

Francis X. Murphy, C.Ss.R. Papers

Baltimore Province of the Redemptorists Archives

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The scope of the papers of Father Francis Xavier Murphy, C.Ss.R., a priest of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, encompasses letters, manuscripts, notebooks, scholarly and popular articles, photographs, video, and DVD and sound recordings dating from 1896 to Murphy's death in 2002. The Province Archives is also in possession of several of Father Murphy's books. The papers are housed in six cabinet drawers (56 A and B, 63 C and D, and 64 A and B). Murphy's personnel files are located in the alpha files, cabinet drawer 1 C, but are not detailed in this finding aid. Some material that appears in the personnel files is also available in the Murphy papers. The papers themselves are subdivided into several sections, detailed below, though researchers are cautioned that there is frequent overlap of material between sections or within sections, whether by duplication or adjunct subject matter. The entirety of the collection is open to qualified researchers, with some exceptions, particularly in the subject files related to personal matters in cases of ecclesiastical correspondence, adoption, or student records. Consultation of these materials will be at the discretion of the Province Archivist. The Murphy Papers also contain unpublished manuscripts that are attributable to other authors. Researchers who intend to quote from these materials should seek the permission of the copyright holder—either the author or his or her estate.

Biography:

Born June 26, 1914, in the Bronx, Francis X. Murphy was raised by loving parents—Dennis and Anna “Nano” (Rynne) Murphy who eloped from Ireland. They raised three children, including Patricia (b. 1918) and Annabelle (b. 1923), both of whom survived their elder brother. He was baptized in the Church of St. Angela Merici on Morris Avenue in the Bronx, July 6, 1914. Murphy attended Immaculate Conception Church and School, from which he received the sacraments. At the age of eight he was confirmed in this Church by Archbishop Patrick Hayes of New York and it was then that Murphy began to hear “the first whisperings of the call of God.” In 1928, he began minor seminary at North East, Pennsylvania. Upon the death of his father in September 1932, Murphy applied for and was granted permission by the Rector to return home and assist his mother. While home in the Bronx, he was able to continue studies at Fordham University, where he remained until the end of the Fall term. He returned to North East in January 1933, graduating in May 1934. He followed the normal course for Redemptorist studies, entering the novitiate at St. Mary's, Ilchester, Maryland, and completing his theological training at Mt. St. Alphonsus in Esopus, New York. He made his first profession in August 1935 and final profession in September 1938. Murphy was ordained at Esopus on June 23, 1940.

Already while at Esopus Murphy displayed affinities for writing and historical narrative. His first major work, “The Irascible Hermit”—a treatise on the temperament of St. Jerome—was published by *The Catholic World* in 1937, but he had been editing or contributing to student or Redemptorist publications in the months prior to this. When he was ordained, Murphy's superiors sent the young priest to the Catholic University of America for further studies. He obtained a master's degree (1942) and doctorate (1944) in medieval history there, writing a thesis under the direction of Dr. Martin R. P. McGuire, on Rufinus of Aquileia, an erstwhile contemporary of St. Jerome. The period and controversies that arose among these thinkers would serve as a touch point for much of Murphy's future work. Upon graduation he took up pastoral duties as a chaplain to the Mid-Shipmen at the Naval Academy in Annapolis,

Maryland, and immersed himself in the work, conducting conferences and parish activities for the “middies” and their superiors at the Academy. This began an abiding interest in the life and work of those in the armed forces and their spiritual care. Murphy was stationed at St. Mary’s Parish in Annapolis until 1947, when he returned to Esopus to teach and organize the library, but this assignment was short-lived. In the summer of 1948 he was sent to Sant’Alfonso in Rome to assist in the task of collecting and microfilming Redemptorist records in European libraries.

The Roman experience was perhaps determinative of Murphy’s future outlook. Not only was he able to do research work for the Redemptorist Generalate, which taught him how to move in the echelons of ecclesiastical power, he managed to undertake two further assignments: as correspondent for the National Catholic Welfare Conference News Service, for which he covered the Italian elections of 1948, as well as the pastoral care he was able to provide for displaced persons languishing in camps in Germany as a result of the Second World War. For his research, he often went to the Vatican Library and acquainted himself with the staff. For his coverage of Italian politics, he made contact with important members of the Vatican Secretariat of State, including Monsignor Giovanni Batista Montini, who would become Pope Paul VI. He was a confidant of other Americans stationed or visiting in Rome. And for his work on the plight of displaced persons and refugees, he developed close ties with the heads of Catholic War Relief Services. Thus an admixture of the scholarly, the journalistic, and the apostolic began to coalesce.

