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## **The Work of Fr. Raymond Flanagan, OCSO, Author of Historical Novels, Devotional Books, and Pamphlets**

### **Introduction**

Father Mary Raymond Flanagan (1903–1990), a monk of Gethsemani Abbey, was the widely-read author of dozens of books and pamphlets particularly popular in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. Numbering in the dozens, his publications were characterized by a hard-hitting, vigorous Catholic piety that accentuated American family values, fidelity to Catholic traditions, the beauty of religious vocations, anti-Communism, and the athletic asceticism he associated with the first Cistercians. His works lost their appeal to a wide audience during the cultural shift of the late 1960s and later, but several of his writings have been reissued in recent years.

Because he was a contemporary of Thomas Merton and both were monks in the same abbey, comparisons of the two authors have been numerous, yet misleading. Merton is today a respected and well-known author, widely-read even after his death. Flanagan was representative of a more popular style suited for pamphlets and audiences who had little higher education. His appeal went far beyond American Catholicism and saw many editions and translations into Spanish, French, and German. Abbot Timothy Kelly noted in his funeral homily for Father Raymond

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that his earlier publications had, in a special manner, convinced many to enter religious life in general and the Trappist Order in particular.<sup>1</sup>

This introduction to Raymond Flanagan's life and writings describes the famous Trappist author's family background, his development as a priest and monk, dominant characteristics of his publications, and the cultural milieu in which his work thrived. It also includes a bibliography.

## Fr. Raymond Flanagan's Biography

He was born November 29, 1903 in Roxbury, MA and baptized as Joseph David Stanislaus Flanagan. He was the son of Irish immigrants. His father, Patrick J. Flanagan, had come to America from Castlerea, Roscommon. His mother, Mary Bridget Flanagan, née Meaney, emigrated to America from Limerick. Of their ten children, three became priests: in addition to Father Raymond there was the Rev. John P. Flanagan, a member of the Jesuit Order and the Rev. Edward Flanagan, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Two sisters became nuns: Sister Leo Stanislaus and Sister Mary Clare were both members of the Sisters of Charity in Halifax, Nova Scotia.<sup>2</sup>

There were five other children in the Flanagan family. One son died at an early age. Another died during the flu epidemic of 1917. Charles Flanagan, one of the brothers, died from cancer at the age of forty-seven,<sup>3</sup> leaving a wife and seven children. Several years later, the wife died, thus orphaning the children. Father Raymond had two sisters in secular life.

Growing up in a fervent Catholic family, Flanagan and his siblings attended St. Peter's parochial school in Dorchester, MA. Flanagan later recalled that "the Mass was central to my life from earliest youth."<sup>4</sup> Later on, as a high-school student, he worked part-time for the New York,

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1 Timothy Kelly, funeral homily, 4 Jun 1990. Abbey Archives Gethsemani.

2 Archives, Sisters of Charity, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

3 Raymond Flanagan's *This is Your Tomorrow and Today* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing 1959) tells the story of the last 18 months in Charlie's life.

4 M. Raymond Flanagan, *Forty Years Behind the Wall* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1979), p. 176.

New Haven, and Hartford Railroads.<sup>5</sup> His elder brother John, nine years his senior, had entered the Jesuit Order and likely sparked the idea in young Joseph, who himself began his religious life as a Jesuit. The two brothers were similar in many ways, since both became debate coaches and teachers of rhetoric at various schools in the care of their prestigious order.<sup>6</sup> Sister Mary Clare had this family trait in common with them; she was later commissioned by her order to study public speaking.<sup>7</sup>

There are clear connections between the typical American immigrant parishes and schools the Flanagans attended and the religious vocations some of them pursued. The teachers at St. Peter's parochial school were Sisters of Charity from Halifax, Nova Scotia, thus two of his sisters became nuns of that order. The teachers at Boston College High School were to a large extent Jesuit priests: two of the Flanagan boys entered the Society of Jesus, but one of them was later to become a Trappist.

