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1991

Review of Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989

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Fournier, Denis R., "Review of Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989" (1991).
Great Plains Quarterly. 565.

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Colorado Catholicism and the Archdiocese of Denver, 1857-1989. By Thomas J. Noel. Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1990. Preface, introduction, photographs, sources, index. xii + 468 pp. \$39.95.

The early sections of this very readable history of the Catholic Church in Colorado will be of special interest to fans of Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* who are interested in the historicity of her character Father Joseph Vaillant, based on Joseph Projectus Machebeuf, first bishop of Colorado. The author mines Howlett's *Life of Bishop Machebeuf* (one of Cather's sources), other ecclesiastical histories, and the local church archives for interesting information, some of it significant and some trivial, about Machebeuf and the problems he faced in Colorado. For instance, did you ever suspect that the effectiveness of Machebeuf's preaching "may have been diminished by his frequent use of a spittoon" during his long sermons?

Noel argues in his Preface that, contrary to the Turner Thesis, the frontier people, especially the women, "hungred for the churches they had known 'back home,'" and as quickly as they could they "installed the old traditions." These frontier Catholics longed for the pageantry and music of the Latin Mass and Gregorian chant, the statues and paintings of Jesus and the saints, and the Catholic schools, convents, and hospitals they had known "back home," and they were often willing to make great sacrifices to replicate them in their frontier parishes.

The first missionaries into the American Southwest were foreign-born French, German, Irish, and Italian priests and nuns. But even from the beginning, the division in Colorado Catholicism was not so much among the immigrant groups, although there was bickering

over the ethnic backgrounds of bishops and pastors and over the erection of national parishes, as between the Anglos and the Hispanics. Recent archbishops have been much more sensitive to the needs of the Hispanic Catholics than were the earlier bishops who were intent on welding together an "American" Catholic Church in Colorado.

Noel, an associate professor of history and director of Colorado Studies at the University of Colorado at Denver, was commissioned to write a "popular" history so he tends to simplify some of the complex problems facing the Colorado church and its bishops. However, he does cover the "embarrassing scandals" as well as the "glorious achievements" in local church history, and the reader gets the sense that his evaluations and assessments are honest and balanced. Non-Catholics often perceive the Catholic Church as a monolithic organization in which everyone marches in lock step; forthright church histories, such as Noel's, go a long way in dispelling that particular myth.

The last third of the book contains the histories of parishes within the present archdiocese; considering their brevity, the histories are both well-written and interesting. Noel's history has a good selection of interesting pictures, brief chronologies of each bishop's administration for easy reference, and an excellent index. However, as a non-Coloradoan, I would have appreciated more maps so that I could see where all the "far-flung" missions were located and what territorial changes occurred in the Archdiocese of Denver with the separation of the Diocese of Pueblo in 1941 and the Diocese of Colorado Springs in 1984.

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