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THE FRANCIS XAVIER MURPHY, C.SS.R., (1914-2002)  
COLLECTION OF THE BALTIMORE PROVINCE ARCHIVES:  
A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Of all twentieth century Redemptorists, two *periti* of the Second Vatican Council remain in the popular mindset. One is Bernard Häring (1912-1998), the widely read moral theologian, and the other is his colorful contemporary, the puckish Francis Xavier Murphy (1914-2002) of the Baltimore Province. Known better to English speakers as Xavier Rynne, he was as prodigious as those who sought to lionize him, keep up with him, or skewer him. From the extensive archival matter he bequeathed to the Baltimore Province Archives, there are a number of humorous and light-hearted jabs at Murphy's pen name. For instance, a cartoon caption echoes the words emanating from a confessional: «Forgive me Father for I have Rynned!» As «FX» Murphy (also, «Murph»), a member of the Congregation for nearly six decades, he was a tattler, of sorts, but one who held an abiding love for the Church, in part because he believed it was so fascinating, so Spirit-filled and so truly human. For this he garnered the respect (or disdain) of all who read him. If one happened to dwell in his inner circle, he was the inspiration for friendly banter. Any contestant gave as good as he got. To take one example, the eminent English prelate John Cardinal Heenan, who admired Murphy's verve, wrote him in 1971, «I am just off to the Synod where I hope to denounce people like YOU and [other] organized clerical anarchists».<sup>1</sup> Murphy relished this repartee, heaped praise on those skilled at it, and was allergic to the pedant or dullard to the end of his days.

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<sup>1</sup> See the notes of the transcribed letter from Heenan to Murphy, dated October 1971, in the James J. Galvin, C.Ss.R., Papers, Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province: *Chronicle Material*.

By the onset of the Council in the early 1960s, Murphy had already led a storied life. But it was through the use of the Rynne pseudonym that his legend grew. As Rynne, Murphy was able to avoid ecclesiastical censure for publishing accounts of the inner workings of the closed sessions of the Second Vatican Council, all of which were to be conducted under pontifical secrecy.<sup>2</sup> In a typical exchange on the question of whether he was the infamous Rynne, Murphy would simply reply, «No, I am Francis Murphy». This «bit of casuistry», as he called it, disclosed a truthful reply and at the same time protected his identity by tricking his interrogator into believing he was not the alleged author. There can be little doubt that his ability to skirt the rules also led to new ventures on his career path, including the holding of prestigious fellowships and openings to print venues such as *The New York Times*.

His career path was not always well planned, but seemed altogether providential. Murphy's vocational interests went in many different directions—from parish priest, to army chaplain, to social worker, to patristics scholar, to Vatican gadfly, to journalist, to Ivy-League professor. He was a globe trotter—logging hundreds of thousands of miles around the world. He never shirked the apostolic life, doing weekend parish work where necessary and preaching before all who would listen. Whether he was ultimately an asset or hindrance to the Redemptorists in the United States, and specifically to the Baltimore Province, will be a question left to future historians. What this essay aims to do is bring his life and the scope of his literary output to the attention of his confreres as well as to a wider public.

#### *Content of the Murphy Papers*

Murphy left a long paper trail beyond his several books on the council, which themselves appeared in a number of editions.

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<sup>2</sup> For the regulations governing the Council, see Pope John XXIII, *Motu Proprio, Appropinquante Concilio* (August 6, 1962), accessed via the Internet March 30, 2011, at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_motu-proprio\\_19620806\\_appropinquante-concilio\\_lt.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/motu_proprio/documents/hf_j-xxiii_motu-proprio_19620806_appropinquante-concilio_lt.html). Article 11.1 of the regulations governs secrecy.

The literary legacy has been conserved, as much as possible, by the Baltimore Province and is presently housed at the community's Shore Road archives in Brooklyn, New York. Many boxes of unsorted papers came into the possession of the Province Archives and were left fallow before the author of this essay began a slow organization which now forms the present collection. The material constitutes a largely untapped and highly valuable source for scholarly research on the Catholic Church in the twentieth century. The Murphy papers encompass letters, manuscripts, notebooks, scholarly and popular articles, photographs, video, film and sound recordings dating from 1896 to Murphy's death in 2002.

If there is one thing that shows through the collection's documents, it is that Murphy took the craft of writing very seriously. He was assiduous in the clarity of his prose, practicing every day, often going through numerous drafts for even the shortest articles or speeches. Further, he was a copious letter writer. There are twenty-six large files of correspondence within the collection. It is perhaps not an overstatement, either, to say that Murphy loved words—not merely as his bread and butter—but also as a wellspring for thought. While he redacted his own words over and over, he also took a wide interest in a number of subjects, collecting scores of files of news clippings.

The archives are also in possession of several of Murphy's books. The papers are housed in six file cabinet drawers of varying dimensions. Murphy's personnel files are located in the alpha files, in a separate cabinet drawer. Some material that appears in the personnel files is also available in the Murphy papers. Among these records are copies of letters which seem to be of an official nature relating the interest of the Holy Office in the publication of a series of *The New Yorker* articles issued by Xavier Rynne, together with Murphy's own rather provocative essays on population questions. The collection itself is subdivided into several sections, though researchers are cautioned that there is frequent overlap of material between sections or within sections, whether by duplication or as 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. Before providing Murphy's extensive bibliography, a more thorough biographical sketch will help situate the man and his times.

