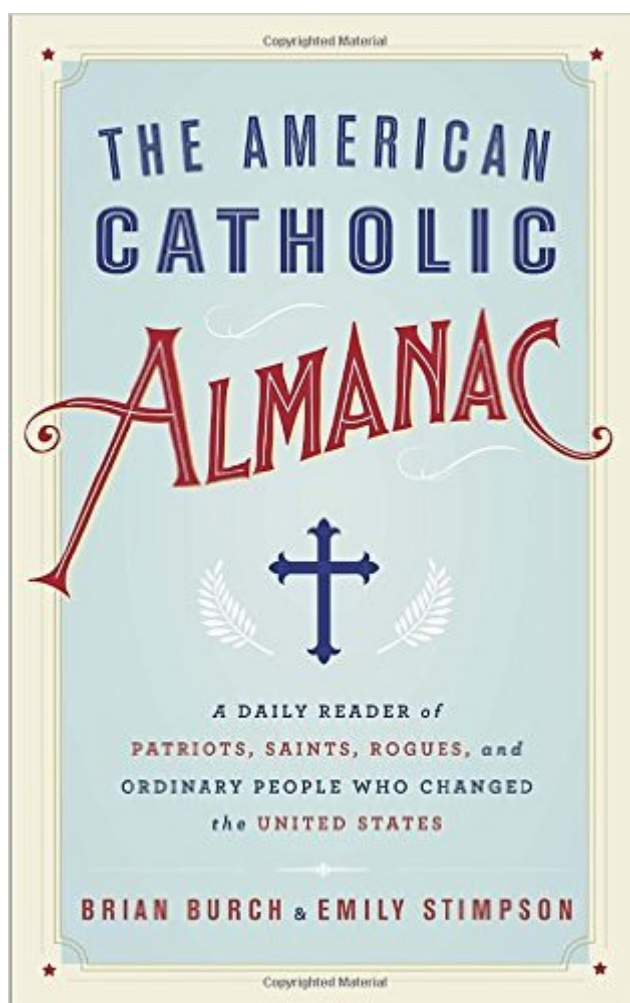


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# The American Catholic Almanac: A Daily Reader Of Patriots, Saints, Rogues, And Ordinary People Who Changed The United States



## Synopsis

WHAT DO BUFFALO BILL, JOHN F. KENNEDY, VINCE LOMBARDI, DOROTHY DAY, FULTON SHEEN, AND ANDY WARHOL HAVE IN COMMON? They're all Catholics who have shaped America. In this page-a-day history, 365 inspiring stories celebrate the historic contributions of American men and women shaped by their Catholic faith. From famous figures to lesser-known saints and sinners, The American Catholic Almanac tells the fascinating, funny, uplifting, and unlikely tales of Catholics' influence on American history, culture, and politics. Spanning the scope of the Revolutionary War to Notre Dame football, this unique collection of stories highlights the transformative role of the Catholic Church in American public life over the last 400 years. Did you know? The first immigrant to arrive in America via Ellis Island was a 15-year-old Irish Catholic girl? Al Capone's tombstone reads "MY JESUS MERCY" Andrew Jackson credited America's victory in the Battle of New Orleans to the prayers of the Virgin Mary and the Ursuline Sisters? Five Franciscans died in sixteenth-century Georgia defending the Church's teachings on marriage? Jack Kerouac died wanting to be known as a Catholic and not only as a beat poet? Catholic missionaries lived in Virginia 36 years before the English settled Jamestown?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Q. What was your inspiration for writing The American Catholic Almanac? Over the past several years, we've watched Americans—both believers and non-believers, liberal and conservative—square off against each other on questions of faith, politics, and the place of

religion in public life. Regrettably, not only has the tenor of the discussion grown increasingly hostile, but also, much of the discussion has been sadly uninformed. As a nation, we've forgotten so much of our history. As a Church, we've done the same. While technology has afforded incredible access to information, we simply don't know our own story any more. We don't know so many of the men and women of deep faith who shaped our country, Church, and culture. This cultural amnesia has contributed to a tragic loss of respect and appreciation for the role of religion in American history, and the role of the Catholic Church in particular. The truth is, there are legions of fascinating, brave, brilliant, complicated, and holy Catholics who are part of the American story. Knowing their stories enriches both our lives and faith. More fundamentally, when we know and share their stories, we understand our own story as both Americans and Catholics so much better. That understanding changes the way we engage the culture. It changes the way we see the current conflict over religion in public life and partake in conversations about it. Ultimately, in writing the American Catholic Almanac, we wanted to help Catholics celebrate the rich history of Catholicism in America, so they might write an even greater story for our future.