Joseph (later Raymond) Flanagan attended Boston College High for four years and then entered the Jesuit novitiate in August, 1920. He had not yet turned 17 or graduated from high school. At the time, high school seniors were allowed to enter novitiates before graduation, since further studies awaited them in any case. He entered the novitiate at Yonkers, near New York City, on August 14, 1920 and spent two years as a novice in the Gothic Revival estate that the tobacco merchant Christian Henry Lilienthal had built on the Hudson River in the mid-nineteenth century; the Jesuits purchased it later.<sup>8</sup> After the novitiate, he went on to the Jesuit juniorate and spent 1922–1924 in Poughkeepsie, NY. Studies in philosophy followed at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology (MA) from 1924 to 1927. The triennium 1927–1930, during his so-called regency when he was not yet ordained a priest, Flanagan spent teaching freshman and sophomores at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA. He also served the students there as the moderator of several debating societies. Debates and theatrical events at Holy Cross were often covered on the front page of the student newspaper, with repeated

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5 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, pp. 14-15.

6 Jesuit Archives, St. Louis, MO. E-Mail from Ann Knake, 11 Nov 2019.

7 Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Archives, US Province, E-Mail from Ann Diehl, 19 Apr 2018.

8 Hudson River Museum Homepage, <https://www.hrm.org/collection/49-13b/>, accessed 15 Jan 2021, archived at <https://perma.cc/HDL3-GMNS>.

reference to a Fr. Flanagan.<sup>9</sup> From 1930 through January 1934 he studied theology at Weston. He was ordained a priest on June 22, 1933. After ordination he transferred to St. Louis University's School of Theology at St. Mary's, Kansas to continue his studies from January 1934 through June 1934. He did his tertianship from 1934 to 1935 at Manresa Hall in Port Townsend, WA. These years saw him giving retreats intermittently. In 1935, he served again at Holy Cross in Worcester as a lecturer of religious studies. The year after, he left the Society of Jesus to become a Trappist monk.<sup>10</sup>

Father Raymond arrived at Gethsemani on November 14, 1936 and received the novice's habit the following March 7th. His first years at the abbey were a third novitiate of sorts, since he had completed two intensive years of Jesuit formation after high school. Then, after many years of membership in the Society of Jesus, he completed the tertianship which many consider to be a second novitiate. It is the last formalized element in the standard program of Jesuit formation, taking place after ordination and involving a year-long program of spiritual training, including the 30-day-long Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.<sup>11</sup>

He took simple vows as a Trappist monk in 1939 and made his solemn vows on April 5, 1942.<sup>12</sup> His name in religion was Raymond. The transition from Jesuit to Trappist was dramatic by any standard: Flanagan had gone from the life of a priest mainly devoted to preaching and teaching debate to leading a life where much communication took place using sign language and where he would be permitted to write only four letters a year.<sup>13</sup> He missed "contact with educated men of delicate tastes, refined feelings".<sup>14</sup> Despite the austerity, Father Raymond relished the life "behind the wall", as he would later phrase it, and developed a deeper appreciation of the manual labor which had only been a minor part of his Jesuit formation.

Father Raymond's rhetorical savvy for describing the beauty of contemplative

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9 "Debaters hold an Open Forum [...] Point at Issue Hotly Contested by Many Clever Speakers", *The Tomahawk* (Worcester, MA), 17 Dec 1929, p. 1; "Dramatic Society Work Progresses; Fr. Flanagan Holds Daily Meetings [...]", *The Tomahawk*, 21 Oct 1930, p. 1.

10 Jesuit Archives, St. Louis, MO. E-Mail from Ann Knake, 18 Oct 2019.

11 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, pp. 16-17.

12 Trappist Archives, Gethsemani Abbey, Raymond Flanagan, funeral card.

13 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, p. 50.

