

# NOTITIAE CHRONICAE

## The Death of V.R.F. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R.

Returning from Chicago, where he had attended a three day meeting in preparation for the coming General Chapter of the Redemptorists, Father Francis J. Connell suffered a heart attack, and a month later, on May 12th., at the age of 79, died in St. Elizabeth's hospital, Washington, D.C., fortified with the sacraments of the Church and surrounded by his confreres. The week-end before becoming sick, he had helped out in a local parish, heard confessions on Saturday evening and said two Masses with sermons on Sunday morning, as he had done on almost every week-end of the 54 years of his priestly career; despite a full schedule as professor, lecturer, spiritual director to hundreds of priests, religious, bishops, and laity, writer and consultant for various governmental as well as ecclesiastical agencies.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 31, 1888, Francis J. Connell proved an honor student at the famous Boston Latin School, being rewarded with the Franklin medal in 1905. He graduated from Boston College in 1907, then entered the Redemptorist Novitiate in Ilchester, Maryland, where he was professed on October 15, 1908. In later life, asked why he had not become a Jesuit, he replied that he had not wanted to spend the whole of his life in a classroom; but this is precisely what he did as a Redemptorist. He was ordained on June 26, 1913 at Esopus, New York, and selected for graduate studies in Rome, but had to postpone this assignment because of war conditions in Europe until 1921. Meanwhile he served briefly as a curate in the busy Brooklyn Redemptorist Parish, then taught dogmatic theology at the Redemptorist House of Studies at Esopus, New York, to which he returned with his Doctorate in Sacred Theology gained at the Angelicum, Rome, in 1923. Having made a brilliant course at the Angelicum, he was invited to contribute an essay on the Eucharist to *Strena*, the Festschrift offered to Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange in 1925.

Meanwhile, in 1920, he had begun an association with the *American Ecclesiastical Review* that lasted throughout his career; the following year beginning a series of articles on « Recent Theology » that appeared every six months until 1940, and was continued in almost every issue thereafter as « Answers to Questions on Moral Theology » down to the time of his death. He published a number of books including *Outlines of Moral Theology* (Milwaukee, 1953), *Sunday Sermon Outlines* (New York, 1955), *Morals in Politics and the Professions* (Westminster, Md., 1946) as well as series of pamphlets on the Sacraments, on Marriage and the Family, and contributed

apologetical articles of great weight to the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Reader's Digest*, and was frequently quoted in *Time* as an authoritative Catholic spokesman (see obituary notice in *Time*, May 19, 1967, pg. 51).

In 1940, he accepted the chair of Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America, and served as dean of the Theology Department from 1949 to 1957. He retired from the University in 1958 and then served as Special Dean of Religious on the Campus until his death. In 1936 he had prepared a revised edition of the Baltimore Catechism and continued to bring it up to date until 1949 with the publication of *Father Connell's Confraternity Edition of the New Baltimore Catechism*.

During World War II Father Connell proved an invaluable confidant and adviser to the American Bishops as well as the military Chaplains. He was a frequent visitor at the Apostolic Delegation. He had been one of the first priests invited to give a radio program in the late 1920s, and conducted numerous retreats and lectures all over the United States and Canada. A peritus at Vatican Council II, he served on the board of information for the English speaking journalists, and with inveterate courtesy and clear responses upheld the conservative position. As a pedagogue in the classroom he had a clear, genial manner of presentation, and encouraged dialogue on the part of the student, frequently remarking after a vivid exchange of opinions, « that will form another chapter in my book: 'Corners out of which I have crawled, by Connell' ».

Widely recognized as an authoritative moral theologian, he was honored by Pope Pius XII in 1952 with the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal. He was a president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, 1946-47, and the society honored him with its Cardinal Spellman Award for theological excellence in 1947. Several honorary degrees were conferred on Father Connell; the Academia Alfonsiana, Institutum Theologiae Moralis, in Rome, awarded him on November 13, 1958, the Diploma « honoris causa ».

His obsequies were conducted at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on the University Campus by the Archbishop of Washington, D.C., Msgr. Patrick O'Boyle, with many of the American hierarchy present or represented, as well as many priests, students and lay people. With his death, an era of American theological thinking and American catholic life comes to an end.

F. X. Murphy, C.S.S.R.