

Eulogy delivered at a Memorial Mass for Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen at Caldwell Hall Chapel, Wednesday, January 30, 1980 by The Reverend Robert Paul Mohan.

Today dear friends of the University community, we meet to remember a revered professor, priest, friend and colleague, who chiefly through the artistry of the spoken word touched the lives of the faithful and uncommitted more than any preacher in American Catholic history.

Last month, as I approached St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to attend Archbishop Sheen's funeral, I wondered how many people on the threshold of the 80s would remember a churchman whose fame was in the 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. I found my answer in the hundreds of people standing in the rain, waiting for admittance to the Cathedral. I found it in more than a hundred and fifty priests and bishops from all over the land assembled to celebrate the Funeral Mass. I found that answer in dignitaries and people from all walks of life come to pay homage to the man who personified, explained and defended the faith.

Archbishop Sheen was many things to many people, but we of the University family celebrate the memory of the brilliant agrégé en philosophie from Louvain who spent a quarter of a century as a professor of philosophy here.

Let it be said that the Monsignor Sheen of those days was neither a folksy Mr. Chips, fond of dialoguing endlessly with students in or out of class, nor a research-oriented scholar who used a superb Louvain education in pursuit of the esoterica sometimes

thought by academicians to be the sole fitting employment of a truly first class mind. Albert Camus once said: "I am the sum of my choices." The Monsignor Sheen we knew and admired, the priest-scholar, was the result of his choices. He chose to do what he felt he did best; and indeed he did best what he chose to do.

I studied with Archbishop Sheen for three years, and found him inspiring, knowledgeable, helpful, wise, and kind.

He was always the priestly gentleman with awesome skills in the art of communication. As an admirer and friend of G. K. Chesterton, he loved paradox, which Chesterton once described as a wildly capering truth, standing on its head. The verbal description of such capering involved its own kind of risk. More often than not such description was witty, incisive, even luminous. Sometimes even we seminarian admirers preferred a more chastened rhetoric even while we conceded oratory to be a shameless art!

Just a few years after his teaching career began here in 1926, Monsignor Sheen began his enormously popular Catholic Hour radio broadcasts, which he continued until his retirement from the University in 1950.

By that time TV had arrived, and in early 1952 Dumont television needed a fill-in for a throw-away time slot opposite Mr. Television of the 50s, the comedian, Milton Berle. The sacrificial victim was to be the eloquent Catholic cleric, Monsignor Sheen, who was never designed by nature or temperament to be anyone's

sacrificial victim. The "victim" eventually drew 20 million viewers to his Life is Worth Living telecasts, and in 1953 was voted TV's Man of the Year. He had become National Director of the Propagation of the Faith in 1950, and by the time he left to become Bishop of Rochester, the fledgling missionary and his organization has sent 200 million dollars to the needy of the world, largely through his effective efforts to dramatize their plight. He became the world's most elegant beggar.

He was over seventy when he became Bishop of Rochester, and though his thousand day career reflected a new concern for ecumenism, low cost housing and minority poverty, the complexity of contemporary diocesan administration made his new career somewhat more demanding than the pastoral challenges the young intellectual faced as a curate many years earlier in St. Patrick's in London's Soho. His last decade, technically as Archbishop of the Titular See of Newport, Wales, was spent in New York where he continued his priestly duties on a schedule dictated by failing health. He offered Mass the day he died and gave instructions from bed the last week of his life.

The world remembers him as the charismatic convert-maker with the piercing eyes, the instructor of such luminaries as Grace Moore, Louis Budenz, Heywood Broun, Jo Mielziener, Fritz Kreisler, and Clare Boothe Luce. But with equal fervor and zeal he instructed his cook, the taxi driver, shop girl, and actor. It has been said that the most admired and influential Catholic priest in the America of the 80s offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass wherever he is, no

matter how busy he is. Archbishop Sheen's greatest strength was not in the perfection of his oratory, nor in the breadth of his vision, nor the extent of his charities, but in the life of prayer that gave all these lesser things their meaning.

His day began with an hour of prayer, a practice Archbishop O'Meara, his friend and associate, tells us he continued to the end of life. "Contemplare, et contemplata, aliis tradere." He prayed, and from that richness of the spirit, he gave to others.

Perhaps the most poignant moment in Archbishop Sheen's life came a few months before his death when in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Cathedral, the successor of St. Peter raised the kneeling Bishop from his knees and enveloped him in a brotherly embrace, and said: "You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus." May Fulton John Sheen, with that same Lord Jesus, Rejoice in Eternal Life.