14 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, p. 50.

silence was appreciated by a popular audience: “I mentally ran down the sixteen busy and ever noisy years of my Jesuit life as the train clicked me toward silence that November morning in 1936. As we neared Gethsemani, I increasingly felt a tingling sense of expectation, tinged with anxiety. I had been talking, and talking and talking for sixteen years – as a student, professor and retreat master and giver of parish missions over the entire Pacific slope from Vancouver to San Diego. Yet here I was heading for a cloister hidden among the knobs of Nelson County, Kentucky and toward absolute silence.”<sup>15</sup> This romantic portrayal of “absolute silence” is typical of Father Raymond’s ebullience. In fact, he enjoyed speaking and often received visitors at the abbey. He and his superiors repeatedly wrangled about whether or not Flanagan should speak at conferences or receive guests.<sup>16</sup>

Although comparisons of Flanagan and Thomas Merton (1915–1968) have been exaggerated in the past, contrasting the two of them brings some of their characteristics into better focus. Merton came from a more privileged background and may well have been aesthetically more sophisticated than Flanagan, whose texts were often intended to provoke readers and rouse them out of complacency. Despite their differences, the two author-monks accepted each other as confreres and even exchanged letters.<sup>17</sup> Flanagan signed his with the nickname Rasputin, after the Russian monk and healer who was influential and controversial at the Czar’s court.<sup>18</sup> Merton wrote five limericks about Father Raymond; this poetic genre was well-suited to their complex relationship, since it alternated between respectful affection and heated theological opposition.<sup>19</sup> Father Raymond may have been jealous of Father Louis (Merton’s name in religion), since the latter was novice-master for many years, while Flanagan soon lost his job teaching canon law in the abbey’s course of priestly formation. With the wisdom of hindsight, Flanagan admitted in old age that

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15 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, p. 17.

16 Frederic Dean Lucas, *Merton’s Abbot. The Life and Times of Dom James Fox, as Revealed through Letters, Interviews with Monks, Records* (Lexington, KY: Frederic D. Lucas 2016), pp. 147.

17 A selection of their letters is in Thomas Merton, *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crisis*, ed. William Shannon (New York: Farrar, 1994), p. 231, cited in Thomas Merton, Five Limericks for Father Raymond, *The Merton Seasonal* 23.2 (Spring 1998), p. 11-12, note 3.

18 Lucas, *Merton’s Abbot*, p. 139.

19 Merton, “Five Limericks for Father Raymond”, p. 11-12.

“the silent cloister was not the most compatible environment” for him, after all.<sup>20</sup>

As the years progressed, Father Raymond’s work assignments in the monastery centered on his literary output. Additionally, he served as Mass Secretary for many years, administering the correspondence and donations received from people asking for Mass intentions. He also worked in the garden during seasonal highs, but most of his work flowed into dozens of publications, many of which were reprinted in several editions and languages.<sup>21</sup> The output over the course of the decades is quite impressive in sum total.

Father Raymond died on June 3, 1990 in Gethsemani, on Pentecost Sunday.

## Cistercian Topics

In his popular historical novels, Flanagan portrayed pioneering leaders who dedicated their lives to advancing Cistercian ideals. The “Saga of Cîteaux” series contained historical narratives like *Three Religious Rebels* (devoted to the three founding abbots of Cîteaux) and *These Women Walked with God* (describing female saints in the Cistercian family like St. Lutgarde, Bl. Aleyde, and St. Francha). Flanagan also wrote about Trappists in twentieth-century America: *The Less Traveled Road* was about Abbot Mary Frederic Dunne, the abbot of Gethsemani from 1935 to 1948.

The historical personalities in question were deeply religious and complex, yet their portrayal in the American novels tends to be schematic and general. There is reason to believe that Raymond’s own observance as a monk may have been less than exemplary: Abbot James Fox, for instance, took issue with Flanagan’s explanation of certain principles of monastic poverty and did not allow him to continue teaching young monks after 1951.<sup>22</sup> The deposed professor deeply resented having lost this job.

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20 Flanagan, *Forty Years*, p. 37.

21 E-Mail from Abbot Elias Dietz (Gethsemani Abbey) to Alkuin Schachenmayr, 9 Nov 2020.

22 Lucas, *Merton's Abbot*, p. 139.

## Devotional Writer

Father Raymond had a forceful personality. He was a cradle Catholic from working-class origins, and he was educated by Jesuits. In many of his publications, he portrayed monastic life in a vigorous manner comparable to the disciplined life of a soldier. Indeed, the Rule of St. Benedict often invokes the monk as a soldier, a role that even the pacifist Thomas Merton described with wonder. In his commentary on the Rule, Merton identifies “the vocation of the monk as the chosen instrument, the soldier of Christ who, by his prayers and self-denial, continues the work of the Incarnation which is a reconquest, by God, of His creation.”<sup>23</sup> Flanagan identified with this role, but he also wrote for women living as professed religious. Some of these publications (e.g. *Doubling for the Mother of God*) have recently been re-issued at the request of sisters’ communities. A part of their appeal lies in the familiar, brotherly tone that Flanagan uses, since the books he wrote for sisters were written with his biological sisters in mind.

