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Federico M. Requena

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The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on United States Catholic Historiography

*Federico M. Requena**

The Second Vatican Council's impact on the historiography of U.S. Catholicism can be viewed through an evolution of topics and paradigms before and after the council. A new historical consciousness within the Catholic Church, the ecclesiology of the People of God, and the new post-conciliar ecumenical climate had a significant influence. Initially, the council and its interpretations contributed to an opening of the discipline of Church history to new currents of social and cultural history, placing Catholicism under the domain of "religious history." Simultaneously, the Church history approach that favored institutional histories continued to be cultivated, while renewing avenues for research and analysis through the perspectives of the council's proposals. Finally, the article suggests that in recent decades the impact of the council can be seen in historiographical developments including: 1) the quest for "continuity" in the historical narrative; 2) from a paradigm of "uniqueness" to one of "difference"; 3) a less "American" focused and more "global" Catholic outlook; 4) the exploration of a more religious "religious history"; and 5) Catholic history that contributes to a new reading of U.S. history.

Introduction

Martin E. Marty, among the most significant historians of American religious history and now professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, at the end of the 1980s was studying the "history of

*The author wishes to acknowledge his gratitude to the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, where this study was carried out. An early version of this work was published in Spanish: "El impacto del Concilio Vaticano II en la historiografía sobre el catolicismo en Estados Unidos," *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 23 (2014): 279–307. The author acknowledges the helpful comments of David O'Brien, Philip Gleason, Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Leslie Woodcock Tentler, and Joseph Chinnici, OFM.

mentalities” in American Catholicism. In his work on the subject, he imagines a hypothetical faculty meeting in which dissertation topics were being proposed. “My favorite,” he mused, “would be ‘Whatever happened to hell: a comparison of pre- and post-Vatican II popular Catholic understandings.’ Here is a typical case where ‘history of events’ would not be informative. One could trace some accents through the documents of Vatican II, but there was no document that says, ‘from now on you do not have to believe in the reality of or fear hell.’ Yet such belief and fear are certainly shifting. ... Certainly the relative ‘disappearance of hell’ has to be one of the major events of modern Catholic history.”¹

Marty’s provocation helps us appreciate that any study of Vatican II’s impact on U.S. Catholic historiography ought to consider the impact of the council in its wider sense, yet keep in mind that the historiography of American Catholicism cannot be entirely isolated—especially after the council—from the historiography of other Christian confessions.

Up to the present, U.S. participation in Vatican II and the council’s impact on American Catholicism have seen fewer historical studies than one might expect.² In the United States, theologians and sociologists have pri-

1. Martin E. Marty, “Is There a *Mentalité* in the American Catholic House?” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 23.

2. See Amy L. Koehlinger, “Catholic Distinctiveness and the Challenge of America Denominationalism,” in Keith Harper, ed., *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 20–26. On American participation in the council, see Robert F. Trisco, “The U.S. Bishops’ Press Panel at the Second Vatican Council,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 1–20; Steven M. Avella, “‘I Don’t Think Any Council Father Could Go Back Home the Same’: Albert G. Meyer and Preparing for Vatican II, A Case Study of Episcopal Transformation,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 25–37; Patrick J. Hayes, “‘Bless Me Father, for I Have Rynned’: The Vatican II Journalism of Francis X. Murphy, C.Ss.R.,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 55–75; François Weiser, “The Periti of the United States and the Second Vatican Council: Prosopography of a Group of Theologians,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 65–91. For a study on the sources related to American participation in the council, see Tricia T. Pyne, “The Archives of the Second Vatican Council Fathers Project: A Report from the United States,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 51–63.

Among the most influential “histories” of the impact of the council is by sociologist Andrew M. Greeley: *The Catholic Experience, An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) and *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

The following may also be useful: Timothy I. Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council, 1950–1972* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Mark S. Massa, SJ, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America*

marily debated the council, its implementation, and its legacy.³ However, the influence of Vatican II on U.S. Catholicism has been enormous. It has been argued that in few countries has the council had greater impact than in the United States.⁴ There are two possible explanations for this fact. First, the Catholic Church in the United States in its two centuries of history had not previously encountered innovations of such scope as those the council proposed.⁵ Secondly, the council sanctioned views that the young U.S. Church had passionately defended throughout its brief history: religious liberty, separation of church and state, and ecumenical dialogue. These were topics that, until then, had not found general consensus among the universal Church, especially the curia, and that, on occasion, had been a source of tension among some American Catholics. It could be said that after the council American Catholicism saw itself confirmed in its approaches.⁶ These glimpses of the council's impact serve as context for our exploration of the effects of the council on U.S. Catholic historiography.

To discover the possible influence of Vatican II on historians' approaches to the study of U.S. Catholicism, we follow three continually intersecting developments: 1) The council's effect on the understanding of the Catholic Church and of Catholicism, that is, the impact on the "object of study"; 2) The council's effect on the topics chosen by historians in order to approach that object of study; 3) The historiographical paradigm shifts that can be associated, directly or indirectly, with the council's influence.

