BOOK REVIEWS

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This beautifully written and illustrated book chronicles the exodus of Vietnamese refugees to the United States following the fall of Saigon and their relocation to Pittsburgh from the refugee camp at Indiantown Gap in 1975. Pittsburghers, themselves the descendants of immigrants, showed deep sympathy to the latest immigrants, the majority of whom were professionals in the “old country.” With text in both English and Vietnamese, the work details the lives of individuals, families and the collective Vietnamese Catholic community as it moved through a series of churches until presently located at the former St. Boniface Church on Pittsburgh’s North Side. This immigrant community has already produced its first priest son, who was ordained in 1993. The deep faith of the members of this community resonates from the pages of this chronicle.


This book recounts the history of the Pontifical Institute of the Religious Teachers Filippini, who arrived in the USA in 1910 at the command of Pope Pius X to minister to the large number of Italian immigrants, who lacked priests and sisters conversant in their native language. While education was the initial focus of the sisters’ efforts, they tended the sick and dying in the Spanish influenza outbreak of 1917-1918. The order’s history is one of rapid expansion and ultimate contraction in the years subsequent to Vatican II. In the period of expansion, this order staffed schools and religious education centers in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Sisters who entered the order from Pittsburgh are identified. The author is a member of the order and best known for her several books defending Pope Pius XII against charges of silence during the Holocaust. This work, commemorating the order’s American centennial, is attractively illustrated.


The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) has written the history of its efforts over many decades to professionalize Catholic elementary and secondary education in the United States. The Diocese of Pittsburgh has played a prominent educational role at the national level over the years – as evidenced by the series of English texts prepared by the late Msgr. Paul E. Campbell of St. Lawrence O’Toole Church, and the series of history textbooks authored by the late Auxiliary Bishop John B. McDowell. This work focuses on the leadership role of the Department of Superintendents, one of several constituent bodies within NCEA. The creation of this Department was the brainchild of Msgr. Campbell in 1935. The present author spent ten years researching this volume, which traces the history of Catholic school superintendency in the United States from 1936 to 1971. Prominent in that history is Msgr. Thomas J. Quigley (a native of the former Annunciation Parish on Pittsburgh’s North Side, superintendent of Pittsburgh diocesan schools 1939-1955, and pastor of St. Bernard Parish in Mt. Lebanon until his tragic death in 1960), who served as NCEA Department president from 1953 to 1955. The role of then-Msgr. John B. McDowell (successor to Msgr. Quigley as diocesan superintendent of schools) on the Department’s executive board 1959-1963, and his later role as a bishop in developing policy to address the challenges confronting Catholic schools in the societal and church upheavals of the 1960s, is duly noted. Our local Mike Aquilina, long-time CHS board member, contributed to this work.

This tightly-written volume recounts the life story of a woman born in Pittsburgh in 1910 and raised in her early years in Old Economy, near Ambridge in Beaver County: Vera Duss. Her paternal grandparents were the last members of the Harmony Society, an extraordinary experiment in communal living. Taken to France, Vera was baptized a Catholic in 1915. She later became a medical doctor in Paris, but left that profession to become a Benedictine contemplative at the famous Jouarre Abbey. Deeply affected by the liberating efforts of American soldiers during World War II, she felt an interior call to return to the United States to found the first community of contemplative Benedictine nuns in this country. The 400-acre Abbey of Regina Laudis in Connecticut served as the inspiration for Hollywood’s early 1950s movie with Loretta Young and Celeste Holm called Come to the Stable – a fictionalized version of how Mother Benedict and Mother Mary Aline settled in Bethlehem, Connecticut after leaving their French abbey. This volume recounts the many challenges that Mother Benedict encountered before and after her American foundation – along with the support of several prominent church officials, including the future Pope Paul VI. Mother Benedict died in 2005, just six weeks short of her 95th birthday. The work concludes with the author’s recounting of Mother Benedict’s insightful reflections on religious vocations and consecrated virginity. This volume, complete with attractive photographs, clearly lays the groundwork for future consideration of Mother Benedict Duss for sainthood.