Again and again, the religious ambiance of the Flanagan home influenced Father Raymond’s publications. The 1959 book about his brother Charlie’s early death was titled *This is Your Tomorrow and Today*. It describes, among others topics, the apostolic value of suffering and the manner in which Charlie’s comportment in the face of death drew others, including medical doctors, closer to Catholicism.

The following two examples help to understand the cultural milieu in which Flanagan was comfortable and in which his books were often read.

### 1942 Pamphlet, “Let's build a home!”

Published without naming Flanagan as the author, this 1942 pamphlet “by a Trappist” saw at least three editions with a grand total of 40,000 copies. It opens with a long quote from Pope Benedict XV's letter to “Father Mateo” concerning the enthronement of the Sacred Heart in private homes. Father Raymond does not cite the source, but the context

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23 Thomas Merton, *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (Monastic Wisdom Series 19, Collegeville 2009), pp. 29-30.

of devotions to the Sacred Heart Enthronement make it clear that Mateo Crawley-Boevey (1875–1960) is the priest in question. Crawley-Boevey was a self-declared apostle of the Sacred Heart and wrote devotional books and pamphlets for a wide audience. They were translated and published the world over. Mateo's *Jesus, King of Love* is advertised at the back of Father Raymond's pamphlet.

The pamphlet is divided into a foreword and 15 short sections which alternate between two styles. Half of them are easy-to-understand dialogues which portray scenes from the life of a devout Catholic family with children in their teens. The other half of the sections is devoted to theological reflection. In his foreword to the pamphlet, Flanagan makes it clear that he believes American homes and, indeed, all of American society to be under siege from “invading forces which threaten our very existence.” Paramount dangers are said to come from “carnality, sensuality and materialism”.

In the pamphlet, the family's conversations make casual references to recent papal encyclicals or sermons preached in their parish church the previous Sunday. The theological sections make reference to Pius XI's imperative in the encyclical *Casti Connubii* (On Christian Marriage, 1930): “stop divorce or ruin the state” (20). He also quotes from devotional books and pamphlets by other authors (13). Midway through the pamphlet, a priest arrives at the family's home for dinner, citing Latin aphorisms (29). The conversation turns to building homes, which the priest explains to the teenagers in practical and spiritual terms, in which Christ serves as the cornerstone.

The United States are portrayed as a religious project initiated by (if not Catholic, then at least Christian) refugees seeking to live their faith more freely. Yet the same America must defend itself against “assaults of neo-paganism, godlessness and material philosophies” (19).

Communism and rising rates of divorce function in the narrative as threats to American culture, but despite the occasional references to theological writings, the pamphlet's arguments remain superficial. One passage reads: “The old question of one religion being as good as another was brought up and discussed. It was dismissed as being absurd [sic], insane and illogical” (41).

Besides the typographical error, the redundancies do not succeed in offering readers useful arguments.

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The pamphlet includes an advertisement for other books and pamphlets available for sale from Gethsemani Abbey. Amidst classics like the *Rule of St. Benedict*, a biography of Rancé, and Chautard's *Soul of the Apostolate*, the pamphlet also advertises several books by Father Raymond, among them *The Man Who Got Even With God* and *Three Religious Rebels*. Even a Jesuit title (*Radiating Christ: An Appeal to Militant Catholics* by Father Raoul Plus, SJ) was offered there.

### Three Religious Rebels

Because of its educational value for young Cistercians and those in formation, this novel about the first three abbots of Cîteaux is perhaps the book by Father Raymond that has reached the most people over the longest stretch of time. Originally published in 1944 as an offering to Abbot Mary Frederic Dunne of Gethsemani on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of monastic vows, Flanagan stated that his reasons for writing the book were predominantly didactic. At the time of writing, there were few English-language books available about Robert, Alberic and Stephen, the first three abbots of the new monastery, leading to ignorance among Americans about them.

