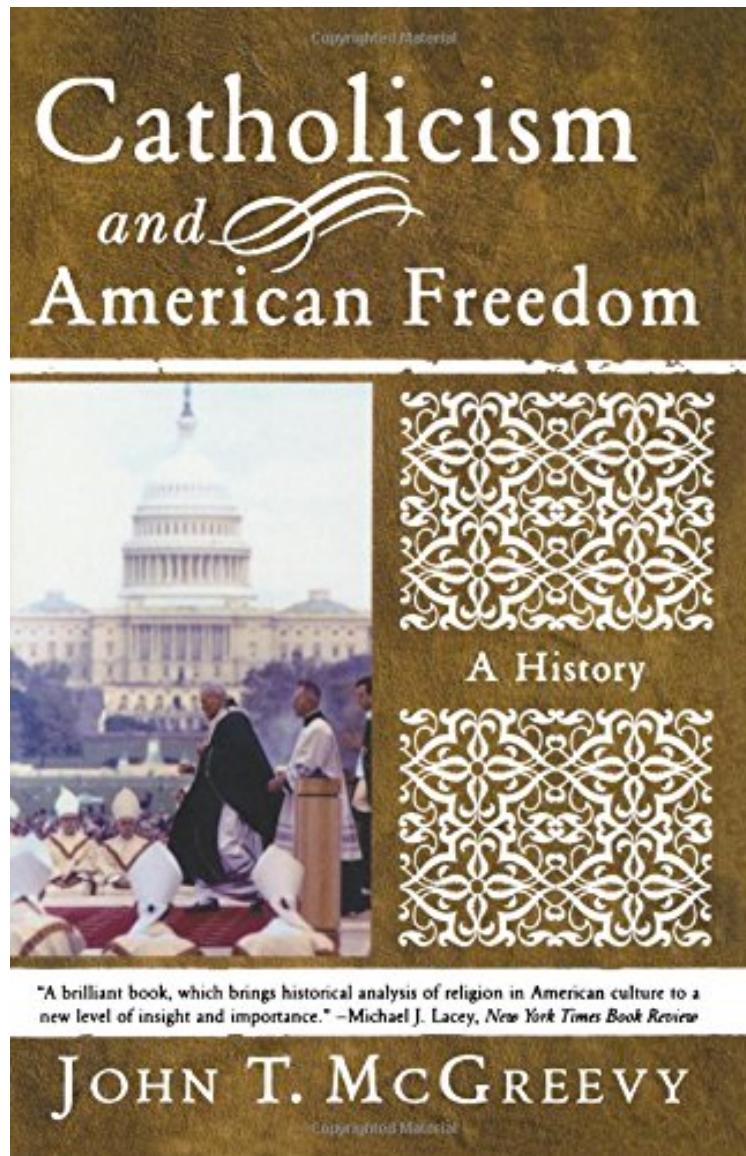


Catholicism and American Freedom: A History

John T. McGreevy

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"[McGreevy] has written the best intellectual history of the Catholic Church in America."Commonweal For two centuries, Catholicism has played a profound and largely unexamined role in America's political and intellectual life. Emphasizing the communal over the individual, protections for workers and the poor over market freedoms, and faith in eternal verities over pragmatic compromises, the Catholic worldview has been a constant foil to liberalism.Catholicism and American Freedom is a groundbreaking tale of strange bedfellows and bitter conflicts over issues such as slavery, public education, economic reform, the movies, contraception, and abortion. It is an international story, as both liberals and conservatives were influenced by ideas and events abroad, from the 1848 revolutions to the rise of Fascism and the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, to papal encyclicals and the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s; and by the people, from scholarly Jesuits to working class Catholics, who immigrated from Europe and Latin America. McGreevy reveals how the individualist, and often vehemently anti-Catholic, inclinations of Protestant intellectuals shaped the debates over slaveryand how Catholics, although they were the first to acknowledge the moral equality of black people and disavowed segregation of churches, even in the South, still had difficulty arguing against the hierarchy and tradition represented by slavery. He sheds light on the unsung heroes of American history like Orestes Brownson, editor of Brownson's Quarterly Review, who suffered the disdain of abolitionists for being a Catholic, and the antagonism of conservative Catholics for being an abolitionist; and later heroes like Jacques Maritain and John Courtney Murray, who fought to modernize the Church, increased attention to human rights, and urged the Church "to adapt herself vitally . . . to what is valid in American democratic development." Putting recent scandals in the Church and the media's response in a much larger context, this stimulating history is a model of nuanced scholarship and provocative reading. 18 illustrations

From Publishers WeeklyThe interplay between the American Catholic Church and the United States has long been a source of tension for both church and state. McGreevy, an associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, examines the relationship between the two, beginning with the Eliot School Rebellion in Boston in 1859 and extending into the present day, when questions about abortion and human life dominate the church's engagement with American political life. The author begins by exploring efforts by some Catholics to counter the Protestant brand of Christianity being taught in the nation's public schools in the antebellum period, pointing out the sharp division that existed between Protestants and Catholics in the 19th century. He also discusses how Catholics dealt with slavery, then presents the church's stands on behalf of human life, most notably concerning abortion, a debate preceded and affected by an earlier battle over birth control. McGreevy's final chapter combines a discussion of the proposed "consistent life ethic" linking abortion, poverty, the arms race and the death penalty with a sparse treatment of the church's recent sexual abuse crisis. The author sees the scandal as further evidence of a fragile institution trying to distinguish "permanent truths from contingent applications." McGreevy's work is largely academic, and is presented in such a way that it will be of more interest to scholarly readers than ordinary Catholics. Still, it should be a valuable resource for students of modern church history. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistAs the largest American religious denomination, Catholicism has directly and indirectly influenced intellectual and cultural life in this country. Though significant connections between Catholic ideals and American politics have been largely ignored by historians scrupulously separating church and state issues, there has nevertheless been considerable "interplay between Catholic and American ideas of freedom." McGreevy traces the evolution of this relationship from the mid-nineteenth century--when the tidal wave of Catholic European immigrants drastically altered the religious balance in the U.S.--to the present day. Controversial topics impacted by American Catholic thought and action include education, slavery, nationalism, social welfare policy, democracy, abortion, and sexual abuse. This thought-provoking combination of religious and social history provides a unique slant on the sizable role Catholicism has played upon the American stage. Margaret FlanaganCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved The most informative, analytically insightful, and even-handed account we have of the troubled relationship between Catholicism and the American experiment. - First ThingsA brilliant book, which brings historical analysis of religion in American culture to a new level of insight and importance. - New York Times Book Fascinating...a meditation on power and its shadow, marginality; on freedom, and its inevitable price, unfreedom. - The NationA laser-like examination of the central tension between Catholicism and the American experiment. Deeply intelligent, well written, and based on wide research in original sources, this will be the standard work for a long time to come. - Charles Morris, author of American CatholicA masterpiece that will be read eagerly not only for its insights into Catholic history but also for its rich understanding of American history. - E. J. Dionne, Jr., author of Why Americans Hate Politics