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McGreevy, John T.: Catholicism. A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis. – New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc. 2022. 528 S., geb. € 36,45
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John T. McGreevy, Provost of the Univ. of Notre Dame, is a scholar of high repute known until now especially for three major works: *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (University of Chicago Press 1996), *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (W. W. Norton 2003), and *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global* (Princeton University Press 2016).

With his latest magisterial book, however, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis* (W. W. Norton 2022), M. has given us a modern history of Cath. that is prodigiously researched, written with literally thrilling narrative elan, and in fact of major importance for understanding Catholicism today and for several generations to come.

M. wrote the book, he tells us, for two reasons. The first is a detailed argument that “a better understanding of Catholicism enhances our grasp of the modern world.” (ix) No other institution is as multicultural or multilingual, and a recent flourishing of scholarship on modern Catholicism has plumbed the implications of its influence extensively. The second reason for the book, writes M., is more personal (and I have to say led me very often to wish I had been able to articulate as my own sense of the church what he writes so well). How, he asks, did we get from the “long sweep of the nineteenth-century Catholic revival,” (xi) with the Second Vatican Council as the hinge point, to where we are now, with Catholicism faltering in the Global North but burgeoning in the Global South. “Catholicism in the twenty-first century will be reinvented, as it was in the nineteenth. We just don’t know how.” Boldly, but to my mind utterly persuasively, M. offers “a savvy baseline as the process unfolds” (xiii).

“Part I: Revolution and Revival, 1789–1870” (1–108) begins with the French Revolution which, as Joseph de Maistre predicted, would have reverberations “felt far beyond the time of its explosion and the limits of its birthplace.” (6) A reciprocal relationship between what M. calls Reform Catholicism and new forms of political representation had been developing through the 18th cent., but with the excesses of the Revolution, and in particular the 1790 *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, the church found itself in a deeply defensive position which led to the Pope’s being understood less as a bishop among bishops than as a monarch in whom alone safety and certainty could be found. “And so the pope and his allies,” writes M., “set about fashioning an ultramontane church in a postrevolutionary age.” (28) “Only the disarray caused by the French Revolution allowed ultramontaniam to become the dominant form of Catholic Christianity,” he adds, epitomized in

Chateaubriand's *The Genius of Christianity*. (Admirably underlined in these pages is the pivotal role of women religious.)

In what some historians call the Age of Democratic Revolutions (from 1760–1800), and during the Polish revolution of 1830, the “liberal ultramontanist” Félicité de Lamennais advocated a “liberal nationalism [which] would soon become a fundamental organizing principle of the nineteenth century.” Despite the rhyming observation of Alexis de Tocqueville that Catholics were “the most republican and democratic class in the United States,” (75) however, the church under Pius IX became increasingly ultramontane and saw the triumph of that perspective at the First Vatican Council. A strengthened papacy was established as the surest protection against aggressive nation-states.

“Part II: The Milieu and Its Discontents, 1870–1962” (109–271) brilliantly surveys “the milieu” that resulted from this establishment and where its fault lines were at first felt and finally fatal. Risking the label of simply opposing modernity, the church globally drew itself together to create a world of its own institutions: parishes with their attendant associations, schools, hospitals and other charitable organizations, a proliferating panoply of shrines and devotions and also, thanks to Leo XIII, a neo-Thomist revival fostered by the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. (We also owe to Leo XIII, of course, the founding document of Catholic social thought, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.) Pius X is remembered for devotional commitments but still more for his unrelenting opposition to so-called “modernists.” The Great War then showed how easily Catholics could turn against each other. After it the missionary activity of the church and the imperialism of the major European powers continued apace.

Catholic Action, “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy,” (168) became the centerpiece of the pontificate of Pius XI. But it was also a time of increasing diplomatic arrangements between a church asserting its primacy and secular society its sociopolitical prerogatives. Among the some 40 concordats signed by the Vatican with various governments in the interwar years, M. considers the 1929 Lateran Accords with Mussolini and the 1933 Reichskonkordat with Hitler the most controversial. While “Catholic democrats” were becoming more visible, the term was avoided in most official Cath. documents, including Pius XI’s relatively radical encyclical on the social question, *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, not to mention the new Code of Canon Law 14 years earlier.

It is at this point that M. introduces Jacques Maritain, the closest figure to a hero in the book. Inclined at first to an almost monarchist position, Maritain came to be convinced that Thomas Aquinas had favored democracy as a form of government. In 1936 he provided a contemporary framework for that assertion in “Integral Humanism”, a personalist pluralism that distinguished between religious and political authority and that he traveled ceaselessly to promote. (Giovanni Battista Montini, later elected Paul VI, wrote an introduction for the book’s Italian translation.) Through it he became Catholicism’s leading critic of emerging fascism where once the church had been preoccupied with communism. His ideas also “underwrote one of the key achievements of twentieth century political history: Christian Democratic parties.” (230)

We are accustomed to think of the “ressourcement” that prepared the way for the Second Vatican Council as occurring chiefly in biblical, patristic and theol. studies. But with typical creativity M. introduces the subject with the figure of the arts patron Dominique de Ménil. And as part of the lead-up to the third part of his book he also crucially includes a chap. on decolonization in the “Catholic Global South.” The result is that Part III of the book, “Vatican II and Its Aftermath, 1962–2021” (273–409), while closest to the reader in time now reads as a positioning of the church’s future.

Successive chapters on Vatican II, liberation movements, tensions over sexual and gender issues, the towering figure of John Paul II (coupled with his successor Benedict XVI) and the end of the Cold War are written with both scholarly care and an unflinching sense of missed opportunities. This is above all true of the penultimate, lengthy chapter on the sexual abuse crisis, which not only documents the most traumatic episode in the church's modern history but also exposes the inadequacy of the church structures that permitted the abuse. One can almost hear the author muttering to himself: "If only the democratic thrust and spirit latent in the church now for centuries had been given way, we might have been spared the trauma." But for that he offers a final reflection on Pope Francis and the hope inherent in his approach to synodal governance.

It is possible, as James Chappel did in his review of M. in *Commonweal* magazine, to read the book as "a work of political and social history." It is also possible to ask for more discussion of Catholicism in music, a somewhat more exact accounting for some prominent figures at Vatican II such as Msgr. Pietro Pavan and Marie-Dominique Chenu OP, and how modern Catholicism was seeded by earlier movements such as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. But this is to overlook M.'s wise and consistent lesson that modern Catholicism is in fact largely defined by a new relation, fundamentally challenging but also promising, and indeed I would say more truly evangelical, between the church and the world.

The book is never sensational – it is written in bedrock faith – but not infrequently the reader has the impression of reading daily headlines. I beg ThRv's indulgence in quoting its last, memorable (and hopeful!) lines: "The ultramontane milieu constructed in the wake of the French Revolution is sliding into history, beyond living memory. A Catholic baptized today is as distant from the Second Vatican Council as Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner were in 1961 from the nineteenth century. Let's hope that these young Catholics will be better positioned, in the words of [Pope] Francis, to be 'citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond'." (422)

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