(New York: Basic Books, 2011). Relevant articles include Joseph Chinnici, OFM, "Reception of Vatican II in the United States," *Theological Studies* 64, no. 3 (September 2003): 461–494; John T. McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God: The Second Vatican Council, the Civil Rights Movement, and American Catholics," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 4 (1994): 221–254; Seth Smith, "Implementing Vatican II in Two Rural, Southern Parishes," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 93–114; Samuel J. Thomas, "After Vatican Council II: The American Catholic Bishops and the 'Syllabus' from Rome, 1966–1968," *Catholic Historical Review* 83 (1997): 233–257. See also the special issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2013) titled "The Ecumenical Legacy of the Second Vatican Council, 50 Years Later."

An important step in the historical study of U.S. reception of the council is the research project launched by the Cushwa Center that culminated in an international conference on the "Lived History of Vatican II" at the University of Notre Dame, April 24–26, 2014. The publication of a volume resulting from the conference is expected.

3. See Massimo Faggioli, "In Margine a Recenti Studi Sul Cattolicesimo Americano," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 33, no. 1 (2012): 203.

4. See, for example, John Cogley, *Catholic America, Two Centuries of American Life* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), 116; McGreevy, "Racial Justice and the People of God," 222; and Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism*, 300–301. References to the revolutionary character of the council in U.S. Catholicism can be identified in abundance.

5. John Tracy Ellis, "American-Catholicism, 1953–1979: A Notable Change," *Thought* 54, no. 2 (1979): 113–132.

6. Greeley, *The Catholic Experience*, 11.

The chronological exposition of these lines has led me to divide the article into four parts. The first briefly assesses historiography previous to the council and the pre- and post-conciliar evaluations of that historiography; the second focusses on the historiography of the conciliar years and immediately following; the third centers on the historiography cultivated until the end of the 1980s; and the fourth reviews the historiography produced in the last few decades. It is not possible, however, over the course of these pages to offer a complete panorama of U.S. Catholic historiography over the last fifty years.⁷

The principal difficulty this study has presented is evaluating to what extent the changes produced in post-conciliar historiography have been caused, at least partly, by the council and to what extent these changes have been the fruit of the evolution of the historiographical discipline in general.⁸ From this perspective one conclusion that could be anticipated is the impossibility of completely isolating the two factors and the certainty that Vatican II contributed, firstly, to the entrance of *new histories* into the Catholic sphere, and, secondly and indirectly, to the evolution of the historiographical paradigms by which American Catholicism and U.S. history can be explained.

U.S. Catholic Historiography Before Vatican II: A Pre- and Post-Conciliar View

The history of the Catholic Church in the United States was often studied intra-ecclesiastically up until World War I. Until that time U.S. Catholic historians were primarily clergy with a marked apologetic inclination and on occasion, little academic skill. Early U.S. Catholic historiography had devel-

7. The following works are helpful for situating us in the abundant historiographical output on American Catholicism: John Tracy Ellis and Robert Frederick Trisco, *A Guide to American Catholic History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1982), 265; James Hennesey, SJ, *American Catholic Bibliography 1970–1982* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); and *Supplement to American Catholic Bibliography 1970–1982* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” *American Quarterly* 45 (1993): 104–127; Martin E. Marty, “American Religious History in the Eighties: A Decade of Achievement,” *Church History* 62 (1993): 335–377; Jay P. Dolan, “New Directions in American Catholic History,” in Jay P. Dolan and James P. Wind, eds., *New Dimensions in American Religious History: Essays in Honor of Martin E. Marty* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993): 152–174; Catherine L. Albanese, *American Religious History: A Bibliographical Essay* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2002); Koehlinger, “Catholic Distinctiveness and the Challenge of America Denominationalism,” 7–30; Mark A. Noll, “American Religious History, 1907–2007,” in James M. Banner, ed., *A Century of American Historiography* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 90–102; R. Scott Appleby and Kathleen Sprows Cummings, eds., *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

8. This difficulty was evident at the aforementioned conference at the University of Notre Dame. See note 2.

oped in an intellectual milieu marked by anti-Catholic prejudice in the Protestant sphere and by utter indifference among secular academics.⁹

From the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, the priority of the Catholic Church in the U.S. was to assimilate the more than nine million Catholic immigrants that had arrived from Europe during those decades. Catholics built parishes frequently located in urban environments and characterized by the national origin of their members, Poles, Germans, Italians, and Irish, and were marked by their low socioeconomic status and educational level.

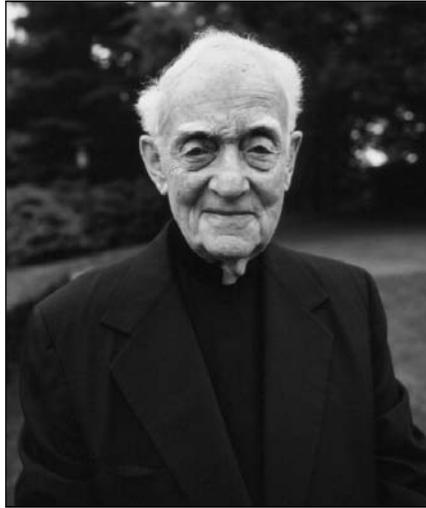
John Gilmary Shea (1824–1892), considered the father of American Catholic historiography, is a particular exception in the nineteenth century historiographical landscape. Shea, the author of more than 250 books and articles, wrote as much on American history as he did on the Catholic Church. His work was marked by close attention to archival sources, an impartial approach to his objects of study, and a strong theological understanding of the nature of the Church.¹⁰