It was Flanagan's second historical novel about the Cistercian movement. *The Saga of Cîteaux* series also included *The Family that Overtook Christ*, which had gone before, and a book about Cistercian nuns. *The Family that Overtook Christ* is also still in print, in one case even including a study guide with "Lessons in Sanctity" to be learned from discussing the way several members of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's family followed God's call to serve as monks and nuns.

*Three Religious Rebels* came later, but addressed an earlier era in Cistercian history, namely the founding of Cîteaux Abbey, the mother of all other Cistercian houses. As a monk-novelist, Father Raymond did not delve particularly deep into historical research about the twelfth century. All of his historical books were largely fictional, albeit with references to names and places that were taken from popular accounts of the Cistercian Order's history. The dialogue is, as one would expect, thoroughly mid-twentieth-century American parlance, yet the characters make

reference to specific chapters of the Rule of St. Benedict. While one European critic complained that the Kentucky monk used “subjective writing” and the style of an “American newspaper” to portray the founding abbots,<sup>24</sup> others enjoyed Flanagan’s way of constructing believable monastic ambiance with details about daily life and liturgy in a medieval abbey: “the author makes you want to be one with them!”, enthused a 2019 review on the internet platform *Good Reads*.<sup>25</sup>

The publishing history that preceded the 1982 German edition of *Die drei Rebellen* is exemplary for Flanagan’s working conditions as an author and the manner in which his works were distributed. Although the book from the 1940s had been widely read, re-issued and translated into several languages, by 1979 there was no copy available in English at Gethsemani, or at least Father Raymond claimed that none was available to him. Initiators of a German translation had written to him in Kentucky, hoping to secure a copy as the basis for their translation. Flanagan could offer them none, telling them to use the Italian version as the source text instead. This directive either proves Father’s humility or his disinterest in the book, more than thirty years after its first edition.

In a foreword that surprisingly suggests that the book has no long-term significance, the abess of the South Tyrolean Cistercian Abbey of Mariengarten claimed that although the book had “no real literary value”, still it portrayed the Cistercian founders in a genuine manner that filled readers with awe and respect for their fervor, therefore meriting a translation into German.<sup>26</sup> This translation was originally to serve as a contribution to the celebration of St. Benedict of Nursia’s 1500<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1980, but it did not appear in print until two years later.

## Father Raymond as a Voice in American Catholicism

Flanagan’s major books are very closely related to Bruce Publishing

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24 A. [author unknown], Book review, *The Irish Monthly* 74 (May 1946), p. 228.

25 Amy Gieser, Book review, Goodreads.com

<[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2394058.The\\_Saga\\_of\\_Citeaux\\_First\\_Epoch](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2394058.The_Saga_of_Citeaux_First_Epoch)> dated 6 May 2019, accessed 15 Jan 2021, archived at <https://perma.cc/T6DE-VN75>.

26 Adelgundis von Zieglauer, Foreword, *Die drei Rebellen* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1982), p. 8.

in Milwaukee, a family business run by generations of Bruce brothers. The publishing house was led during Flanagan's day by men who "ran the firm almost like a small religious community", while remaining mindful of bringing in profits.<sup>27</sup> Its titles were popular and catechetical, very often authored by priests and devoted to the cause of establishing Roman Catholicism as a force to be reckoned with in American society; they and their colleagues considered themselves part of a Catholic literary revival in which Thomism and intellectual rigor were held higher than in previous generations. Anti-Communist sentiments permeated many of the books published by the Milwaukee publishing house. Bruce Publishing, as a trademark, was "synonymous with the confident Catholicism of the Church [...] and of Catholic Action."<sup>28</sup>

In the context of this publisher's titles, Flanagan's style of Cistercian hagiography took its place amidst a particularly American type of Roman Catholicism, appearing with titles like Floyd Anderson's *Father Baker*, a book published in 1960 about Nelson Henry Baker (1842–1936), a priest in Buffalo, NY who is venerated even today for coordinating and funding charitable projects like hospitals, schools, and homes for orphans and unwed mothers.