Murphy returned to the United States in 1949 to do parish work at Immaculate Conception Parish in the Bronx, an assignment he kept until 1951 when he volunteered to become a chaplain in the United States Army. He was initially assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, where he shared pastoral duties with Jesuits from nearby St. Mary’s Seminary. It was at Fort Riley that Murphy often confronted a disturbing, if latent, racism within the ranks of the enlisted men he served and made repeated overtures on the behalf of African-American soldiers to the Army’s headquarters in Washington. Eventually Murphy was deployed to the Korean theater, saw action on the battle front, and earned the Bronze Star. During this time he advocated on behalf of chaplains and edited a short-lived series of pamphlets called “God’s F.O.” (Forward Officer), for the instruction and entertainment of the enlisted men. Conflicts with his commanding officers forced an application for re-assignment, which was readily granted, and Murphy took up his new duties between France and Germany. It was in France that FXM first encountered Archbishop Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, and renewed an important acquaintance in the person of Giovanni Benelli, the future archbishop of Florence. Eventually, he returned to the United States and was assigned briefly to Fort Dix in New Jersey and Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, New York.

Upon his discharge in 1958, Murphy returned to parochial duties at Immaculate Conception, but it was not long before he was informed that an instructor at the Academia Alfonsiana had taken ill and that Murphy would return to Rome to teach courses in Patristic Moral Theology. The timing was fortuitous—Pope John had announced the convening of an ecumenical council and FXM, in addition to teaching duties, would serve as *peritus* for Redemptorist Bishop Aloysius Willinger of Monterey-Fresno, providing him with ready access to all the conciliar proceedings, major participants, and press briefings. During Vatican II, FXM would alter the nature and substance of the proceedings considerably with his own running commentaries which he filed under the pseudonym “Xavier Rynne” for *The New Yorker* magazine. The long articles for *The New Yorker* seemed to violate the principle of secrecy requested by the Holy Office of all Council participants and an internal investigation began. FXM’s continued denials that he was Xavier Rynne became the stuff of legend, though gradually it became, in the words of Lawrence Cunningham, “the worst kept secret in Catholicism.” An insider’s voice was established, and FXM’s contacts and fame grew wider. His friendships with journalists led him to assignments for a

variety of American and Italian newspapers and magazines, and he continued to file for these in the years following the Council on topics ranging from Vatican politics, papal elections, and social questions seen from the perspective of the Catholic Church both at home and abroad. After 1968, with the publication of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (On the Regulation of Births), he wrote numerous articles for the religious and secular press on fertility, married life, population control, and sexual ethics. He supplemented his writing with a number of speaking engagements that frequently caused disquiet among members of the Catholic hierarchy as well as among his own confreres.

Murphy was a frequent traveler outside the United States and made contacts around the globe. Before Vatican II he travelled extensively in Western Europe for War Relief Services, was a sometime vacationer in Ireland, and found himself on assignment in Japan while an Army chaplain based in Korea. After the Council, he served as guest commentator or reporter at two of the Synods of Bishops that took place in Rome, accompanied Sargent Shriver's entourage to the old Soviet Union, lectured in Oxford and the Augustinianum at numerous patristic congresses, made visits to slums and clinics throughout Latin America, and could be found passing through India and Egypt. During the Council itself, in addition to all his other work, he played a small but faithful role in assembling the historical matter that was presented to Pope Paul for the beatification of America's first Redemptorist saint, Bishop John Neumann, in 1963. During his professoriate in Rome he also served as a subject area editor of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1968 edition) for all matters related to Patristic and Byzantine studies. His own contribution of over 100 separate articles was integral to the *Encyclopedia's* quality and depth, but his duties as editor frequently forced his return to the United States for consultative meetings at the Catholic University of America, where the editorial offices were based. All of these experiences rounded out a career that shrunk the apertures Catholics have with one another, with the wider world, and with the dead.

As will be evident from his lengthy bibliography (now in progress), FXM's publication output has few rivals in religious journalism or scholarship. His writing cast him as a decided member of the progressive camp in the aftermath of the Council, and he saw this "apostolate of the pen" as intrinsic to his own priestly life, an avocation that he could not confine to teaching alone. To wit, he was granted an extended leave of absence from the Academia Alfonsiana to take up a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, and teaching assignments that included stints at Princeton University, the Johns Hopkins University, and Union Theological Seminary. Meanwhile, his journalism appeared week to week, if not day to day in American and British journals. He organized academic conferences on patristic and Renaissance thought. And he attached himself to social causes such as Bread for the World and the Population Reference Bureau, both of which put him at the center of controversies surrounding Vatican policies at the United Nations on questions related to population control. From 1977-1981 he served as Rector of Holy Redeemer College in Washington, DC, the Redemptorist house of studies at the Catholic University of America. His lecturing and writing continued into the mid-1980s relatively unabated, but a heart attack on December 23, 1979, and a continued bout with Parkinson's disease since 1987, slowed his productivity. From 1985 until his death on April 12, 2002, Murphy resided with his brother Redemptorists at the parish community of St. Mary's in Annapolis.