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BOOK REVIEW FORUM

Response

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My thanks to the reviewers for their insightful comments and to the editors of *Church History*, most especially Jon Butler, for shepherding the reviews. Having once served as a *Church History* editor, I appreciate his labors even more.

Catholicism turned out to be my pandemic project. Imagine me, during those dreary and uncertain months, sitting masked on the twelfth floor of Notre Dame's library surrounded by towering stacks of books and journals.

My basic question was simple: how should we understand the global history of modern Catholicism? Roman Catholicism is the world's biggest, most multilingual and multicultural institution, claiming 1.3 billion baptized members. Only a pope, as Francis did when visiting Manila in 2015, can attract six million people, perhaps the largest crowd in human history, to an event held in a driving rainstorm. Yet despite the recent welcome interest among historians in topics that cross national borders, Catholicism is often neglected in otherwise sophisticated studies.[1] The monographic literature on Catholicism in one country or another has become unprecedentedly rich—the first footnote in *Catholicism* lists some forty major studies published since 2010—but there are few synoptic accounts.

So the first reason I wrote the book is to convey the importance of Catholicism as a global and modern institution. The French revolution and its aftermath; the long sweep of the nineteenth-century Catholic revival; the building of a vast, protective milieu of parishes, schools, and associations; the political crisis of the 1930s; World War II; decolonization; the Second Vatican Council; the end of the Cold War; and the clerical sexual abuse crisis are the main episodes. Although a few archival finds pop up in the footnotes, the book is primarily based on secondary literature.

The second reason I wrote the book is personal. Most of my life—a bit to my amazement—has been spent studying in, teaching at, writing about, and administering Catholic institutions. On an almost daily basis I get asked (and I wonder): how did we get here?

That the modal Catholic is now a woman of color living in Manila or Nsukka should inform Catholic strategy, from Rome to Indiana.[2] So too should the realization that the funeral of pope emeritus Benedict XVI means we have entered the post post–Vatican II

[1]David Bell made the point a decade ago. David A. Bell, "The Global Turn," *New Republic* (Oct. 7, 2013), https://newrepublic.com/article/114709/world-connecting-reviewed-historians-overuse-network-metaphor.

[2]*Notre Dame 2033—A Strategic Framework* (Notre Dame, 2023), https://strategicframework.nd.edu.

era. Those who played a major role in the council are gone; we rely now on history, not living memory.

Figuring out how to write the global histories of modern Catholicism animates the reviewers. Charles Keith generously praises *Catholicism*, and he highlights something that also surprised me: once you frame the history of the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century as in part a battle between Catholicism and liberalism, with liberal Catholics tugged back and forth by the two warring sides, you are able to connect the history of Europe, North America, and South America. Mexico's Benito Juárez, Germany's Otto von Bismarck, Britain's William Gladstone, and America's James Garfield all described Catholicism as the most potent threat to newly formed nation-states. All waged fierce battles over public funding of Catholic schools. Pius IX, Ludwig Windthorst (leader of the Catholic Zentrum party in Germany), Gabriel Garcia Moreno (the president of Ecuador), and many lesser-known Catholics understood the world as locked in the same struggle, and in response strengthened papal authority, built tens of thousands of Catholic schools and organizations, and dispatched or welcomed missionaries. Christopher Clark and Margaret Lavinia Anderson diagnosed this pattern as central to European history a generation ago, but the appearance of Lourdes grottoes and neo-Gothic churches in Santiago and Rio de Janeiro, as well as Brussels, Toronto, and Philadelphia, links all three continents.[3]

In contrast to his encouragement for my effort to integrate Latin American Catholicism into larger narratives, Keith gently admonishes me for introducing African and Asian Catholics to *Catholicism* primarily in relationship to European missionary activity and imperialism.

Guilty as charged. Keith's excellent study of Catholicism in Vietnam begins before the imperialist era and ends in the 1960s. In my own shaky defense, my narrative strategy depends on the transformation wrought by the nineteenth-century Catholic revival. The Napoleonic wars and tensions within the church that limited missionary activity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made many African and Asian Catholic communities more distant from traditional Catholic centers. In part for this reason, they were fragile. Keith's recounting of Catholicism in Vietnam recognizes this, and Jean Luc Enyegue, SJ, in his contribution to this forum, notes that the old churches of Kongo, Angola, and Senegal were "almost extinguished." If we seek causal explanations for how we arrived at the current situation, with Catholicism's demographic center in the global South, the energy unleashed by the expansive missionary projects of the nineteenth century, beginning in Europe, moving to North America, then South America, and then sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia can still claim center stage.

For now. A better understanding of how evangelization worked on the ground, recognizing that native-born converts were more important than European missionaries, may, as Keith suggests, lead to new historiographical frameworks. So too might more careful attention to internal discussions within formerly (and so-called) missionary lands. Enyegue wishes I had paid attention to a wider range of African Catholic voices

[3]Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "The Divisions of the Pope: The Catholic Revival and Europe's Transition to Democracy," in *The Politics of Religion in an Age of Revival: Studies in Nineteenth Century Europe and Latin America*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (London: University of London Press, 2000), 22–42; Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "The Limits of Secularization: On the Problem of the Catholic Revival in Nineteenth Century Germany," *Historical Journal* 38, no. 3 (Sept. 1995): 647–670.

in the 1980s and 1990s. The payoff might be considerable. Historians trained in the ambiance of North American and Western European universities, it seems to me, do not yet provide compelling explanations for why Nigerian Catholics can at once be enthusiastic about Pope Francis's stress on climate change and the environment, but also willing to characterize contemporary North American and European ideas about gender and sexuality as a new form of colonization.