Another glimpse into the Bruce list of titles reveals *Realities: Significant Writing from the Catholic Press*, published in 1958 and edited by Daniel C. Herr and Clement Quirk Lane. The latter was a staunchly loyal Catholic and editor for the *Chicago Daily News*. "Clem" Lane was street smart, had a high-school education and identified with his Irish-Catholic urban background.<sup>29</sup> The book helped Catholic readers to form opinions about current affairs that matched their religious convictions, but it did not pretend to be intellectual discourse.

Austin Joseph App, a professor of medieval English literature who taught at several Catholic universities after receiving his doctorate from the Catholic University of America in 1929, considered the book he published with Bruce in 1950 to be his best. *Making Good Talk: How to Improve Your Conversation* was aimed specifically at Catholics who

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27 Steven Avella, "Catholic Lay Activism in Milwaukee: The Bruce Family", *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 103 (1992), pp. 1-11, here p. 10.

28 Avella, "Catholic Lay Activism", p. 10.

29 Ellen Skerrett, *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), pp. 155-156.

were insecure about their social performance. App also wrote popular articles about courtesy, courtship and marriage.<sup>30</sup> Bruce Publishing did not, however, publish or distribute App's more controversial anti-Semitic writings, which were devoted to denying the Holocaust and defending policies implemented by Nazi Germany.<sup>31</sup>

Some of Flanagan's work was included in Bruce Publishing's particularly successful series called "Religion and Culture". The series "was dedicated to discussion of the cultural aspects of religion and included in its numbers such classics as [...] the tremendously popular *The Man Who Got Even with God* by the Trappist, Raymond Flanagan, who until the advent of Thomas Merton, was the best known Cistercian of the Strict Observance in the United States. To push these books, the Bruce Company established in 1943 a Catholic book club called the Catholic Literary Foundation [...]."<sup>32</sup> Modeled after the marketing strategies employed so successfully by the Book of the Month Club, the Bruce series was able to reach a large number of Catholic households in regular intervals.

In addition to the editors at Bruce publishing with whom Father Raymond had direct contact, and the authors alongside whom his writing was disseminated, the Trappist author also stood in contact with a powerful businessman from California. The millionaire Emmet Joseph Culligan (1893–1970) was deeply devoted to the Roman Catholic Church and furthering its expansion in America. Culligan had been a friend of Flanagan's since the 1950s; Raymond's book *Now* was dedicated to Culligan, because he had helped Flanagan's sister-in-law after her husband (the priest's brother, Charlie) died.<sup>33</sup> Having established the water conditioning company he named after himself, Emmet Culligan was a successful entrepreneur, philanthropist, and public speaker. The two men corresponded over many years. Culligan himself wrote several books with apologetic, even apocalyptic themes.<sup>34</sup> His son became a priest.

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30 Austin Joseph App, *Courtesy, Courtship and Marriage: A Collection of Sixteen Magazine Articles and a Commencement Address* (San Antonio, TX: A.J. App, 1947).

31 Andrew E. Mathis, Art. "Holocaust, Denial of", in: *Conspiracy Theories in American History: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Peter Knight (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 321-324, here 322-323.

32 Avella, "Catholic Lay Activism", p. 9.

33 University of San Diego Archives, Emmett J. Culligan Collection, finding aid by Fr. Kevin Culligan, 31 Aug 1977.

34 University of San Diego Archives, Emmett J. Culligan Collection, finding aid by Ashley Toutain, 2018.

Like thousands of readers, Culligan may well have been moved by Charlie Flanagan's fate by reading about it in *The Sign*, a monthly magazine which was distributed nationally and tailored to Catholic interests. It ran a lavishly illustrated photo-essay about the tragedy in 1960.<sup>35</sup> Published by Passionist Fathers from 1921 to 1982, *The Sign* was the fourth most popular Catholic magazine in the United States in the early 1960s. In this period, it printed articles by Fulton Sheen and Dorothy Day, among other well-known authors.<sup>36</sup> It featured its own Catholic list of best-selling books, and for more than six months in 1959–1960, Father Raymond's book about his brother Charlie, *This is Your Tomorrow and Today*, headed the list.<sup>37</sup>

