

GOLDEN JUBILEE*

Very Rev. V. F. O'Daniel, O.P., S.T.M.

June 16, 1941

"Thou art a Priest forever, according to the Order of Melchisedech."

HEB. VIII—4.



FOR a long time during the past half century, practically during the whole of Father O'Daniel's priesthood, a rather attractive theory has held sway in the writing of American history. This is called the theory of the American frontier. Its purpose is to describe and to interpret the social and political progress of the American people in the light of the impact between the ever-receding West and the more stabilized East.

It is an historical commonplace that much of that West was Catholic when the pioneers began the journey across the Appalachian mountains shortly after the Revolutionary War. Evidence of French and Spanish Catholic culture met the American new-comers at every step once the River of the Immaculate Conception, as Marquette named the Mississippi, was crossed.

From St. Louis, to San Antonio, to San Francisco, from St. Anthony's Falls, to Santa Fe, to Corpus Christi, in the names of towns and villages, in the names of streams and mountains, the advancing frontiersman witnessed evidence of a past worthy of the Catholic Faith.

The building of our great nation in a little more than a century and a half is one of the most thrilling sagas of history. For all time to come, so long as we remain a nation, the boys and girls in our schools, the young and old of all ages will read the pages of this great past with hearts stirred by the heroism of their forefathers.

The conquest of the West has been highly dramatized in these latter years and has now assumed the sweep of an epic poem. But that should not blind us to the less pleasing side of the picture. Adventurers of all types, criminals, religious ranters, gamblers, petty politicians, hard drinkers, two-gun fighting men, and other worthless characters walked side-by-side with honest, brave men and women, starry-eyed with hope for homes in the great plains of the West.

From the vivid and picturesque scenes which crowd the general

* Sermon delivered by the Rt. Rev. Monsignor Peter Guilday.

picture of the westward movement, we turn this morning in loving memory to the first organized band of Americans to go west—the Catholic League of Maryland which began its journey to Kentucky in the Springtime of 1785. This League consisted of sixty Catholic families who had banded together to seek homes in the Blue Grass Region along the Ohio. We know too little of this precious page in our American Catholic history. The fact is, we knew almost nothing until Father O'Daniel made his researches in Maryland and Kentucky and wove the story into a fascinating chapter in his *Life of Bishop Edward Dominic Fenwick*. From his pages we glean the names of these pioneer Catholic families, names that are familiar to all of us—the Abells, the McAtees, the Hamiltons, the Spaldings, Jarboes, Lancasters and the O'Daniels. The journey from Southern Maryland over the old turnpikes leading to Pittsburgh or to the Cumberland Gap, while far different from the noisy caravans which came out of New England and the Carolinas, was not less dangerous. There was always the peril of roaming Indians and highwaymen. In fact, one of the ancestors of Father O'Daniel was slain by a highwayman just after the turn of the century on his way to Kentucky. Each successive group of Maryland Catholics was a happy one, the only sad note in the beginning was that they had no priest to accompany them, but that was quickly remedied and Catholic life and customs were soon well organized in the little towns they founded. Father O'Daniel's maternal grandfather, William Hamilton, one of the first settlers, was a double second cousin to Archbishop Martin John Spalding of Baltimore, and on this same side, he traces his family back to the *Ark* and the *Dove*.

With the blood of the pioneers in his veins, and with the stories of their exploits ringing in his ears from boyhood, it is not surprising that his mind and heart should be filled with the desire to place in permanent form the annals of this Kentucky past in which his own American Dominicans had played so splendid a part.

Father O'Daniel came to the work from a scholastic training acquired both at home in Kentucky and Ohio and in the University of Louvain, Belgium.

He was born and reared in the most historic settlement of the Dominicans in the United States, St. Rose, Washington County, Kentucky, in 1868, the son of Richard Jefferson O'Daniel and his wife, Sarah Ann Hamilton. His elementary education was received in private and public schools there and at the age of 18, he entered the Order of St. Dominic, and began the long journey to the priesthood which he reached on June 16, 1891. From that time, fifty years ago

today, his services to the Order and to the Church have been exceptional in scope and in scholarly worth. For long years he was professor of theology in Kentucky, in California, and here in Washington. He has had various educational offices in the ranks of his fellow-Dominicans, and during these last three decades of years he has been archivist of the province. Above all these posts, in the eyes of scholars beyond these sacred walls, he has become the historiographer of his Order and, on account of his many books and articles, he is acknowledged to be the foremost Catholic American historian of our generation.

Those of us who have followed his career as an historian have the satisfaction of knowing that it began with the creation of the Catholic Historical Review, of which Father O'Daniel was a co-founder and for many years an Associate Editor. Some of his earliest studies in Dominican history appeared first in the pages of the *Review* and all who read them realized that a scholarly and well-trained research student was about to reap the harvest of his long years of study and reflection.

Fenwick was not the first biography from the pen of Father O'Daniel. Three years before its appearance in 1920, Father O'Daniel gave us a life of Father Charles Hyacinth McKenna, the greatest Dominican of his day in the United States.

Here was no shadowy figure like Fenwick, or Wilson, or Miles, whose biographies were later to be written by Father O'Daniel, but the story of an apostle many of us knew and whose eloquence in behalf of the Holy Name thrilled hundreds of thousands of men throughout the United States, and who laid the foundations for the Society which other Dominicans guided wisely and successfully during the past half-century.

The *Life of Father McKenna* revealed the fact that we had in the American Church an historian as skilled as Shea, and far more brilliant than Martin John Spalding, Camillus Maes, Sarah Brownson and others of the earlier school.

When the little band of brothers, with Shahan at our head, back in 1914, founded the *Catholic Historical Review*, it was to Father O'Daniel that we came for advice and ever since he has been a sagacious and prudent leader.

