

Bishop Richard Henry Ackerman 89 USA * August 30, 1903, Pittsburgh + November 18, 1992 Fort Thomas, KY

Shortly before Richard's birth, his father died in a railroad accident, and the boy grew up in the pious home of his grandmother. He served as an altar boy and from his early teens he wanted to become a priest. He enrolled in the Duquesne University Prep School, graduating at the top of his class in 1920, and then went on to earn his bachelor degree in Duquesne's School of Drama. For a moment he contemplated a career as an actor, but then he heard again God's call and decided to become a priest like his preferred teacher at Duquesne, Fr. Henry McDermott.

Armed with the highest recommendations, he was accepted for the novitiate at Ferndale and pronounced his first vows on October 19, 1922 at Ridgefield, CT. (The novitiate was transferred there in May, 1922). During his senior studies at Ferndale, CT, he excelled again; he was ordained there September 28, 1926 at the age of twenty-three. His first appointment took him to nearby Ridgefield as assistant novice master, until in 1929 he became assistant director of the Holy Childhood in Pittsburgh.

Three years later, he went to Cornwells as editor of The Paraclete. This monthly, reportedly, had a circulation of 100,000 and under capable direction could have developed into a national Catholic family magazine. Unfortunately, an otherwise insignificant fire destroyed its mailing list soon after his arrival. With the country in the depth of the great depression it was hopeless to launch a campaign for subscribers, and the publication had to be suspended. Father then joined the Ferndale senior seminary staff where he taught philosophy for three years. In September 1934 he was sent to Fribourg, Switzerland, to earn a doctorate, but ill health forced him to return two months later. Nursed back to health by Fr. Frederick Hoeger at St. Mary's, Detroit, he became an assistant in that parish till 1940.

In that year he received his appointment to the important position of National Director of the Holy Childhood Association for the USA. Its direction had been taken over in 1889, when the Jesuit who administered it had died, by the founder of the Spiritan province in the USA, Fr. Joseph Strub. When Fr. Ackerman took over, the Association had overcome many difficulties and spread to all but 14 dioceses. Its main purpose was to make children mission-conscious, but it also aided missions financially. Before he took over it had annual receipts of \$187,000 and reached over 300,000 children. In the sixteen years he remained its national director, the association was extended to virtually all dioceses and most parochial schools, enrolling some three million children, and its annual receipts had grown tenfold. He also built new headquarters for the offices of the association in Pittsburgh.

The following year the Holy Childhood's American branch grossed over one million dollars for the first time in its history and from its disposable income could make a substantial contribution to some 500 mission areas throughout the world. All by itself the American branch provided more than half of the association's total funds. Pope Pius XII had taken the association under his immediate protection and from 1950 on Fr. Ackerman received annual letters of appreciation signed by G.B. Montini, the future Pope Paul VI.

His national directorship of the association came to an end in April 1953 when a telegram announced his appointment as auxiliary bishop of Santiago. Further inquiry showed that what was meant was San Diego, CA, and not Santiago, Chili. He was ordained a bishop on May 22, 1956 in the Pittsburgh cathedral by the future cardinal, Bishop John F. Dearden, and seven days later Bp. Charles F. Buddy installed him as auxiliary in his San Diego diocese. Bp. Ackerman, however, retained his position as vice-president and member of the supreme council of the Holy Childhood association and, as such, continued to attend its annual meeting in Paris.

In 1960 the Holy See transferred him to the diocese of Covington, KY, as its Ordinary. During his administration four new parishes and 39 new missions were opened in the diocese, as well

as a dozen new parochial schools and Thomas More college. He introduced fourteen new religious orders to the diocese, and founded the Sisters of St. Joseph the Worker, the Christian Appalachian Project served as a new approach to evangelization in rural areas, hospitals were enlarged and homes for the elderly opened. The bishop sponsored open housing, the pro-life movement and adequate public transportation, and he welcomed Cuban and Vietnam refugees. He also promoted participation in foreign missions among the priests and religious in his diocese.

Bp. Ackerman stayed on as bishop of Covington till he reached the mandatory age of 75 for offering his retirement in 1978. Even then he was asked to stay on as administrator of the diocese until his successor could take over in March 1979.

He had always hoped to retire to a Spiritan community, but it was not to be. From his Fort Thomas residence he continued his ministry by writing, counseling and officiating as a bishop whenever he was asked to do so until in July 1991 he entered the Carmel Manor Nursing Home, Ft. Thomas. Having celebrated the 70th anniversary of his profession, he died there at the local St. Luke Hospital. He had been a priest for 66 years and a bishop for 36. Interment took place at St. Mary's Cemetery, Ft. Mitchell, KY.

USA-East Newsletter, December 1992 Archives 29D-1 to 29D-7