Peter Guilday (1884–1947) presided over the historiographical landscape of American Catholicism in the twentieth century's first decades. In 1915 he founded the *Catholic Historical Review* and, in 1919, the American Catholic Historical Association. A Catholic University of America professor, he pioneered the Americanist historiographical approach to U.S. Catholicism. This current of interpretation advocates the alleged harmony that had existed since the founding of the nation between Catholicism and American culture and government. That narrative, concurrently, tended to highlight the distinctiveness between American and European Catholicism. Guilday's historiographical work centered on the institutional aspects of Catholicism and the biographies of ecclesiastical leaders, and although he had not completely shaken off an apologetic perspective, his work constituted a step forward from nineteenth century historiography.¹¹

9. Appleby and Sprows Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 4–9, and Noll, "American Religious History," 91–92.

10. John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (New York: J.G. Shea, 1886–1892), 4 vols. On Shea's life and work, see Henry Warner Bowden, "John Gilmary Shea: A Study of Method and Goals in Historiography," *Catholic Historical Review* 54 (1968): 235–260, and J. Douglas Thomas, "A Century of American Catholic History," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 25–30.

11. Thomas, "A Century of American Catholic History," 30–34; and David O'Brien, "Peter Guilday: The Catholic Intellectual in the Post-Modernist Church," in Nelson H. Minnich, ed., *Studies in Catholic History: In Honor of John Tracy Ellis* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1985), 260–306. On historiographical research up until World War II, see John Paul Cadden, *The Historiography of the American Catholic Church, 1785–1943* (Washington, DC: 1944).



John Tracy Ellis (Courtesy of American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.)

Despite the achievements of Shea and Guilday, American Catholic historiography even following World War II evidenced significant limitations. Those defects also became more pronounced in comparison with the religious history produced in Protestant circles, which had experienced impressive development since the 1920s.¹² Following World War II, John Tracy Ellis (1905–1992) succeeded Peter Guilday in the church history department at the Catholic University of America. Ellis would preside over the American Catholic historiographical landscape until Vatican II. Ellis had originally studied European Church history, but academic and institutional circumstances led him to become the foremost scholar of American Catholic history.¹³

Ellis' historical work, occurring chiefly after World War II, developed in a significantly altered context: increased access to higher education for second and third generation descendants of Catholic immigrants; Catholics' subsequent rise in social and economic status; and the desertion of city centers and ethnic parishes and the move to the suburbs. These factors combined to shape a new Catholic social and intellectual status. These changes, which have become known as the "revolutionary '50s," profoundly and almost silently transformed U.S. Catholicism in the years leading up to the council.¹⁴

12. Henry F. May, "The Recovery of American Religious History," *The American Historical Review* 70 (1964): 79–92.

13. John Tracy Ellis, "Fragments from My Autobiography, 1905–1942," *Review of Politics* 36 (1974): 565–591; see also Minnich, *Studies in Catholic History*.

14. McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*.

Concurrently, the growing number of Catholic colleges and universities offered opportunities to an increasing number of professional historians dedicated to documenting the history of Catholicism in the United States. Toward the mid-1950s, Catholic universities, including Catholic University of America, University of Notre Dame, Marquette University, and Xavier University, began to offer American Catholic history as a defined field of study, encouraging future academic interest. At first this intellectual activity remained intra-ecclesial and was often limited to theological perspectives, failing to break out of Catholic spheres to influence the American historiographical discourse more generally.

In this context Ellis published his famous article, “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life” (1955), in which he criticized the diffidence of Catholic intellectuals who by their poor contributions betrayed the academic rigor of the Catholic tradition. Consequently, Ellis gave an inspiring call for historians to overcome their inferiority complexes and to carry out significant research with a combined impact proportionate to the influence of Catholicism in American life.¹⁵

Ellis’ historiographical work sought to move naturally toward this goal. Since the early 1950s, Ellis had distanced himself from the work of his mentor Guilday to focus on the study of social movements and on Catholic organizations. His work, also based on the paradigm of Americanization, distinguished three major themes that would shape the history of American Catholicism: religious freedom, a consequence of the separation of church and state; ecumenism; and the role of the Catholic laity.¹⁶

Thomas T. McAvoy, CSC (1903–1969), also made a significant contribution to the pre-conciliar historiographical landscape. Beginning at the end of the 1950s, the University of Notre Dame archivist and historian laid the foundations for the “minority thesis.”¹⁷ This interpretation of American Catholicism—which supposed that Catholics in the United States considered themselves to be a minority, essentially different from their Protestant neighbors—would be at the foundation of concepts like “Catholic subculture” and “Catholic ghetto” that have been used to describe Catholics’ presence in America.¹⁸

15. John Tracy Ellis, “American Catholics and the Intellectual Life,” *Thought* 30 (1955): 351–388.

16. John Tracy Ellis, “American Catholicism in 1960: An Historical Perspective,” *The American Benedictine Review* 11 (1960): 1–20.

