

Faithful Witness

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, now “Venerable,” was National Director of the *Pontifical Mission Societies*, from 1950 to 1966.

He clearly and effectively communicated the Catholic Church’s message and mission on radio and television, as well as through his books and other writings. He presented the inspiring stories of the Missions and told of the love and joy of those serving the poor in those areas of the world.

FROM BIRTH

Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was born on May 8th and named Peter, like the first missionary apostle, but his family called him “Fulton,” his mother’s maiden name:

“The Archbishop was born in El Paso, Illinois, May 8, 1895, one of four sons of Newton Morris and Delia [Fulton] Sheen. Baptized Peter, he took the name of John at Confirmation and later adopted his mother’s maiden name.” Treasure in Clay



The Archbishop’s birthplace – the hardware store and apartment at 25 Front Street, El Paso, Illinois, where the Sheen family lived. Archbishop Sheen was born here and his father ran the hardware store.

Courtesy, Fulton J. Sheen Archives – Treasure in Clay

“It was at this point in my life that I was given the name of Fulton. It seems that I cried for almost the first two years of my mortal life. Later, as a boy, I was so embarrassed when visiting relatives and a family doctor would always begin the conversation to my mother: ‘Oh, this is the boy who never stopped crying.’ I became such a burden to my mother that her own mother and father would often relieve her tears. Jokingly, relatives and friends would say to my mother: “Oh, he’s Fulton’s baby.”

When I was enrolled in the parochial school my grandfather Fulton was asked my name and he answered: “It’s Fulton. Though I had been baptized Peter in St. Mary’s Church in El Paso, Illinois, I now was called Fulton.”

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES

“What the appointment as National Director brought to my life was the opportunity to see . . . that the conversion of a single soul may not be alienated from the promotion of human rights as required by the Gospel . . . that soul-winning and society-saving are the concave and the convex sides of the love of God and love of neighbor . . .” Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen

Here was the message the new “Bishop” Sheen sent, via cablegram from Europe, and quoted in a New York newspaper: *“I certainly do not deserve being a successor to the Apostles and receiving the fullness of the priesthood. There is no doubt that if I continued even another 23 years as a Professor of Philosophy, the Bishopric never would have come. It must, therefore, be that the Holy Father and Cardinal Spellman willed rather **to honor not me as a person, but the World Mission Aid Society for the Propagation of the Faith, of which I happen to be the National Director.**”*

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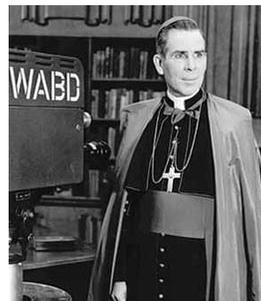
“As the church bell is rung not to honor the belfry, but to call souls to worship, so I have been named not to glorify myself,” he continued, “but to remind all peoples of the importance of the Missions when the world is engaged in the struggle of evangelizing for Christ . . .”



Solemn moments during consecration of Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen as Auxiliary Bishop of New York. Adeodato Giovanni Cardinal Piazza presided in Rome’s Church of Sts. John and Paul, June 1951.

[G. Felici] – Treasure in Clay

He concluded: *“In days of peace and prosperity, the Bishopric is a privilege and an honor. In this hour of crisis and war, it is a summons to sacrifice, to work, and to reparation. May I, therefore, beg my friends who have prayed for me in the past, to renew their oblations, that this frail vessel, in which the flower of the Bishopric has been laid, will humble himself that the missions may be exalted and that the Holy Father and Cardinal Spellman may see their high hopes of Missionary expansion justified to me, who has **the honor to be the servant of the Missionaries of the world.**”*



ONE OF CATHOLIC MEDIA’S GREATEST STAR

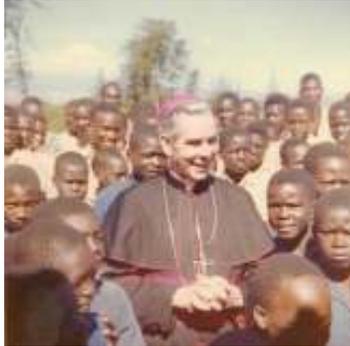
Millions listened to his Catholic Hour radio programs from 1928 to 1952. Millions also received printed copies of these talks. In 1949, Gladys Baker, a noted journalist, observed that Sheen was *“the name priest in America.”* She added, *“By members of all faiths, Monsignor Sheen is conceded to be the most electric orator of our times.”*

When Sheen went on television in February 1952, his **Life Is Worth Living** programs became extremely popular, competing effectively against shows starring *“Mr. Television,”* Milton Berle, and singer-actor Frank Sinatra. A television critic exclaimed, *“Bishop Sheen can’t sing, can’t dance, and can’t act. All he is . . . is sensational.”*

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In his first year on television, Sheen won the Emmy for Most Outstanding Television Personality, winning over media giants Lucille Ball, Arthur Godfrey, Edward R. Murrow and Jimmy Durante. After winning, he was featured on the covers of Time, TV Guide, Colliers, and Look. The journalist James Conniff stated, *"No Catholic bishop has burst on the world with such power as Sheen wields since long before the Protestant Reformation."* By early 1955, his programs were reaching 5.5 million households a week.



