

## In the Midst of His People: the Authorized Biography of Bishop Maurice J. Dingman

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*In the Midst of His People: The Authorized Biography of Bishop Maurice J. Dingman*, by Shirley Crisler, SFCC, and Mira Mosle, BVM, with a foreword by Senator Tom Harkin. Iowa City: Rudi Publishing, 1995. xvii, 283 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY GEORGE WILLIAM MCDANIEL, ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

Shirley Crisler and Mira Mosle were coworkers and friends of Bishop Maurice Dingman and began this work with his cooperation. They also had the cooperation of members of Dingman's family and others in Des Moines and Iowa who had known and worked with him. They claim not to have produced a "definitive study" of the bishop (xv). Nor have they attempted to place him in the larger context of the Roman Catholic Church in the last part of the twentieth century. Rather, they ask readers to provide the context necessary to understand Dingman's impact.

Dingman was born in St. Paul, Iowa, in 1914, attended St. Ambrose University in Davenport and the North American College in Rome, and was ordained a priest in 1939 for the Diocese of Davenport. In Davenport he served as a convent and hospital chaplain, Diocesan Superintendent of Schools, high school principal, and vice-chancellor and chancellor of the diocese. In 1968 he was named the bishop of Des Moines, where he served until he resigned in 1986 because of ill health. He died in 1992.

Dingman became a bishop three years after the close of Vatican II, a reforming council called by Pope John XXIII. The council documents defined the church as the "people of God," which deemphasized (but did not reject) the older hierarchical view of the church. Dingman was a postconciliar bishop who regularly consulted with his people through councils and commissions. He also actively advocated the causes of ecumenism, labor, prisoners, and, especially, family farmers. The book's title "In the Midst of His People" aptly describes Dingman's service as bishop. Readers unfamiliar with the postconciliar church might think that Dingman was the only example of this style of leadership. While a case could possibly be made that he was the best example, the book's lack of context inappropriately implies that he was unique in the postconciliar church.

While Dingman's administrative style certainly represented the postconciliar church, his tenure also began just weeks before Pope Paul VI issued his birth control encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, which deeply divided the church in America. The tension between the Vatican II view of a consultative church and the authoritarian view rep-

resented by *Humanae Vitae*—and its effect on Dingman—is evident throughout the book.

Crisler and Mosle have written an anecdotal, sometimes hagiographic book. They rightly claim that the high point of the Dingman years was Pope John Paul II's visit to Des Moines in 1979. They hint at opposition to Dingman's policies and consultative style, but they do not discuss it.

Readers who want a general introduction to Dingman and the issues that faced Iowa Catholics (and Iowans in general) during these years can benefit from this book. But general readers and scholars who want a more analytical look at Dingman's leadership will have to wait for another book.

*The Gas Station in America*, by John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. xi, 272 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LEO E. LANDIS, HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE

In *The Gas Station in America*, John Jakle, a geographer, and Keith Sculle, a historian, provide a definitive history of the American gas station. This product of the twentieth century is placed in a cultural and economic framework. The authors blend business and cultural history with cultural geography and provide a broad analysis that engages the reader.

In their introduction the authors describe childhood memories of gas stations and explain how their interest in the topic matured. This device provides the rationale for the study, and introduces the cultural significance of the gas station. The study reflects the environmental history concept of "second nature," as the innovative built environment becomes so commonplace that its importance is undervalued. In the case of the gas station, the architecture and its cultural significance are marginalized. The chapter is sometimes wearing, but it provides relevant background regarding the authors' academic disciplines and professions. The authors offer a concise survey of the development of cultural geography as an academic discipline, and relate the difficulty of pursuing independent research as an employee within a state historical agency bureaucracy.

The authors employ a model termed "place-product-packaging" to analyze the American gas station. "Place" is the distinctive architecture employed by oil companies. "Product" refers to the brand names and logos associated with the "place." Oil companies branded

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