17. Thomas T. McAvoy, “Formation of the Catholic Minority in the United States, 1820–1860,” *Review of Politics* 10 (1948): 13–34. Also see Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 91–122.

18. Thomas, “A Century of American Catholic History,” 34–41.

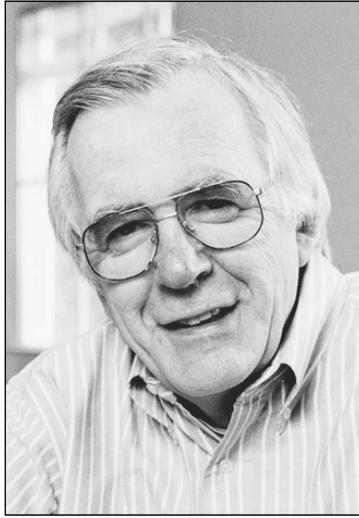
How can pre-Vatican II historiography be judged? A pre-conciliar assessment is offered by a 1957 report on the state of the study on American Catholic history. That study, which placed John Tracy Ellis' historiographical work in the foreground, highlighted two positive aspects: the overcoming of apologetical approaches in the writing of Catholic history and the growing effort to give Catholic historiography a place in the broader U.S. historical narrative. The report also indicated an increase in the number of historians dedicated to these tasks and their improved academic training. The topics attended to by Catholic historians were often biographies, especially of bishops, and regional diocesan studies; although, the interests of the latter were questioned since, according to the author, the diocese is an "artificial administrative division," and thus the studies were less relevant to American history.

The report also highlighted deficiencies: the limiting of the research to exterior aspects of the Church; the lack of studies on the laity; the paucity of studies on Catholics' "public philanthropy"; the lack of attention to liturgical dimensions (the most significant lacuna, the author determined, noting the contemporary interest in the topic); and lastly, the extreme limitation in access to and organization of archives. Despite the article's optimistic affirmation of the growing interest in U.S. Catholic history, the report itself demonstrated that the field had not yet matured. The report cited thirty relevant books and five important articles published in the previous ten years but such output lagged behind other disciplines.¹⁹

The most significant post-conciliar evaluation of pre-conciliar historiography, David J. O'Brien's 1968 "American Catholic Historiography: A Post-Conciliar Evaluation," was impacted by critique that Protestant Henry F. May had made in his article, "The Recovery of American Religious History" (1964).²⁰ May called attention to the growing importance that since the 1920s religious history held for the intelligibility of American history. Recognition of the growing importance of religious history took place in the context of a renewal of intellectual and social history, and also amidst a revitalization of religious participation itself during the 1950s. Concretely, May demonstrated the growing interest that Catholicism, the religion of the non-elite, was beginning to attract among social historians. May starkly described Catholic historiography, indicating that Catholics, along with atheists, were those who had least contributed to the revitalization of religious history. For May, the problem

19. Henry J. Browne, "American Catholic History: A Progress Report on Research and Study," *Church History* 26 (1957): 372–380.

20. David J. O'Brien, "American Catholic Historiography: A Post-Conciliar Evaluation," *Church History* 37 (1968): 80–94. This article was preceded by David J. O'Brien, "American Catholicism and the Diaspora," *Cross Currents* 16 (1966): 307–323.



David J. O'Brien (Courtesy photo)

rested in the intellectual attitudes of Catholics themselves. Those attitudes could be summed up in the lack of a historical understanding, as a consequence of authoritarianism, formalism, and a static philosophical world view, which, according to the Protestant author, characterized Catholic thought.²¹

O'Brien in his evaluation of Catholic historiography placed May's critique in the center of his reflection, making reference to the transformations occurring at the time of the council. O'Brien's historiographical perspective stood in contrast to the pre-conciliar approach. The then-young professor did not focus on extending historiography in the framework of the preceding decades, but rather attempted to analyze prior works as an exercise in intellectual history, placing them in the context in which they were written and elucidating their principal assumptions.

From his perspective the most serious deficiencies of pre-conciliar scholarship included: 1) a failure to respond to the questions in which the Catholics of the day were interested; 2) its predominantly confessional character—rigorous and academic in tone—but lacking significant contributions to American intellectual and social history; 3) the limitation of serious academic study of Catholic history to only a few universities; 4) the predominant emphasis on Catholicism's juridical and institutional character with scarce

21. May, "The Recovery of American Religious History," 90–91. This criticism was already present in Thomas F. O'Dea, *American Catholic Dilemma: An Inquiry into the Intellectual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958).

attention given to the laity; 5) the absence of Catholicism from the national historical narrative; 6) the predominance of the paradigm of “Americanization”; and 7) an emphasis on the “minority” mentality to describe the development of American Catholicism.²²

In John Tracy Ellis’ work, some of O’Brien’s critiques of pre-conciliar Church history were present. Among them was the excessive emphasis on institutional dimensions, and the resulting lack of attention to the laity, and also the limited capacity of American Catholic historiography to enter into the narrative of national history. Other observations, however, were new, especially the revision of some traditionally accepted paradigms in the interpretation of American Catholicism. Those continuities as well as discontinuities prompt us to analyze the council’s impact on American historiography.

