

BOOK REVIEWS

MAPPING THE CATHOLIC CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

RICHARD FOSSEY & PAULA JEAN MILLER, EDS.
ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD, 2004
\$28.95, 308 pages

Reviewed by Michelle Ryan

Mapping the Catholic Cultural Landscape (Fossey & Miller, 2004) is a series of essays compiled “to explore the inculturation of the Catholic faith within a global perspective” (p. xvi). The book is organized into three main subject areas: (a) “Literature and Art: Embodiments of the Faith”; (b) “Culture and Holiness”; and (c) “Transforming Interrelationships: Catholic Faith and Secular Society.” Each section, though modest in length, presents an eclectic array of subjects to a startling depth. Rather than an overview of Catholic culture, this is a sampling of the beauty of Catholic history, practice, and modern theology. The intended audience is clearly a university Catholic studies class; while the essay topics are somewhat obscure, they could certainly produce enlightening discussion among young Catholics. In fact, it is the obscurity and variety of topics included that make this a good choice for any Catholic interested in thought-provoking reading.

Sources for part 1, Catholicism in literature and art, range from the obvious choices of Flannery O’Connor and the iconography of Santiago to some less identified with Catholicism, such as the writings of Jane Austen and William Shakespeare. These writings explore elements of Catholicism from its influence on Anglican theology in *The Book of Common Prayer* (Church of England, 1976), to religious allegories in Tolkien’s (1954) novel *The Lord of the Rings*.

Volumes have been written about the relationship between culture and holiness, but part 2 creates a sense of the common threads in the Catholic practice of spirituality across time and place by giving a glimpse into the Polish and Spanish Marian devotions, the saints of France, and the 19th century mystic, Lucie Christine. The essence of Catholic spiritual culture is captured throughout these essays, even while the practice of strong Marian devotion among ethnic Catholics is examined under the light of papal admonition that “Marian veneration should clearly express her Trinitarian and

Christological connections” (Fossey & Miller, 2004, p. 111).

Any discussion about faith and secular society will raise questions that are not only difficult to answer but also somewhat painful to ponder. In part 3, these difficult questions are raised. In examining the opposition to vouchers for sectarian schools, Fossey wonders if anti-Catholicism is at the heart of the matter. The fact that members of the fashion industry have chosen to ridicule Catholicism shows both the disrespect directed toward Catholic values and the important place Catholicism holds in popular culture to be regarded enough to be mocked. While there is no single right answer to the questions raised about Catholicism and secularism, the opportunity to deepen faith lies within the dissonance between the two.

The topics of the individual essays vary widely and represent the universality of the Catholic faith in breadth of subject alone. While touching on many areas close to the hearts of Catholics, the book neither attempts to address each topic comprehensively nor to represent completely the diverse ethnic cultures within the faith, but rather to provide an exploration into Catholic studies. *Mapping the Catholic Cultural Landscape* successfully completes that task, while creating in the reader a piqued interest not only in one’s own culture, but in Catholic inculturation throughout the world. Discussion of the various facets of the Catholic faith as it affects culture, and culture as it affects faith, leads to a deeper understanding of personal spirituality while lending itself to a quest for further knowledge. Our faith is best expressed in the community of our world and in the daily tasks to which God leads us.

REFERENCES

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- Tolkien, J. R. R. (1954). *The lord of the rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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