virtue in the maelstrom of American life, the usual impression of a bingo-dominated Catholic community, concerned above all with organization, needs to be revised. At Gethsemani, which has acquired its own importance as the monastery of Thomas Merton, who has contributed so profoundly to the spiritual awakening of American Catholicism through his writings, one finds week by week large groups of wholly representative laymen, sharing in the religious and liturgical life of the Cistercian monks. Their presence is in a way more remarkable than that of the monks themselves.

One has the impression that so far the liturgical advances of the last few years have had little general effect on Catholic life. America remains a great country for the novena and the 'shrine', and the necessarily Irish tradition of so many of the clergy means that, as in Ireland itself, advance will be slower in some areas than many laypeople would like. There are of course some notable exceptions to such a general statement, and the work and publications, for instance, of the Benedictine monks of Collegeville are profoundly affecting the religious life of many parishes and certainly most Catholic colleges throughout the country. But the piety is still characteristically individual in its emphasis, and a glance at most Catholic journals will reveal a strong interest in what one might call the pragmatic tests of the Church's life. Nowhere is there such an interest in the moral theologian's rôle, as the

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extraordinary debate recently about the right to 'defend' a fall-out shelter showed.

It is the achievement of Catholic education that is bound to impress the visitor. In terms of 'plant' it is formidable. Once scarcely ever visits a school or college where ambitious building projects are not in progress. So far the concentration has largely been on provision for a rapidly growing community, and in any case increasingly large numbers of Catholic students will have to go to 'neutral' universities, for the Catholic institutions cannot hope to find room for them. Thus in one large city the Catholic university has 3,000 students, with some eighty priests on the faculty, while the independent university includes 4,000 Catholic students, with until recently only one priest acting as their chaplain and running the Newman centre. This disproportion is a startling illustration of a problem that is going to grow to perhaps unmanageable proportions. In the meantime there has been much self-examination among Catholics as to the results of the education they have and for which they have made such immense sacrifices. In particular, Mgr Tracy Ellis of the Catholic University of Washington, has stressed its disappointing contribution to scholarship in the true sense, but, being a historian, he has shown how inevitable this was in the formative stages of the Church's growth, when energies were wholly concentrated on building up institutions, often isolated as they were from the general stream of American educational advance, and deprived of any sort of aid from public funds.

It is perhaps a matter for debate whether the conception of the Catholic University, providing courses of instruction in all the academical disciplines, is likely to need modification under the stress of present-day needs. The mere cost of such departments as engineering or nuclear physics is itself a difficulty, and it will often happen that the graduate of a Catholic college will in any case do his graduate work of preference in a 'neutral' university, whose material facilities are likely to be better. A concentration on the programme of the 'Liberal Arts College', preserving humane values which are everywhere threatened by the claims of technology, will remain an essential Catholic contribution to true learning and perhaps ultimately a more valuable one than the attempt at competing in specialist fields. It is odd to find a School of Business Administration as an indispensable part of any Catholic college, but as Father Walter Ong, S.J., has pointed out,[2] the social accept-

[2]In his *Frontiers in American Catholicism*, The Macmillan Company of New York, 9s, an excellent discussion of this, and many related problems.

ability of business in American life, and all its implications in terms of universal optimism, has necessarily affected Catholics as they take an increasing share in American life at all its levels. 'The Church feels this milieu is not to be neglected, but redeemed', he comments.

The coming-of-age of the Church as an established feature of American life has of course created much suspicion among those, such as Dr Blanshard, who see in Catholic advance a threat to the American tradition of tolerance and democratic process. It is ironical that this should be so, for it is in America that a realistic understanding of the Church's function in a 'pluralistic' society has been most frankly faced. It is true that there are Catholic groups who find in the opposition to Communism a sufficient justification for the extremes of conservatism associated with the John Birch Society. And the memory of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy is far from forgotten. But it may well be that the providential rôle of the American Church in 1962 is to present to the world an exemplar of what religious freedom means. The circumstances of their history have required American Catholics to avoid any sort of equivocation in this matter. One recalls the extraordinarily prescient remarks of Archbishop Carroll in 1784[3]: 'America may come to exhibit a proof to the world that general and equal toleration, by giving a free circulation to fair argument, is the most effectual method to bring all denominations of Christians to a unity of faith'.

