

Untitled review of

Dorothy Day

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Summary: Lukewarm review of a book on Christian unity. Defends the author's critique of Catholics but wishes he was better versed on ecumenical efforts, including ones she is involved in. (DDLW #632).

A Catholic Speaks His Mind on America's Religious Conflict, by Thomas Sugrue, Harper & Bros., N.Y. \$1.00

When I came back to the Peter Maurin Farm at Pleasant Plains, after speaking on the same platform with secularist liberals and Communists at Carnegie Hall a few weeks ago, I went to our little chapel which is quiet and bright and warm with the presence of all good, of love unutterable. I felt suddenly happy.

Life was a succession of struggles, a grim battle often, a venturing out on a dangerous front, and then a quiet retreat to gather one's forces in silence, in suffering and prayer. Probably what I had done would be censured by many. And indeed if I had made a mistake, God would have to take care of it.

I had been thinking of the Holy Father's February 11th message: "We must do everything, everything, for peace." "Of what value would be disputations on justice, on charity on peace, if the will were already resolved, if the heart were determined to remain in icy solitude and if none were to dare to be the first to break through the barrier of dividing hate to hasten to offer a sincere embrace?

What gestures we must make these days! Yes, God would have to repair our mistakes. He would have to take care of it. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Thomas Sugrue felt that way when he finished his book *A Catholic Speaks His Mind on America's Religious Conflict*. Catholic editors and writers feel affronted that a good part of the book appeared in the *Christian Herald*, a Protestant publication. They felt that a Blanshard was quite articulate enough without a "cradle Catholic" joining in the criticism of the Church. It seems to me it was that more than anything else that caused the outcry.

But the book must be judged on its intention—and that is the intense desire of the author to reach out to others, to find some basis for unity. There is an intense hunger in the heart of Thomas Sugrue for unity and this desire is and expression of the love he has for the great body of Protestant Christians in this

country. I have this yearning toward Communists, and I recognize this spirit when I see it in others.

What if the does criticize Catholics? Aren't we all taught in the spiritual life to take criticism, deserved, and undeserved? "This then is the perfect joy!" Saint Francis said. And Saint Peter said the same. We are to take it and humbly say we deserve far more. Indeed when it comes down to it, Sugrue's criticism is bitter and strong and too concentrated, too much along one line. But we could all add our bit to it.

I could complain of the attitude of churchmen or rather the lack of any stand taken against great social sins. We have had a Father Dunne come out in the *Short case* (remember the story in the *Commonweal*?) we have had individuals weeping with those who weep, crying out for justice, but where is the public excoriation of sin, the denouncing of lynchings, legal lynchings and those by mobs, the burning of Negroes and their homes, the looting of the poor by corrupt civil servants and the defrauding of the laborer of his hire-sins crying to heaven for vengeance?

There are too many Communion breakfasts (Sugrue mentions them where politicians and exploiters of labor sit side by side, cheek by jowl with the clergy, and we could all of us, name names and places. No, the Church is expected these days to be bulwarks of the status quo, and is honored as such, and enjoys a false sense of peace as such.

"The Church is as uneasy in a concordat as she is in the Catacombs," it has been said. The trouble with Sugrue's book is that it does not go far enough. As a convert with a Protestant background I was always conscious of the iron curtain between Catholics and Protestants. Sugrue felt it most keenly in New England. He knew the Catholics were looked down upon by Protestants, who were in turn scorned by the Catholics. He didn't like the scorn he saw. When he wondered why Catholics were not liked, he looked around and found plenty of reason why, in the political Catholicism of our great cities, in the attempt, at whatever cost to be as good as the next one. He beats his breast over the political and business practices of well known Catholics. *Mea Culpa! Mea Culpa!*

How to get together with our Protestant brothers? It has been said many times that there can be no peace while Christians are so hostile, so divided. Mr. Sugrue does not seem to know much about the ecumenical movements in Europe and this country. He is familiar with Karl Adam's book **One and Holy**, and quotes from it. He comes to many of the same conclusions.

But he does not know Father Danielou and his **Salvation of the Nations and Advent**, and I hope he gets them and enjoys them. I hope too, that he gets acquainted with Father Yves de Montcheuil, the Jesuit, and Yves Congar, the Dominican, **Men of Action**, by the first named, has recently been published by Fides Press and "Attitudes toward Reforms in the Church" part of a book by the latter, has appeared in the fourth number of *Cross Currents*.

Many of the things Sugrue has said have been said before. Father de Menasce, French Dominican, spoke at the Third Hour meeting last month (the Third Hour is another ecumenical group not known to Sugrue) and said through the mystics of every faith, the Sufi of the Mohammedans, the guru of the Buddhists, the prophet of Israel and the saints of the Protestant and Catholic and Eastern Churches we would meet on a common ground in a stretching out of the soul to God, as the author of **The Cloud of Unknowing** said, "Look that nothing live in the waking mind but a naked intent stretching unto God." "Press upon Him with longing love.

We can meet too, he says, on the ground of social justice, the common good. Does he know of Saul Alinsky's back of the yards movement in Chicago where Bishop Sheil too has tried to find common ground with non-Catholics?

This is far from saying "One religion is as good as another." Thomas Sugrue himself does not believe this. He writes of his discovery of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and others. "They are the heart of Catholicism; they are its mystical core; after I had found them and studied them I would not have left the Church under any persuasion." And later, "I consider when I think of Simone Weil, that I was fortunate to be born inside the gate, and that I was lucky in having the sense to take myself inward toward the center in my flight from the noise of the markets, instead of fleeing outward through the gate."

Mr. Sugrue makes it plain that he is a practicing Catholic, and when he speaks as he did recently at the New School for Social Responsibility and at the Community Church, he has appeared to voice this longing of this heart to reach his brothers. My friend Sally Schiltiuis heard him at the New School and said she was stirred by his message of love and only reinforced her faith. Tom Sullivan and Charlie McCormick heard him at the Community Church and said that in the question period, when questions were aired and misunderstandings were brought out into the open. Sugrue could only be considered in the light of defender of the faith.

Reaching as he does, through books and lectures, so many who know little of our faith, we are hoping that he will deepen and enrich his own knowledge of it to further his missionary work with a more positive approach to unity.