Leslie Tentler asks if the success of the Catholic revival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries should weaken narratives of American distinctiveness. When French priest-sociologists ventured to the United States in the 1950s, they marveled at the vibrancy of Catholic parish and school life, especially since these institutions were financed and staffed independent of the state. (Contemporary historians still do not properly acknowledge the sheer scale of this enterprise.) Didn't this prove that Catholicism (and religion more generally) had thrived in the United States more than Europe? Cue references to Alexis de Tocqueville and civil society.

I began my scholarly career in the 1990s making some of the same claims.[4] Catholicism in the United States remains more vibrant than in Canada and most of Europe, but the similarities now seem as notable as the differences.[5] In the 1950s, as those French priest-sociologists discovered, Catholicism was thriving much more in Chicago than in Paris or Barcelona. But Catholicism in Chicago was rather like Catholicism in Montreal, Amsterdam, and Warsaw. The first amendment to the U.S. constitution was not the key variable. The pitfalls associated with global history are many, but the enterprise does prompt scrutiny of nationalist exceptionalisms. Similarly, Tentler is right to wonder whether historians have fully grasped the global appeal of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic devotional culture, with its sacred hearts, novenas, and mass-produced statuary.

Tentler also wonders if Vatican II, at least in some sense, caused the sharp decline in Catholic practice since the 1960s. Here I am less sure, and, as Tentler notes, I did not directly answer the question in *Catholicism*. As Tentler also acknowledges, the decline in Catholic practice began in the mid-twentieth century before the council, and recent work in several countries stresses how Catholic activists in much of the world were already imagining a different form of church.[6]

The decline accelerated after the council because the council intersected with the sexual revolution, shifting gender roles (and much lower Catholic birthrates), and a long-term and ongoing detachment from institutions of all types (at least in North America and Western Europe). Tentler's own brilliant study of Catholics and birth control in the United States conveys this uncertainty. The priesthood, as an institution, became diminished, and young Catholic women essentially stopped entering women's religious orders. Over time, participation in weekly mass plunged. Overshadowing all of this in the last two decades has been disillusionment caused by the ongoing clerical sexual abuse scandals.

Certainly the sheer pace of change within the church in the 1960s and 1970s—especially for an institution once eager to define itself as unchanging—was almost

[4]John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4–5.

[5]David A. Hollinger, *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

[6]For example, Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

unmanageable. One example: Fordham, the Jesuit university in New York City, weathered in a single decade three Jesuit presidents (one of whom left the order and later married), a financial crisis, a bumpy start to co-education beginning in 1974, a sharp decline in vocations to priesthood, efforts by a newly emboldened state government to make taxpayer-funded scholarship monies dependent on limiting the influence of "religion," fierce curricular debates influenced by the Second Vatican Council, a belated but still powerful student protest movement centered on opposition to the American military presence in Vietnam (and again influenced by the council), and the descent of the Bronx (where Fordham's main campus is located) into an emblem of urban devastation.[7]

It is a wonder the place survived. Guillaume Cuchet has recently connected the pace of change in Catholicism in the decade after the council, as much as the changes themselves, to the decline in practice.[8] But for Cuchet as well, the intersection of church and the culture outside the church remains crucial. We might pose a counterfactual: what would the fate of Catholicism have been absent Vatican II? If a current risk to Catholicism in the global North is dissolution into the wider culture, a risk in the absence of a council—and its call to engage with the world—would have been a marginal sectarianism.

Judging from the evocative paragraph in her response, sign me up to read Jennifer Scheper Hughes's memoir, should she write one, of her year in the heart of liberationist Catholic Brazil in the 1980s. Given the importance of liberation theology for Catholicism during this period, we desperately need such accounts.[9]

Where I disagree with Hughes is in her sharp division between obscurantist bishops and priests on the one hand and lay people committed to social justice on the other. Progressive change, in Hughes's view, always begins in the "history of lay Catholics" or "grassroots movements of the laity" or "the situation and struggles of ordinary Catholics." My own sense of how religious cultures actually work sees more continuity across lay and clerical roles and identifies other sorts of divisions.[10] Return to Brazil in the 1980s. The thousands of ecclesial base communities informed by (and shaping) liberation theology need more scholars like Hughes to write their histories. But so too do the millions of working-class Brazilian Catholics who moved into prosperity gospel churches during the same period, to the dismay of liberation theologians. Conservative lay Catholics in the United States, as I write this paragraph, feel no assurance whatsoever that bishops and priests participating in the upcoming synod in Rome will acquiesce to their vision of free markets and traditional sexual morality.

Hughes is right to stress the importance of the attacks on liberation theology coming from Joseph Ratzinger and John Paul II, and I tried to highlight this in *Catholicism*. Among the pleasures of writing history, though, is identifying ironies. Ratzinger's final verdict on liberation theology, as Benedict XVI, was more appreciative than his initial salvo. Ratzinger's successor as pope, Francis, discarded the Marxian vocabulary,

[7]Thomas A. Shelley, *Fordham: A History of the Jesuit University of New York, 1841–2003* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[8]Guillaume Cuchet, *Comment notre monde a cessé d'etre chrétien. Anatomie d'un effondrement* (Paris: SEUIL, 2018).

[9]For example, Noah Oehri, *Landscapes of Liberation: Mission and Development in Peru's Southern Highlands* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2023).

[10]For a canonical statement, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

but the more populist vision of liberation theology he shaped in Argentina still bears a strong resemblance to ideas first elaborated by Gustavo Gutiérrez.

When viewed from a slightly less compressed time frame, then, attacks on liberation theology coming from the Vatican in the 1980s are one chapter, not a final resolution. Any global history of Catholicism is equally partial, written at a particular moment for a particular audience. My intervention is no different. Catholicism in the twenty-first century will be reinvented, as it was in the nineteenth. If *Catholicism* provides a savvy baseline as the process unfolds, it will have served its purpose.

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