Vatican II in the United States: History and Historiography

Two hundred and thirty-nine conciliar fathers from the United States took part in the Second Vatican Council, a national representation second only to the Italians. The impact of Vatican II on U.S. Catholicism was called at the outset “revolutionary.” The 1960s were certainly revolutionary apart from the council and that revolution affected all of Western society, not just the United States and not only Catholics.²³ American society in the 1960s experienced a new wave of immigration, not principally European, with the subsequent multiplication of religious pluralism. The era was also marked by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the sexual revolution. The 1960s were also characterized by the increasing weight that Catholics had been acquiring in the American social, economic, and political sphere. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 as the first Catholic president in U.S. history was considered the definitive proof that Catholics had entered into full participation in the dominant culture. The event of the council must be situated in this context.

Some of the conciliar contributions were destined to have immediate repercussions in the historiographical realm. During the initial post-conciliar years, the novelty of the conciliar contributions was highlighted, thereby emphasizing the idea of “rupture” with the past.²⁴ The first of these conciliar

22. O’Brien, “American Catholic Historiography: A Post-Conciliar Evaluation,” 80–94.

23. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, “Radical Turn in Theology and Ethics: Why It Occurred in the 1960’s,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387 (1970): 1–13.

24. David A. Hollinger, “What Is Our ‘Canon’? How American Intellectual Historians Debate the Core of Their Field,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9 (2012): 191; Massimo Faggioli, “In Margine a Recenti Studi Sul Cattolicesimo Americano,” 210; Thomas J. Sugrue, “The Catholic Encounter with the 1960s,” in Appleby and Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 69.

novelties was the conceptualization of the Church as the People of God, which highlighted the Church's horizontal and communitarian dimensions. Of no small importance was the emphasis on the need to seek dialogue between the Church and the world. In this sense the council was perceived as the moment in which the Church fully accepted democracy, religious liberty, and the separation between church and state. The council was also understood as the event that highlighted the importance of collegiality, resulting in a greater awareness of the importance of bishops and the local, diocesan church. Liturgical reform, especially the use of the vernacular, implied an approximation in its external manifestations to Protestant denominations. Prior to the council, the Catholic devotional world had offered an unmistakable ethos of singularity.

Another theme that would have an immediate impact on the historiographical realm was "historical consciousness." The council's assertions concerning the role of revelation and tradition in the Church in terms of historical progress impacted its overall approach as Robert Trisco asserted: "The Council's awareness of the historical dimension of Christianity can be said to pervade all its pronouncements."²⁵ Finally, the call for ecumenical dialogue among Protestants and Catholics had historiographical repercussions. The new ecumenical context, it appears, was the first aspect to influence the intellectual landscape. In 1967 the first Catholic historians joined the traditionally Protestant American Society of Church History.²⁶ Two years later, for the first time, a Catholic historian, John Tracy Ellis, occupied its presidency concurrently with that of the American Catholic Historical Association.²⁷

As already noted Protestant religious history was experiencing a season of prosperity and great transformation. That religious history was gaining full access to the academic realm, bringing about growth in academic departments, doctoral theses, and publications in prestigious journals. The interpretations were certainly diverse, but clearly the academy had confronted the need to integrate the religious element in order to understand U.S. history. Religious history was simultaneously ceasing to identify itself with traditional Church history and leaving behind its identity as a private domain for the respective denominations. The paradigm for the role of Christianity in the national narrative remained troubled, but an awareness of the approaches and groups from which this narrative was being constructed was increasing.²⁸

25. See Robert Trisco, "The Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association," *The Catholic Historical Review* 52, no. 1 (April 1966): 86–104.

26. Carl Bangs, "Profile of the Membership of the American Society of Church History," *Church History* 37 (1968): 242–244.

27. Thomas, "A Century of American Catholic History," 47.

28. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Problem of the History of Religion in America," *Church History* 57 (1988): 136.



Philip Gleason (Courtesy photo)

The most profound and explicit effect of the council on the historiography of American Catholicism was to be found in the 1980s. Two figures, David J. O'Brien and Philip Gleason, can be considered the pioneers of a new historiography in the post-conciliar Catholic sphere. Both were lay Catholics whose intellectual formation was as American historians, not Church historians.²⁹

Previously, we viewed the council's influence on the young historian David J. O'Brien. Now we examine the new proposal by which he sought to overcome the limitations evidenced in pre-conciliar historiography. O'Brien had graduated from the University of Notre Dame, but it was at the University of Rochester where he became a historian. O'Brien was among the first academics educated as a specialist in American history to dedicate himself to the study of the Catholic Church.³⁰ His works principally dealt with the relationship between Catholicism and culture, with particular attention to the social doctrine of the Church. O'Brien defined himself as a historian that understood the academic task as a mission to renew the Church and the world.³¹

29. Dolan, "New Directions in American Catholic History," 162.

30. David J. O'Brien, "The Historian as a Believer," in Gregory Baum, ed., *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 68.

31. O'Brien, "The Historian as a Believer," 68; and Alice Gallin, "Called to Action: The Historian as Participant," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 1–12.