No record can be made of the thousands of sermons, speeches, and retreats Sheen gave over the decades, often to large audiences. When he was scheduled to preach at St. Patrick's cathedral in New York City, 6,000 people regularly packed the church. On Easter Sunday 1941, 7,500 worshippers were jammed into the Cathedral, and 800 waited outside, hoping to get in. On Good Friday, his sermons were broadcast outdoors to the thousands standing outside St. Patrick's. *"For three hours,"* the New York Times reported, *"the heart of Manhattan's most congested midtown area became a miniature St. Peter's Square. The phenomenon is repeated for the evening service."* Many of his television shows, sermons, and speeches are still available on video and audiotape.

An intellectual, theologian, and philosopher of the first rank, Sheen was one of the Church in America's most prolific writers. Over a period of 54 years, he was the author of 64 books. In addition, he published 65 booklets, pamphlets, and printed radio and television talks. He wrote countless magazine and newspaper articles. In the early 1950s, he was writing two regular newspaper columns, **God Love You** and Bishop Sheen **Writes** [which was syndicated in the secular press and ran for 30 years].

Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen was also the founding editor and publisher of MISSION magazine in 1951; - which is still published today!

Sheen's expertise included a wide variety of topics, from Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and John Dewey. His academic credentials were excellent; he was the first American to be awarded a rare post-doctorate degree from the prestigious University of Louvain. His linguistic achievements were admirable. His writing ability was also exceptional, his style being as lucid and yet consistently less pedantic than that of the great Anglican apologist, C.S. Lewis. More than a dozen of his books remain in print. Fifteen anthologies of his writings have appeared, four in the 1990s.

A SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE

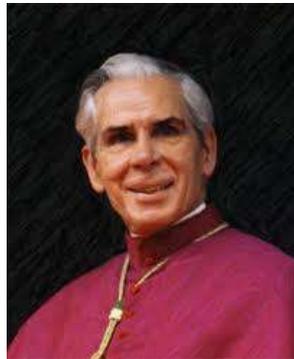
Archbishop Fulton Sheen was one of the Church's great Missionaries. In 1979, the Jesuit magazine America called him *"the greatest evangelizer in the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. He lavished personal attention on both rich and poor."*



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A reporter observed in 1952: “*The Archbishop’s official date book, listing names of those he plans to see [‘I will see anybody with a spiritual problem’], regularly bulges with eight hundred to a thousand entries.*” Thousands attended his convert classes. No one, of course, could count the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, who came into the Church, wholly or in part, as a result of Sheen’s publications and media and personal appearances.



Archbishop Fulton Sheen had a passion about helping the world’s poor. As National Director of the **Pontifical Mission Societies** from 1950 to 1966, he raised more money for the poor than any other American Catholic, an effort that was augmented by the donation of more than \$10 million of his personal earnings. Not long before his death, he declared “*My greatest love has always been the Missions of the Church.*”

Archbishop Sheen was decades ahead of others in his opposition to racism, raising funds and donating very large sums of personal income to help build a hospital and churches for blacks in Alabama. In the late 1920s, while Klansmen were riding through the streets of hundreds of American cities, Sheen was giving speeches stressing racial equality and brotherhood. In 1944, at a time when America’s armed forces were segregated, Sheen wrote of Christ’s “*explicit command to love all men, regardless of race or class or color.*” He strongly opposed anti-Semitism. For a Catholic to be anti-Semitic,” he wrote during World War II, “*is to be un-Catholic.*” He had a special place in his heart for people disfigured by leprosy and disease.

Frequently outspoken, Sheen stirred controversy with strong statements on such topics as communism, socialism, the Spanish Civil War, World War II diplomacy, psychiatry, secularism, education, and the left in general. He often attacked liberal Protestantism: “*Satan’s last assault was an effort to make religion worldly.*”

During the last decade of his life, while battling serious heart disease, Sheen continued at a breathtaking pace to travel, speak, and write. During the course of his more than 50 year career in the Church, he wrote 66 books and countless articles. No other Catholic figure of the century could match his literary productivity. (Book royalties and television fees went almost exclusively to the **Pontifical Mission Societies**.)

In October, 1979 Sheen met John Paul II in the sanctuary of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Thunderous applause greeted their embrace. The Pope privately told the 84-year-old Archbishop that he had been a loyal son of the Church. Nothing could have been more pleasing for Fulton Sheen to hear. He died on December 9, in his chapel before the Blessed Sacrament.

EMBRACING THE WORLD IN PRAYER

In February of 1951, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in a radio address [*The Catholic Hour*], inaugurated a **World Mission Rosary**.

“*We must pray, and not for ourselves, but for the world. To this end, I have designed the World Mission Rosary. Each of the five decades is of a different color to represent each of the five continents.*” Praying this Rosary, Archbishop Sheen said, would “*aid the Holy Father and his Pontifical Mission Society for the Propagation of the Faith by supplying him with practical support, as well as prayers, for the poor mission territories of the world.*”