It is certainly true to say that the response to the present Pope's ecumenical concern has been prompt and generous in America. 'Togetherness' needs no encouraging, and what might be called the Rotary assumptions of American life make contacts, at least at a social level, easy to achieve. The 'dialogue' is constantly discussed, but less frequently is it conducted at a high level of intellectual interest, though here one must acknowledge the contributions of such theologians as Fr Courtney Murray, S.J., and Fr Gustave Weigel, S.J. In whole areas of American intellectual life, indeed, the Society of Jesus is marked by a combination of sound learning and an awareness of the nature of the Church's intervention in the circumstances of to-day. There are many reasons, of which the recollection, and even the recrudescence, of such crude anti-Catholic campaigns as the Ku Klux Klan, is not the least important—why the Church's concern has seemed exclusively one of defence. Catholics have been notable more for their protests against injustices under which they have laboured than for any radical concern for

[3]Quoted in 'American Catholicism in 1960', *American Benedictine Review*, June 1960, by Mgr John Tracy Ellis.

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justice as such. They have been forced too often into the corner of an apologetic that justifies the Catholic opposition to divorce, birth control or whatever it be; their theology has seemed to be more a matter of answering objections rather than of proclaiming the truth.

It has to be admitted—and Americans are the first to admit it—that the intellectual contribution of Catholics to American life, in the sense of applying the resources of their theology to a constructive appraisal of the world in which they live, has been very limited. But, as Jacques Maritain has pointed out, the very newness of the Church's larger mission in America has always to be remembered. Cardinal Cushing recently remarked that not a single American bishop could claim a father who had had a college education. He was of course instancing this fact as proof of the identification of the Church in America with the workers, with those who could claim no privileges. The picture will be very different in a few years time, and already the almost universal Irish episcopal names are giving place to many unspellable Polish and Croatian ones.

What sustains American Catholic life above all else is its vigorous optimism. It may be that as yet the deeper implications of the Church's social teaching, the taxing dilemmas that her moral authority must increasingly create in the evolving American scene, have not been seriously faced. And here a certain confusion of political acceptability with religious sanctions can arise, as in the profound suspicion among many American Catholics of 'socialization,' with the suggestion that even a modest beginning of the welfare state is the high-road to Communism. The agonizing moral problem presented by the possibility of nuclear warfare is only the gravest of many problems in which the mounting crisis for Christian opinion will have to be realized. And the providential history of the Church in America, with its freedom from the pressures that Governments have so often exercised in Europe, should stimulate a candour and courage which the situation will surely soon need. It would be sad if the pressure to conform to the image of 'Americanism' should ever obscure the Church's freedom to instruct the conscience of her children or should limit their choice in following it.

In such matters as racial segregation, the lead given by some American bishops has been admirable, though they have wisely done nothing to countenance the violent seeking of sudden solutions which cannot disperse at once the inherited attitudes that are so often an unconscious factor in the life of the south. And a real sense of solidarity with the sufferings of others in poverty and oppression has been practically

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expressed in the record of the Catholic Relief Services, which have made more than $800 million available throughout the world since 1943—and this, of course, quite apart from the astronomical aid given by Federal agencies and met by taxation. The plans now being worked out to help in such territories as Latin America—and here Cardinal Cushing has been notably active—call not only for cash but for the personal service of Catholics, many of them laymen and women, and the response has been wonderfully generous.

The hope for the Church in America, as everywhere else, lies in the growing maturity of its laity, aware of a true vocation and not, as so often in the past, restricted to a passive conformity. Here such hopeful signs as the growth of the Christian Family movement and the lively spirit of the Newman groups match the true needs of the times—and here, increasively, one may believe that America will begin to assume in the life of the Church at large responsibilities which she has too often evaded. With resources so huge and an enthusiasm so generous, it seems especially sad that American life can superficially appear so trivial, so unaware of the true dimensions of the Church's mission at this point of human history. But the self-questioning that has recently surveyed Catholic education and its contribution to American life is itself a sign of a new and adult awakening. What is needed now is the capacity to communicate to the world beyond the parish walls the hope and justice and above all the charity that the Church commands to redeem society. And one can be hopeful that this will happen, for of the solid spiritual fidelity of the great mass of American Catholics one can have no doubt. They, and all of us, must begin to apply it, to see its total range in terms of a social conscience as well as those of individual perfection.

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