Q. How is The American Catholic Almanac different from other Catholic Almanacs? Traditionally, almanacs are mostly collections of facts and figures. These are, of course, wonderful and resourceful books. But our Almanac aspired to do something more than relay facts. We wanted to enchant our readers, to energize and inspire them. Accordingly, we decided to tell stories. Stories put you in the middle of a moment in history. They invite you into an adventure. And the American Catholic Almanac is really just one great big storybook. Day by day, as you move through the year, you become absorbed in short yet engaging stories that are sometimes funny, sometimes tragic, and often inspiring snapshots of the American Catholics who've come before us. It's an easy way for the busy and overwhelmed (but curious), to learn more about the history of the Church in America, as well about as many of the fantastic men and women who made that history.

Q. What is the most interesting piece of American Catholic history you learned during your research? This is an impossible question to answer! Every day we worked on this project was an exciting journey of discovery. We found ourselves constantly calling up friends to tell them some story or other or posting on Facebook the fun facts we had come across. For example, did you know that the first bishop of Sacramento came to California as a young man to mine for gold in the great California Gold Rush? He wanted to find enough gold to pay for his seminary formation in

Europe. And he found it. Later, after he became bishop, his friends from the Gold Rush days chipped in to build Sacramento's cathedral. Then, there was the first seminary in the United States: St. Mary's in Baltimore. It was a former tavern. How Catholic is that?

Q. How do you see this book being used? Who is the target audience? We don't think there is any one way to use the book. Some people will want to read it a little bit each morning or evening, just following the day by day reading plan we've laid out for them. Others' curiosity will get the better of them, and they'll read it much faster. The important thing, of course, is to read it to the end. Some of our favorite stories are in November and December. In many ways, the Almanac is a great resource for Catholic families, schools, and anyone curious about American history. Parents and teachers might consider, using the stories as a starting point for lessons on the American Revolutionary War, the American Civil War, or the great waves of migration that made the United States what it is. Catholics in public life will benefit from learning more about the long history of anti-Catholicism in our country, while priests, bishops, and lay Catholics working for the Church will find the tales of America's first evangelists incredibly instructive. There really is something for everyone in the American Catholic Almanac, including non-Catholics. Our greatest hope, however, is that the short stories we tell in the book will inspire a deeper appreciation of the profound contributions of Catholics in American history. Before we began this project, we didn't fully appreciate what a great blessing it is to call ourselves not Irish Catholics or French Catholics or German Catholics, but American Catholics. Now we do. The story of America would be far different if not for the faith-inspired role of the Catholic Church in America. By God's providence, this story continues. We hope this Almanac will encourage readers to continue their own journey of discovery about our history and to make history themselves.

What The American Catholic Almanac does is brilliant. One page per day for one person. None of the people highlighted are stuffy or boring. Most of them are either (a) people I hadn't heard of or (b) people I didn't know were so stinkin' interesting. Even with the people who are so well-known as to be patrons of my kids, I learned interesting facts that made them more human. And the history I've gotten out of this book! I can only compare it to when I read *The Frontiersman* many years ago at my husband's behest. I've never been much of a fan of history. It was nothing but boring in high school, so I skipped it in college. In the last 15 years or so, I've learned more from great stories than I ever learned in high school history, and I think The American Catholic Almanac would be well placed in a history classroom. I had NO IDEA the work and hardship that early American Catholics

had to work through and put up with! I had NO IDEA what kind of investment mission priests and religious made in the United States! I had NO IDEA how many inter-stinkin-esting people there were in the annals of American Catholic history! Thanks to The American Catholic Almanac, I've had a taste. (In the interest of full disclosure, I'm not all the way through the book. Though I will be soon.) This isn't a book for the bookshelf. It is, however, a book to share and reread and quote. It's a book to learn from and be inspired by.