James W. Garvey, “St. Raphael Church 1911-2011: Celebrating 100 Years of Love Rooted in Love” (Pittsburgh: St. Raphael Church, 2011), table of contents, illus., appendices, footnotes, 73 pp.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh’s most prolific priest-author has issued another of his well-written parish histories – this time, that of St. Raphael Parish in the Morningside section of the city of Pittsburgh. Morningside developed as a result of the construction of a trolley line to serve the area; in 1911, the parish was formed as an “Irish” one with territory taken from Sacred Heart, St. Lawrence O’Toole and St. Kieran parishes. The parish operated both an elementary school (still open) and a girls’ high school (now closed), both staffed by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, PA. With a $400,00 bequest, the parish constructed a magnificent new church, with attached baptistry, in 1959. A new high school building opened in 1966. Over time, the population of the parish became predominantly Italian. This history provides a complete list of the priests and sisters who served the parish, identification of parish vocations, and pertinent lists of parishioners. The extensive photographs are accompanied by detailed footnotes that serve as an excellent bibliographic resource.


What does a history of a religious order of women headquartered in the Diocese of Scranton in northeastern Pennsylvania have to do with the Diocese of Pittsburgh in southwestern Pennsylvania? Plenty, if you are cognizant of the fact that a number of religious orders have staffed schools in dioceses other than where its motherhouse is located. Such is the case of the Immaculate Heart Sisters, who responded to pastors’ calls from the Diocese of Pittsburgh – leading to their staffing schools at St. Mary of the Mount elementary and high schools, St. Justin in Mt. Washington (1925), Holy Angels in Hays (1938), St. Francis in Munhall (1938), and St. John the Baptist in Unity Township (1959). The writer provides a candid presentation of congregation-pastor interactions (both positive and negative) affecting the schools – and the ultimate withdrawal from their many schools due to the reduced number of sisters in the 1960s and later. Bishop Jerome Hannan of Scranton, a native of Pittsburgh, plays a not minor role in the order’s history, as recounted in this work.

This hefty volume represents 14 years of research and travel in 31 counties in western Pennsylvania. This scholarly architectural history of necessity is selective, yet exhaustive in its scope. The work contains 800 entries, many accompanied by a photograph. Part of a state-by-state assessment called “Buildings of the United States,” the book was commissioned by the Society of Architectural Historians. The volume focuses on the cultural, economic and geographical characteristics reflected in the selected buildings. Of particular interest to Catholic readers are almost four dozen entries pertaining to historic Catholic structures ranging from St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland, to the onion-domed St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church on the South Side, to the former St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cathedral in Munhall. Also included are present and former churches – along with cathedrals, monasteries, priories, friaries, chapels, convents, retreat centers, shrines, basilicas, colleges and universities, seminaries, and an archbishop (all within the dioceses of Pittsburgh, Erie, Greensburg, and Altoona-Johnstown). This herculean work may serve, in part, as an architectural history of major Catholic structures in western Pennsylvania for which no comprehensive Catholic narrative or pictorial history yet exists.


This long-awaited volume represents ten years of research by the successor to the architectural firm founded in 1889 by Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942) — regarded by many as the premier Anglo-Catholic architect in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cram’s life has been told in other biographical works. This volume is essentially the presentation in pictorial form, with accompanying architectural commentary, of the principal works of Cram. Cram’s religious architecture dominated his work and ensured that his reputation will endure as long as his cathedrals and churches stand.

While best known for his contributions to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City (1925-1931), Cram’s three principal projects in the City of Pittsburgh are no less famous: East Liberty Presbyterian Church, Calvary Episcopal Church in Shadyside (opposite Sacred Heart Church), and Holy Rosary Church in Homewood. Stunningly, the author of this work omits any mention of Holy Rosary Church — constructed between 1927 and 1929, with its magnificent Spanish Gothic stonework, flying buttress, and rich metal interior screening — in what purports to be a complete list of Cram’s projects. Likewise, the volume fails to include any photographs of that church, which was just recently closed to public services in light of the financial condition of the successor St. Charles Lwanga Parish. The pictures selected illustrate the magnificence of Cram’s work for the ages.