#### *Biographical data*

Born June 26, 1914, in the Bronx, Francis X. Murphy was raised by loving parents—Dennis and Anna «Nano» (Rynne) Murphy who had 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 the juvenate 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 Mount 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. After 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 two thinkers would serve as a touch point for much of Murphy's future work, especially in view of limitations on his freedom. He frequently took the late patristics as giving guidance and supporting the practical elements of human decision making. Upon graduation he took up pastoral duties as a chaplain to the midshipmen at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, and immersed himself in the work, conducting conferences and parish activities for the «mid-dies» and their superiors at the Academy. By all accounts, the future naval officers enjoyed the young priest as someone who brought high intellectual caliber with a street-smart, Bronx accent. This ministry began an abiding interest by Murphy in the life and work of those in the armed forces and he felt a special obligation to see to their spiritual care. Through the attachments that he cultivated at the Academy he set to work on a biography of Rear Admiral Daniel «Uncle Dan» Callaghan, a former aide to Franklin Roosevelt and a devout Catholic, whose ship went down in the Solomon Islands during the Second World War. 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. As a supply chaplain for Redemptorists engaged in army service, he would often move through occupied territories and give comfort to encamped Catholics wherever he found them. Back in Rome, he was a well-disciplined scholar. For his research, he often went to the Vatican Library and acquainted himself with the staff who warmed to his playfulness and intellect. 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 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 Murphy 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, Murphy 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 Accademia 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 Murphy, 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.<sup>3</sup> During Vatican II, Murphy 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. Murphy believed in a more democratic principle of transparency and openness, a perspective shared among many English-speaking bishops who found in *The New Yorker* articles a chance at bringing conciliar business more immediately to the reading public. The articles themselves emboldened more liberal bishops to speak up and made those intransigent voices in the council hall sound shrill by comparison. Needless to say, the long articles for *The New Yorker* raised the ire of the Holy Office and an internal investigation began. Murphy'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 Murphy's contacts and fame grew wider. Much of his writing was reworked from pages and pages of notes or his personal diary entries, all of which are now archived. Drafts and some correspondence related to the publication of Murphy's articles in this magazine are also found in a separate archival collection at the New York Public Library, with open access, though the bulk of this material is routine business correspondence with *The New Yorker* and sheds little light on the development of the articles themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> In his recent book on Vatican II, the Jesuit historian John O'Malley, notes that Murphy was appointed a *peritus* after the first session. For the record, Murphy attended all four sessions as Bishop Willinger's theological advisor. See O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

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, including presentations before local meetings of Planned Parenthood. He had maintained that in approaching groups like this he was always acting as a priest in dialogue with those of a different view, and in order to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of his interlocutors, he wished to be the spokesperson for the authentic teaching of the Church. As a professor of moral theology he believed his credentials for this work were in order, though many of his confreres saw in these associations a source for confusion, no matter how Murphy chose to style himself.

With his extensive travel Murphy was able to make many helpful contacts around the globe. Before Vatican II he trekked throughout Western Europe for War Relief Services, and was a sometime vacationer in Ireland; later he 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 Nepomucene Neumann, in 1963. During his professorship 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. 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 which diminished the spacing often felt by Catholics with each other, with the wider world, and with deceased historical figures.

As will be evident from his lengthy bibliography, Murphy'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 Accademia 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. In 1974 he was a delegate to the United Nations Symposium on Population and Human Rights in Amsterdam, writing one of the key papers for that event entitled «The Impact of Fertility on Human Rights». 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 as the «writer-in-residence» at the parish community of St. Mary's in Annapolis.

Murphy lived somewhat larger than life, that is, he typically played the Oxford don, *rapporteur*, and bon vivant. He dined with cardinals, chief executive officers, and government officials. But hidden from the limelight, he was dedicated to priestly service, often daring to improve the lives of others when it meant that his own reputation could suffer. He was a friend to unwed mothers and abandoned children, giving consolation and material assistance to those in need of a home. He showed how a street tough from the Bronx could teach the virtues of the mind and right conduct to members of the Naval Academy. And he brought the Church into vital contact with the ideas and personalities of the Second Vatican Council on a scale that reached well beyond the more academic theology of his day. Murphy's character displayed gentility, but also a biting invective against incompetence, particularly against those who he thought should know better. These remarks hardly sum up a life and it would be a mistake to cast Murphy in a particular political camp. While he leaned toward progressivism within the Church, often advocating mercy instead of rebuke, he was nevertheless a fiercely vocal proponent of moral rectitude and accountability, maintaining a reserved and sober attitude toward sexual ethics. Similarly, while he pled for information sharing and transparency within the Church, he was adamant about the primacy of conscience. Murphy's *oeuvre* is matched by few American Catholics of the twentieth century and it deserves a careful study on a number of fronts, biographical, moral, patristic, ecclesial. It is hoped that this bibliography, with no pretence to being complete, will serve future investigators of this remarkable man.

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