I'm a sucker for daily readers whether they are devotionals, writings of the saints, or historical almanacs. So if you combine American History with Catholicism naturally I'm going to be interested. I grew even more interested when a cursory glance revealed that General Longstreet, Buffalo Bill, and General Sherman were all Catholics. I did know that John Wayne became Catholic but not that famed director, and Wayne's longtime friend, John Ford was Catholic. Some of these famous men were more devout than others, some were late comers to the faith, but Catholicism helped define who each of them were. The American Catholic Almanac by Brian Burch and Emily Stimpson looks not only at famous Catholics but at famous people who flirted with the faith in one way or another (Ronald Reagan and Mark Twain among them) although they never went all the way. It also tells us about people and events who are much less known but should be remembered by all of us today. I was really interested to see how many "modern" hot button topics were a struggle for Catholics much earlier in our history. Separation of church and state became a Catholic issue in 1828 when schismatic priests appealed to President Andrew Jackson complaining the pope was acting like a "sovereign ruler." Nuns of today who shed their habits as a sign of "freedom" might be surprised to learn that in 1843 the Sisters of Mercy longed for the freedom to wear their habits but had to wear secular clothing because of the prevalent anti-Catholicism. The eugenics enthusiasts of 1927 would be openly approving of today's ability to test for such things as Down's Syndrome and would approve even more of the modern trend to abort any baby who the test shows might have it. We haven't really progressed as far as we'd like to think in that area. And those who lambast today's courts for not holding the high ideals of old times, might be surprised to learn that the Supreme Court supported Virginia's eugenics law with only one justice, a Catholic, dissenting. The authors don't make those comparisons for us, by the way. They leave us to draw our own conclusions and simply present the facts for our perusal. It's not all serious, of course. In addition to tales of the famous people I mentioned above, there are stories of explorers, tales of churches, celebrations of faithful Catholics, and reminders of those who were not a credit to the faith. There is no telling when something will pop up to remind you how you are connected to the faith throughout our history and

across our country. I was surprised to learn there is a cathedral in Dodge City, Kansas, where I lived for a year and a minor basilica in Victoria, Kansas. My husband and I were interested to read about the founding of St. Mary's in Galveston, Texas, because that is the church his grandmother fled to as a child during the devastating 1900 hurricane. It stood and she survived. Speaking of my husband, I must praise the cover for this book which caught his attention and made him begin perusing it. He's not given to reading about Catholicism but this grounding of it in American history is right down his alley. Chalk one up for the value of having a printed book around to pique interest and keep him asking, "Who is it about today?" when he sees me pick it up for breakfast reading. The one flaw is that it needs an index. There are a few appendices but if you want to find Sherman or Longstreet or Edgar Allen Poe then you've got to page through the book hoping they aren't too buried in the pages. Hopefully there will be a reprinting and this lack can be rectified. Regardless of the lack of an index, this is a really great book and I highly recommend it. NOTE I received a review e-book and print copy of this work. My comments, as readers here know, are solely my own opinion.

Buffalo Bill Cody died a Catholic? Yes, plus many more surprises await this wonderful book! Meant as a day by day almanac I was fascinated with it and read it all the way through, it is a fast, interesting read. You will learn a lot about the Catholic Church in America!!

I really wanted to like this book, but in its effort to "present inspiring stories (that) celebrate the historic contributions of American men and women shaped by their Catholic faith," the choices are sometimes questionable, at least from where I started reading in mid-October. For every five stories that truly fits that description, there is one about a individual of questionable moral character, such as mobster Dutch Schultz (whose later interest in Catholicism culminated with a deathbed baptism) on 10/23, and Antoine Laumet (10/16) and Joseph McCarthy (11/14), whose baptism appears to be tangential, if not inconsequential, to the subsequent trajectory of their lives. My understanding is that the authors had amassed a lot of extra material with which they hope to produce another edition of the book; I would have preferred they were a little more discriminating in the selections made for this one.

I LOVE this book! I can not say enough about this wonderful gem of a book! Each days readings is short and sweet but packed full of information. I have learned so much already about Catholics who have shaped and changed the United States, many who I didn't know were Catholic. It is just a fun tidbit of historical reading about some great Catholics who paved the way in the world. I know

it has nothing to do with daily mass readings, but it is still a fun way to end my daily readings. Since it is a daily reader by the time you finish the book you can start over again. This book is great since you can pick it up any time and start reading it right away. The American Catholic Almanac is a perfect gift giving book. Whether you give it to someone who is going through the RCIA or someone who is a born and raised cradle Catholic. They will love this book so much! The Catholic Almanac is also a wonderful gift for high school confirmation also thank you Blogging for books for allowing me to review this wonderful book. While I received the book for free it no way influenced my review.

An absolutely fantastic read for Catholics. One person per page per day (don't look ahead!) keeps the stories fresh and informative. The excellent research and insight here is evident and the persons profiled are often surprising.

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