Father O'Daniel's historical work has not been limited to the United States alone. His treatises on the founding of the Order, on the first disciples of St. Dominic, on the Dominican laybrother, and other studies have enlarged our vision of the Order's marvellous past. The best of these works is one that reveals a special legacy we sons

of St. Dominic possess for our own sanctification and for the strengthening of our courage in the cause of Christ—this is that remarkable study of the *Dominicans in Early Florida*, with the saintly martyr Father Luis Cancer as the central figure of that glorious scene. Crowning all this library of Dominican history, Father O'Daniel is finishing a voluminous history of St. Joseph's Province which will give the complete and detailed story of the past labors of his brothers here in the United States.

However, on this jubilant note of our gratitude to Father O'Daniel for his magnificent leadership in the field of American historiography, we must stop.

For, after all, it is not alone the historian we are honoring this morning, but more than anything else the gift of the Holy Priesthood of Jesus Christ. What are fifty historical masterpieces compared to fifty golden years of the Sacrifice of the Mass, a half-century of priestly ministrations to poor and rich alike? It is easy for us to ascertain his mastery of historical sciences in his many books and articles, but no one except our Blessed Lord knows the long record of his success as a spiritual guide and as a teacher. His own memories naturally are filled with recollections of thousands of such spiritual marvels, but this morning one memory rises above all the rest, during these past fifty years, and that is the morning of his First Mass, in June, 1891.

Such then are the main outlines of a magnificent record of scholarship and of the priestly life. It is one in which many have shared, none more so than our University family of which Father O'Daniel has been an illustrious member for the past thirty-five years. In the evening of his life we praise and honor him as one who has brought to this House of Studies and to the Catholic University of America a nation-wide fame as a priest, historian, and humble son of St. Dominic.

We congratulate you, Brother Victor Francis O'Daniel, on the excellent use you have made of your talents and so generously.

You are about to ascend these altar steps to consummate the Sacrifice of the Mass of your Golden Jubilee, about to enter into the Holy of Holies again with renewed consecration upon your hands—the consecration love and affection have wrought during all these years that are gone; you are about to stretch forth again those strong arms which have never wearied in the labor of love you took to your heart so many years ago, and as you near the Tabernacle where Jesus Christ the Son of God dwells in the silent mystery of His all-holy Divinity, let the words which must come first upon your lips be your thanks—

giving for the years that are past and your pledge for the years to come; let them be said as if this Chapel and all the Dominican Churches throughout the United States, uttered them with hosannas of joy as the pilgrims do around the Blessed Sacrament at Lourdes; let them sing and ring in your heart for they are God's greatest blessing to you and to us—Faith in the Holy Catholic Church. Our hearts will be with you in those words, our prayer will be the same, supporting you, so that everywhere, where your name and fame are known, the song will resound: "*Credo in unum Deum: I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Who was made Man for us, was crucified, died and was buried. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting in the world to come.*"

In the name of your Brethren and in the name of the University, I congratulate you from my heart and wish you in God's Holy Name—*ad multos annos.*

DOMINICAN FATHERS
PROVINCE OF ST. JOSEPH

869 Lexington Avenue
New York, N. Y.

The Very Reverend
V. F. O'Daniel, O.P.,
St. Rose Priory,
Springfield, Kentucky

Dear Father O'Daniel:

Upon my return to New York, I found the enclosed letter from the Master General. I am sure it will give you great pleasure to know that His Paternity recognizes your ability and is well aware of your accomplishments. I regret this letter did not arrive in time for the celebration of your jubilee.

Wishing you every blessing, I remain

Sincerely in St. Dominic,
(signed) T. S. McDERMOTT, O.P.,
Provincial

June 18, 1941

Santa Sabina—Aventino—Roma 147

May 17, 1941

Very Rev. V. F. O'Daniel, O.P., S.T.M., Litt. Doct.,
Dominican House of Studies,
Washington, D. C.

Very Reverend and dear Father:

We have learned with pleasure that you are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of your Priesthood on the 16th of June and We gladly avail Ourselves of this auspicious occasion to send you Our hearty congratulations and express Our deep gratitude for the splendid and faithful service you have given to the Order during these long years.

Among your many and varied labors We single out for special mention the valuable work you have accomplished as Historian and Archivist of St. Joseph's Province. Our own personal efforts to revive interest in the history of the Order are well known. Hence it is with real pleasure that We put on record Our appreciation of all you have done in order to preserve for posterity the history of the Dominican Order in the United States of America. May God reward you for it. Would that every one of Our Provinces had such a faithful custodian of Our historical treasures!

As a pledge of Our gratitude We impart to you—by permission of His Holiness—the Apostolic Blessing. To this We add Our own paternal blessing and Our personal good wishes for your welfare.

Devotedly yours in St. Dominic,
(Signed) FR. M. S. GILLET, O.P.,
Mag. Gen.

APOSTOLIC DELEGATION
United States of America

No. 9113A/41

3339 Massachusetts Avenue,
Washington, D. C.
July 15, 1941.

The Very Reverend
Victor Francis O'Daniel, O.P., S.T.M.,
Dominican House of Studies,
487 Michigan Avenue, N. E.,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Very Reverend Father:

I am very much pleased to tell you that the Holy Father has graciously deigned to bestow upon you His Apostolic Benediction as a token of heavenly favor, on the occasion of your golden jubilee in

the holy priesthood. May this blessing of His Holiness be a harbinger of many more blessings upon you in the years still before you.

I grasp this opportunity to extend my own congratulations to you, not only upon the completion of so many years in the priesthood but particularly upon the historical accomplishments which have justly placed your name to the fore of the American writers and students of Church History of this country.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

(signed) A. G. CICOGNANI, Archbishop of Laodicea,
Apostolic Delegate