In 1968 O'Brien published his influential *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years*.³² His work acknowledged the Church as the People of God, implying a view of history not principally defined as a history of the individual pursuit of holiness and the collective pursuit of power and influence, but rather of the Church that impacts society and culture.³³ Thus, Church history could not be limited to the history of dogma and its defense but also needed to be capable of grasping the impact of Christianity in the nation and the world.³⁴ Although O'Brien delved into classical topics that Ellis had already explored (social movements and Church reform, for instance), his new perspective led him to revise some of the commonly accepted models of Catholic historiography. Specifically, O'Brien questioned the model of Americanization, pointing out that any attempt to see a perfect harmony between Catholicism and American culture from the outset led to a simplified and disfigured Catholic and American history. Similarly, O'Brien questioned the notion of the "melting pot," proposing instead a more careful study of immigration and assimilation. Finally, he proposed a revision of the historiographical model based on the "minority thesis," which emphasized the distinction between Catholics and non-Catholic Americans.³⁵

Gleason had received his doctorate in 1960 from the University of Notre Dame under the direction of Thomas McAvoy. In 1968 Gleason published *The Conservative Reformers: German-American Catholics and the Social Order*,³⁶ in which he analyzed the role of religion in the Americanization process. Although Americanization was a classic topic, Gleason offered new ideas and categories, drawing from intellectual history, which permitted their integration into the general discourse of American history. Gleason's work on American Catholics revealed the fallacies involved in an overly secular approach to ethnicity, race, and pluralism in American society.³⁷

32. David J. O'Brien, *American Catholics and Social Reform: The New Deal Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

33. See O'Brien's works, including *The Renewal of American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); *Renewing the Earth: Catholic Documents on Peace, Justice and Liberation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977); *Faith and Friendship: Catholicism in the Diocese of Syracuse, 1886–1986* (Syracuse, NY: Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, 1987); *Public Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1988); *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

34. O'Brien, "American Catholic Historiography: A Post-Conciliar Evaluation," 92.

35. *Ibid.*, 80–94.

36. Philip Gleason, *The Conservative Reformers: German-American Catholics and the Social Order* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968). Gleason's other major works: *Keeping the Faith/American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

37. See the theme issue "Americanism and Americanization: Essays in Honor of Philip Gleason," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1999). Also Philip Gleason, "Working in

Although O'Brien and Gleason were traditional in their topics and methodologies, both broke away from then-dominant historiographical models. Both were writing in the post-conciliar era when Catholics believed themselves mainstream and did not manifest a defensive attitude to religion.³⁸

Andrew M. Greeley (1928–2013), Catholic priest and sociologist who declared himself nothing more than an “amateur” historian, embarked on the task of developing a post-conciliar reading of American Catholicism, publishing *The Catholic Experience: An Interpretation of the History of American Catholicism* (1967).³⁹ The work denounced the meager interest that Catholics had shown up to that point in their own history. This was ironic since, according to Greeley, “Much of what the church universal has come to accept in the renewal of the Second Vatican Council was anticipated for at last one hundred years in the lives and teaching of the giants of the American Church.” Greeley denounced the almost exclusively institutional nature of Church history up to that time and lamented that little had been said of Catholics as the People of God. Greeley noted that the most recent history of Catholicism remained to be written, since most of the available syntheses ended at the death of Cardinal Gibbons (1921).⁴⁰ Greeley’s interpretation of U.S. Catholic history acknowledged that the “Americanists” had won the intellectual and terminological battle, but they had lost the war. Greeley reintroduced his work in 2004, with a title that made even more explicit the council’s impact on his reading of American Catholicism: *The Catholic Revolution: New Wine, Old Wineskins, and the Second Vatican Council*.⁴¹

By the late 1960s with the council just concluded, it was already possible to detect its impact on American Catholic historiography. Its further influence would bud in the 1970s and blossom in the 1980s.

A New Experience: The “American” People of God

During the 1970s invitations to reconsider writing Catholic history in light of Vatican II continued. In 1975 Eric W. Cochrane (1928–1985), then-president of the American Catholic Historical Association, published an article in the *Catholic Historical Review* that would have broad repercus-

a Tradition,” *Catholic Historical Review* 97 (2011): 435–460; and Philip Gleason and Jay J. Coakley, *Contemporary Catholicism in the United States* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

38. Dolan, “New Directions in American Catholic History,” 167.

39. Greeley, *The Catholic Experience*, 307.

40. *Ibid.*, 11.

41. Greeley, *The Catholic Revolution*.

sions, “What is Catholic Historiography?”⁴² Cochrane, professor of American history at the University of Chicago, making explicit reference to the council and the Italian historiography of the 1960s, especially the work of Giuseppe Alberigo (1926–2007), proposed that the principal mission of Catholic historians was to reintroduce a sense of religion among their peers. He encouraged the cultivation of Catholic history drawing on the social sciences in dialogue with non-Catholic historiography. In issuing this challenge, Cochrane acknowledged that some historians were already moving in that direction.⁴³

In the decade following the council’s close, U.S. Catholic historiography passed from the stage of proposals and exhortations to the first attempts to write a new history of the Church as the People of God. These first efforts bore fruit in the early 1980s with the survey histories of James Hennesey⁴⁴ and Jay P. Dolan,⁴⁵ two historians who had completed their academic training during the council.