Everyone loves to go to the movies, including Catholics. This volume, financed by the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at Notre Dame University, includes 14 separate chapters on the place of religion in American film. The authors address the impact of such movies as Angels with Dirty Faces (1938), The Song of Bernadette (1943), America’s favorite priest in Going My Way (1944), The Godfather (1972), The Exorcist (1973), cops and priests in True Confessions (1981), Dogma (1999) and The Passion of the Christ (2004). Of particular interest to Pittsburgh readers are the respective chapters authored by University of Pittsburgh history professor Paula Kane (“Jews and Catholics Converge: The Song of Bernadette (1943)”) and Amy Frykholm (“Catholicism Wow!: Dogma (1999)).” The latter critiques the controversial story that was filmed in Pittsburgh, much of it at the now-closed SS. Peter and Paul (German) Catholic Church in the Larimer section of East Liberty. Hollywood actors Matt Damon and Ben Affleck starred in the film — controversial not just for its title and its thematic material, but for its embedded criticism of institutional religion. The movie concluded with a bloody scene outside a cardinal’s church (SS. Peter and Paul), replete with bodies dropped from the top of the Gothic cathedral-size church. Pictures of both SS. Peter and Paul Church, and St. Paul Cathedral, accompany the text of this article. Collectively, the articles recount how movies were an extension of the life of the streets and shrines of the American church, as well as how the movies contributed to the formation of American Catholicism. While the several authors bring Catholic history to light, they also engage a broader cultural field with insightful comments.

This is an easy-to-read history of Sacred Heart Parish in Emsworth (in northwestern Allegheny County), which serves the neighborhoods of Ben Avon, Ben Avon Heights, Killbuck, Ohio Township, and Emsworth. The parish’s current 1955 church replaced the original 1892 structure; the parish priests, school principals and buildings are treated. The parish has been served by both religious order and diocesan priests in its long history.


This attractively presented diocesan history, in the standard French publisher format, traces the history of the diocese in south central Pennsylvania that was formed in 1868 from territory taken from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. While the majority of Harrisburg’s bishops have come from Philadelphia, the diocese’s connection to Pittsburgh was established during the administration of Pittsburgh Bishop Hugh C. Boyle, when a number of “excess” Pittsburgh priests were loaned to the Harrisburg diocese for a number of years. In 1990, Pittsburgh’s vicar general – Rev. Nicholas C. Dattilo, a native of New Castle (Lawrence County) – became the eighth bishop of Harrisburg. This diocesan history book, in part, traces the impact of Bishop Dattilo upon Harrisburg during his 14-year tenure: lay ministry, reorganization of the diocesan administrative structure, initiation of parish mergers following the Pittsburgh model, construction initiatives, and enactment of policies for the protection of minors including the mandate of zero-tolerance of abuse. In addition, he served as president of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference and as a member of seminary visitation and evaluation committees. Bishop Dattilo’s administration was cut short by his untimely death just three days before his 72nd birthday in 2004. He is buried at Saint Lucy’s Cemetery in his native New Castle.


Sister Mary Lou Kownacki – a Benedictine in Erie, Pennsylvania – is the former executive director of the Alliance for International Monasticism USA. Long involved in peace and justice issues, she was honored by Pax Christi USA as their Pope Paul VI Teacher of Peace. She has served in Erie’s inner city amidst poor families trying to survive and keep hope alive despite drugs, violence, and despair. This work is a series of poetic meditations, reflecting the author’s mystical side as an “urban monk” – using the prose of hard facts to take the reader into a poetry of the soul. She writes about days when “spiritual security, not fear, was a neighborhood’s gift to children. It is one way of trying to stretch my monk’s robe until it embraces the suffering world.”


In February 1967, a small group of faculty and students at Duquesne University experienced a “baptism in the spirit” at a spiritual retreat. That experience spread to other American college campuses. This book examines the history of the American Catholic charismatic renewal from roots in the Cursillo movement, the Duquesne “spirit” event, and subsequent developments through the end of the past century. The influence of Vatican II, changes within the movement, and its relationship to the Church and the Protestant Pentecostal movement are treated. The book is an excellent introduction to the nature of Charismatic spirituality, for the uninitiated.