### Diminishing Appeal beginning in the 1960s

Interest in Flanagan's publications diminished in the mid-1960s; compared to the period from 1940 to 1960, there were scarcely any new editions or translations of his pamphlets and books after the Second Vatican Council. The Bruce Publishing Company, which had published Father Raymond's work for decades, declined *Relax and Rejoice, for the Hand on the Tiller is Firm* in 1968 and, concurrently with sending the rejection slip offered its backlist of five previous Flanagan titles to other distributors, clearly not expecting major sales in the future.<sup>38</sup> Father Raymond's close friend and benefactor, Emmett Culligan, arranged for its publication, albeit via St. Paul Publications in Pasay City, Philippines. The Asian publisher was not able to provide the type of distribution an American publisher would have made possible.

Bruce Publishing soon changed ownership and was no longer the self-confident family business it had been for so long: "By 1968, when the publishing house was sold to Macmillan and Collier it seemed just one

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35 [Anonymous], "Without a Father", *The Sign* (Feb 1960), pp. 25-29.

36 Robert E. Carbonneau, Art. "The Sign", in: *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, eds. Michael Glazier and Thomas J. Shelley (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), pp. 1297–1298.

37 "Without a Father", p. 25.

38 University of San Diego Archives, Emmett J. Culligan Collection, Letter from Bruce Publishing company to Emmett J. Culligan, 12 Sep 1968.

more outdated relic of a bygone era of Catholic life.”<sup>39</sup> The transition was typical of the changes in church life during the 1970s and 1980s; Catholics had succeeded in entering American popular culture, many stopped receiving the sacraments on a regular basis, and for many, the Communist menace was no longer an existential threat.

### Still Widely-Read among Contemporary Religious

Flanagan’s books may not be as antiquated today as they seemed to be in the 1970s. Several of them have been reprinted in recent years, and even the old editions are a mainstay in the marketplace of used Catholic books. I asked two younger sisters how they had discovered Father Raymond and why they read his books.

A Bernardine of Esquermes, born in 1968 and admitted into the novitiate in 1991, reported that she discovered Father Raymond’s books in the novitiate scriptorium and in the community scriptorium at their house in Slough (Berkshire, England). Others were on the shelves in the main library at Hynning. The sister was introduced to the stories by the retired Mother General. Her novice mistress also encouraged her to read Flanagan. According to her account, many of the sisters in both houses have read the books, namely: *The Man Who Got Even With God*, *Three Religious Rebels*, and *The Family that Overtook Christ*.

The Bernardine Sister reported that while she found Bernard of Clairvaux’s writings difficult to read and his character hard to understand, Flanagan’s book on the saint’s family gave her “a wider picture of his charm and motivation and that helps to appreciate the man and the monk.” Having studied theology since reading the novels, she now recognizes inaccuracies in Father Raymond’s books, “but even so it fueled my love of the Order and the sense of the people who shaped our history.” She uses the books with oblates when explaining the history of the Order to newcomers. She uses them in conjunction with other study materials like the “Exordium” program in her lectures and talks.

A Trappistine nun of Our Lady of the Holy Trinity Abbey (Crozet, VA) also reports repeated encounters with Father Raymond’s books. She

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39 Avella, “Catholic Lay Activism”, p. 11.

was born in Haiti in 1971 and entered the monastery in 2011. She found *The Man Who Got Even With God* in the novitiate library. Reading it was an experience she described as “inspiring” and therefore she enthused about it to her superior, who in turn revealed that the same book had contributed a great deal to her own vocation. The young nun later found more books by Flanagan and read them “back to back with no interruption”. Besides her superior, this sister doesn’t think that any of her other sisters have read Flanagan’s books. Now that she has persevered in religious life for several years, she no longer reads him, seeking “inspiration from something much more ‘substantial’”. Still, the novels remain a “blessing” for her.

## Bibliography

According to his autobiography, Father Raymond Flanagan wrote 23 pamphlets and 22 monographs.<sup>40</sup> They are listed below in chronological order; statistics about the number of editions are approximations, since not all the translations and smaller pamphlets have been registered in major libraries.