James J. Hennesey, SJ (1926–2001), writing under Ellis, completed a dissertation during Vatican II’s first session on the topic of the American bishops’ participation at Vatican I.⁴⁶ Beginning in the early 1970s, Hennesey reflected on the possible implications for Catholic historians of two central themes from Vatican II: the ecclesiology of the People of God and the historical nature of revelation. The practical result of his considerations was *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*. The term “community” reflected the historiographical shift then underway. Hennesey identified five social groups, diverse in their origin and culture, which had given life to American Catholicism. Three themes articulated the account of the formation and development of that community: its origins and ties with Europe, the particular American experience, and the conflict between homogeneity and the reality of differences.

The People of God concept underpinning Hennesey’s work was not exclusively sociological. Strongly influenced by the theological work of Yves Congar and by the historiographical work of Hubert Jedin (1900–

42. Eric Cochrane, “What Is Catholic Historiography?” *Catholic Historical Review* 61 (1975): 169–191.

43. *Ibid.*, 187, 190.

44. James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

45. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985).

46. Gerald P. Fogarty, “James J. Hennesey, S.J. (1926–2001),” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 71 (2002): 213–214; James J. Hennesey, *The First Council of the Vatican: The American Experience* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963).

1980), Hennesey offered important reflections on the role of theology in Church history.⁴⁷ For Hennesey the American Catholic experience constituted a locus of encounter between history and theology from which to reflect on questions such as religious liberty and collegiality in Church governance.⁴⁸ Hennesey continued this project throughout his life, lamenting in 1986, during his tenure as president of the American Catholic Historical Association, that Church history was often being written based on the presupposition that theological concepts and understandings were irrelevant.⁴⁹

John W. O'Malley, SJ, another historian with theological training, since the 1970s had addressed the council's relationship to history. O'Malley, professor of theology at Georgetown University, is an expert in modern European history, particularly Italian history, but his analyses published during the 1970s and 1980s on the historiographical implications of Vatican II were widely disseminated in the U.S.⁵⁰ Inspired to carry out a comparison between Vatican II and the Gregorian and Lutheran reforms, O'Malley concluded that Vatican II ought to be considered a great reform movement, characterized by the concept of *aggiornamento*, which implied a paradigm shift. The new paradigm would be characterized by the search for a deliberate reconciliation between the Church and some of the changes taking place outside of it. In short, it would mean openness to modern culture.⁵¹

This orientation, however, which we could describe as theological, was not the one that would be most widely circulated in American historiography. Without a doubt it was the work of Jay P. Dolan, whose scholarship has significantly marked the historiographical landscape of American Catholicism since the 1980s. Dolan examined the encounter between Vatican II's new ecclesiology on the People of God and the "new social history" that had been developing since the 1940s and 1950s. "A new understanding of the church (since Second Vatican Council)," he argued, "demands a new history of Roman Catholicism. Reinforcing this development is the current emphasis on the need for a more social history of the past."⁵² New questions, sources,

47. James J. Hennesey, "No More Than 'Footprints in Time'? Church History and Catholic Christianity," *Catholic Historical Review* 73 (1987): 185–195.

48. Patricia Byrne, "Theology and History in the Work of James Hennesey, S.J.," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 1–23.

49. Hennesey, "No More Than 'Footprints in Time.'"

50. John W. O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 573–601; "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 373–406.

51. O'Malley, "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations," 404–405.

52. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 10.



Jay P. Dolan (Courtesy photo)

and methodologies began to pave the way for the study of American Catholicism.⁵³

Dolan's first book, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815–1865* (1975), an early social history of American Catholicism, approached the study of the parish, viewing it as the center of religious experience and practice and the educational, cultural, and social center of Catholic communities. His narrative integrated a study of immigration, education, and popular piety as well as the role played by clergy, laity, and religious.⁵⁴

53. Dolan makes reference to the impact of the work of Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). According to Martin E. Marty, who places Dolan in the historiographical current cultivated by E. J. Hobsbawm, "His shelves like mine are full of journal articles and books on *the new history*." Martin E. Marty, "Locating Jay P. Dolan," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 100. This issue of *U.S. Catholic Historian* was dedicated to Dolan.

54. Other works that followed this path: Charles Shanabruch, "The Catholic Church's Role in the Americanization of Chicago's Immigrants, 1833–1928" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975); Charles Shanabruch, *Chicago's Catholics: The Evolution of an American Identity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); June Granatir Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880–1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); Joseph John Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850–1920: A Religious History* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981).

Dolan had completed his doctorate at the University of Chicago, under the direction of Martin E. Marty, in the early post-conciliar years. As Dolan himself recalled, Marty had urged him to capture “the religion of the people.”⁵⁵ The historiographical orientation that Dolan embraced extended throughout his numerous publications,⁵⁶ graduate students he advised, and, in a particular way, the projects promoted at the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame. For Dolan fidelity to the council implied overcoming the isolation in which the study of Catholicism had been confined for generations, to be informed by “ecumenical,” “interdisciplinary,” and “secular” methods that would allow for Catholic history’s integration into the more dominant American social and cultural history.

