

**Fiftieth Anniversary
of the Catholic Theological Society of America**

COMMEMORATIVE SECTION

WELCOMING REMARKS

The following remarks were offered by Bishop Patrick Sheridan, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of New York, at the opening session of the convention.

Good evening everyone, and a sincere welcome to our town which just happens to be within the Archdiocese of New York.

Sister Elizabeth Johnson, it's a pleasure for me to be here this evening thanks to your kind invitation, and a privilege for me to speak for John Cardinal O'Connor in welcoming the members of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

As you well know, Cardinal O'Connor usually speaks for himself, but this evening his commitment to the Panis Vitae Annual Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria for the benefit of our nursing homes in the Archdiocese prevents him from being present to offer you his best wishes and prayers for a very successful convention here in the Big Apple. I am very happy to be the messenger of his sentiments of appreciation and esteem.

If memory serves me, this place where you gather was once the site of the Commodore Hotel where many of the major social and ecclesial events had been held in ages past, and most, if not all, of the archbishops of New York had gathered with their people to mark the major events of the Archdiocese.

We are here on 42nd Street, a tomato throw to Grand Central Station, the gateway of the world and just a slingshot to Times Square, the "Crossroads of the World."

Look to the west and you see the North River, better known as the Hudson, and to the east another segment of the North or Hudson River which we call the East River. And so what the geographers place in the north, we peculiar New

Yorkers find running on the east and the west of this quiet little town called Manhattan.

You are especially blessed this evening since I am a native New Yorker born on the west side of this town just about fifty city blocks north of 42nd Street. Now do you really think that a Cardinal Archbishop of New York who was born in Philadelphia could possibly talk to you about this town with more hands-on knowledge of its beauty and attractiveness than this city kid who used to sit with his peers on the curbstones of these streets when alternate side of the street parking was meant for kids, not cars?

Oh, those were the days when most of us, the children of immigrants in this city, came tumbling out of the tenements of our neighborhoods to be educated in the local parish school, formed in our faith and filled with loyalty and pride in the Church of New York. It was, after all, the scene of Cardinalatial splendor ever since Archbishop John McCloskey in 1875 became the first cardinal ever in the United States. And while we kids didn't know or care very much about the history of our Archdiocese, we still knew it was the best and the greatest. So what difference did it make, since we kids on these streets knew that "once you leave New York, you're just campin' out."

Things have changed slightly since 1808 when this diocese was established and included the *entire state* of New York, which state is now in 1995 the host to eight dioceses in all. Today the Archdiocese of New York embraces just ten of the counties in this state, extends about 160 miles north and south and measures, so they tell us, 4,717 square miles. By actual count on page 690 of the *Official Catholic Directory*, we are ten bishops in this Archdiocese, including the Ordinary, and while we claim a Church membership of some 2,300,000 we probably cheat a little bit to avoid the NCCB head tax. Privately we believe it is more truly like 3,000,000 souls because of many undocumented immigrants from various countries North and South and now especially from the Far East.

Today the Archdiocese is more than fifty percent Hispanic and on any given Sunday of the year you may assist at the Sacred Liturgy offered in one of twenty-eight or twenty-nine different languages, including a half-dozen or more churches where the Tridentine Mass is permitted. We have no priestless parishes as yet and there are 413 parishes within the nineteen vicariates of the Church in New York. And, remember, when you think of us, you must always be aware that a second diocese serves the people of New York City who live in the two boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, and together comprise the one Diocese of Brooklyn.

To be sure it wasn't that way in 1808 when Bishop Richard Luke Concanen, O.P. was appointed the first bishop of the new diocese. "See Naples and Die," the saying goes, and die he did. Bishop Concanen died in Naples in 1810 before ever setting foot in this glorious place.

It took another four years to name his successor, the second bishop of New York, Bishop John Connolly, O.P., who had the distinction of establishing

churches in Brooklyn, Paterson, New Jersey, Auburn, Utica, Carthage, Rochester, Syracuse, and other places, and not one of the churches he built is now within the Archdiocese of New York.

John Dubois, a Frenchman, was the third bishop, from 1826 to 1842. The motto on his coat of arms was *E Pluribus Unum*. Much maligned by the Irish, he was buried in the ground at the entrance to St. Patrick's Old Cathedral down on Mulberry Street in the East Village (often termed Little Italy) so people would walk over him in death as they did in life. The episcopal ring I wear this evening was his; it has 170 years of history behind it going back to Charles Carroll of Carrollton, who gave it to Dubois when he was consecrated in November 1826.

John Hughes, the fourth bishop and first Archbishop, undertook the building of St. Patrick's Cathedral now at 50th Street and Fifth Avenue, property so far out of the city at the time that people called it "Hughes' Folly." The land had been purchased for \$5,500 to become a cemetery, a plan that proved impossible because of the rocky soil. In the crypt of the Cathedral lie the remains of all the archbishops from Hughes to Cardinal Cooke, a litany of names that also includes McCloskey, Corrigan, Farley, Hayes, and Spellman.

I trust that you will find time during your stay in New York to visit "Hughes's Folly," far more beautiful and much less encumbered than Atlas across the street at Rockefeller Center with the world on his back.

We are honored to have you among us. We hope to be enriched by your theological reflections. Don't be distracted by the noise and bedlam of this town. Just know that we New Yorkers love you, and although "we're not perfect, parts of us are excellent."