*The Man Who Got Even With God: The Life of an American Trappist* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1940). 56 editions published between 1940 and 1993 in 5 languages.

*The Family that Overtook Christ* (New York: Kenedy and Sons, 1942). 17 editions published between 1942 and 2006 in 3 languages.

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<sup>40</sup> Flanagan, *Forty Years*, p. 314. See also William P. O'Brien, *Bruce Publishing: Bibliography of a Milwaukee Educational, Technical, and Religious Publisher, 1891–1977* (Milwaukee, WI: WPO, 2008), p. 178.

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God Goes to Murderer's Row (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1951). 14 editions published between 1951 and 1973 in 2 languages.

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Love Does Such Things, God's Christmas Gift to Man (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1955). 5 editions published between 1955 and 2000 in English.

These Women Walked with God (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1956). 14 editions published between 1956 and 1961 in 4 languages.

You (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1957). 15 editions published between 1957 and 1967 in 2 languages. A revised edition was titled *Spiritual Secrets of a Trappist Monk: The Secret of Who You are and what God Calls You to Be*, Sophia Press, 2000.

This is Your Tomorrow. . . and Today (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1959). 5 editions published between 1959 and 2001 in English.

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Now! (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1961). 10 editions published between 1961 and 1963 in English.

Your Hour (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1962). 9 editions published between 1962 and 1995 in 3 languages.

This is Love (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1964). 5 editions published between 1964 and 1965 in English.

The Mysteries in Your Life (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing, 1965). 4 editions published between 1965 and 1968 in Spanish and English.

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Forty Years Behind the Wall (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1979).

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A Trappist Asks: Are You? Gethsemani 1939.

A Trappist Says: You Can Set the World on Fire! Gethsemani, 1940.

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41 Distributed by the Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist, KY.

A Trappist Tells of the God-Man's Double. A Booklet for Priests. Gethsemani 1940.

A Trappist Asks Catholic College Graduates: What's wrong? [... A Few Questions for Alumnae and Alumni]. Gethsemani 1940.

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A Trappist Cries: Say "Fiat" and Remake Your World! Gethsemani 1940.

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A Trappist Asks: Have You Met God? A Question for Catholics and Non-Catholics. Gethsemani, 1941.

Do you want life and love? Gethsemani, 1941.

Doubling for the Mother of God, Gethsemani, 1941. Dedicated to Flanagan's sister, a member of the Sisters of Charity in Halifax. French edition published in Abbey of La Trappe.

Eventually. Why not Now? Gethsemani, 1941.

What are You Doing to Jesus Christ? Gethsemani, 1941.

For Your Own Defense. A Booklet for Catholics in the Service. Gethsemani, 1941.

How Spiritual Force is Generated. Or, the Apostolate of the Contemplatives. Gethsemani, 1941

Let's Build a Home! Marriage, the Family, the Nation. Gethsemani, 1942.

An Hour with Christ. Holy Hour Booklet. Gethsemani, 1942.

A Trappist Writes to Mothers Whose Sons are in the Service. Gethsemani, 1943.

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Whispers From the Wings. Sequel to Doubling for the Mother of God. Gethsemani, 1943. Loreto Publications recently published a new edition at the request of traditional nuns who sought to distribute it among religious.

Saint Bernard: The Master-Magnet of Europe in the Twelfth Century. Gethsemani, 1943.

A Message From Those Killed in Action. Gethsemani 1944.

A Trappist Gives some Facts about Reason, Revelation and Religion. Gethsemani, 1945.

A Trappist Begs the Medical Profession: Help God be a Success. Gethsemani, 1945. Translated into Spanish.

A Trappist Asks: Is Your Home Like This? Gethsemani 1948.

A Trappist Insists: 'Life is Someone.' A Pamphlet for Aspirants to the Priesthood. Gethsemani, 1948.

A Trappist Talks to Girls about 'Running off with God.' A Pamphlet for Aspirants. Gethsemani, 1948.

Trappists, the Reds and You. Gethsemani, 1949. Also in Spanish translation.

A Trappist says: Father, You are Leading a Dangerous life! English not dated, Spanish translation 1951.