From that perspective Dolan conceived the idea for the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism while he was a fellow at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University (1973–1974).⁵⁷ In 1975 the Cushwa Center, which Dolan would direct for eighteen years, began to take shape.⁵⁸ Although it was not tied to any particular historiographical school or methodology, it especially fostered the “new” religious history. Above all, it broadened the horizons of historiography, promoting studies about parishes as previously described; analyzing the evolution of the role of clergy, laity, and religious; and studying popular piety. This approach would lay the foundation for studies that would mature several decades later, including studies on race, gender, and culture; and the comparative histories of American Catholics and Protestants and European and American Catholics.⁵⁹ In 1985 Dolan published his influential synthesis, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*.⁶⁰ Although Dolan continued to draw on the Americanization paradigm, this work broadened the study of U.S. Catholicism to better embrace its French, English, and Spanish forerunners.

55. Marty, “Locating Jay P. Dolan,” 99–108. Dolan also explored popular piety in *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830–1900* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).

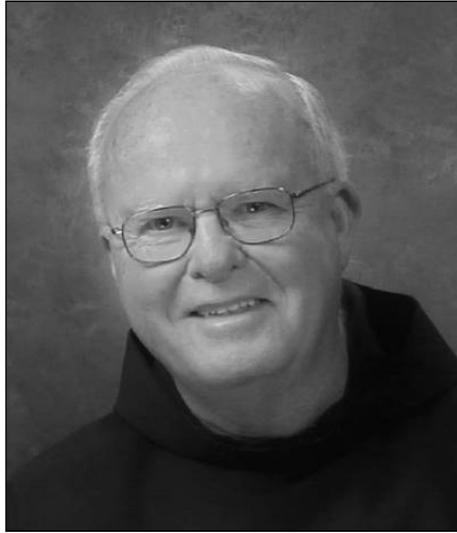
56. “Publications of Jay P. Dolan,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 109–111.

57. R. Scott Appleby, “Historicizing the People of God: The Cushwa Center and the Vision of Its Founder,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 93–98.

58. Jeffrey M. Burns, “In the Service of American Catholic Studies: The Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 3, no. 1 (1983): 20–34.

59. See Jay P. Dolan, et al., *The American Catholic Parish: A History from 1850 to the Present* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 2 vols.; and some conferences organized by the Cushwa Center that illustrate previously mentioned thematic broadening: “Reinterpretations of American Catholic History” (1974); “The Cultures of American Catholicism” (1985); “Perspectives on American Catholicism” (1982); “Ireland and the United States: The Transatlantic Connection, 1800–1980” (1987).

60. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*.



Joseph P. Chinnici, OFM (Courtesy photo)

The history of spirituality, understood as a reconstruction of the spiritual experience, was a field that began to be cultivated during the 1980s in response to the vistas Vatican II opened. Its most significant exponent, Franciscan Joseph P. Chinnici, currently the president of the Franciscan School of Theology in San Diego, California, completed his doctorate in 1975 at the University of Oxford.⁶¹ In the latter half of the 1980s, he published two innovative articles: “The History of Spirituality and the Catholic Community in the United States: An Agenda for the Future” (1985) and “Broadening the Horizons: The Historian in Search of the Spirit” (1989), which offered a direction that studies on Catholic spirituality ought to take in light of the council.

Chinnici’s proposal hearkened back to the work of French historian Lucien Febvre, who in the 1940s had launched his challenge for historical narratives to open themselves up to the emotional dimension of human life. The influence of European historiography in Chinnici’s work is evident. Together with Febvre, Chinnici drew inspiration from the works of Gabriel Le Bras, Philippe Ariès, Paul Ricoeur, Carlo Ginzburg, Jacques Le Goff, Michel de Certeau, and Mircea Eliade.

61. Joseph P. Chinnici, “The History of Spirituality and the Catholic Community in the United States: An Agenda for the Future,” in Nelson H. Minnich, Robert B. Eno, and Robert Frederick Trisco, eds., *Studies in Catholic History: In Honor of John Tracy Ellis* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1985), 392–416; and “Broadening the Horizons: The Historian in Search of the Spirit,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8, nos. 1–2 (Winter/Spring 1989): 1–13.

Chinnici proposed to integrate spirituality and holiness—which he understood as a new way of seeking God in the relationship with the world—in historiographical discourse. For this reason he sought to investigate the relationships between material, social, and cultural qualities of life, personal experiences, and religious expressions. Chinnici proposed a historical narrative attentive to dimensions both interior and exterior, objective and subjective, individual and social, and personal and institutional. Thus he was convinced of the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and history. Topics such as the theology of prayer, the devotional life, spiritual reform movements, personal stories, and the use of symbols, art, and the liturgical calendar have been objects of his attention.⁶² The contributions of Ann Taves and Colleen McDannell may also be considered as examples of this approach.⁶³

In the realm of studying religious experience, it is necessary to discuss the innovative work of Robert A. Orsi. In his *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*, Orsi investigated the world of popular piety in the context of a community of Italian origin in Harlem, from an ethnographical perspective.⁶⁴ Trained at Yale, the current professor at Northwestern University, is considered a prominent figure in the sphere of theory and method in the study of religion and one of the most significant historians of U.S. “lived religion.” He is currently working on a collection of theoretical and methodological essays, provisionally titled *Abundant History*, from the perspective of social and cultural history’s approach to twentieth century U.S. Catholicism.⁶⁵ Thomas A. Tweed, in the same vein as Orsi, has made significant contributions to understanding U.S. Catholic devotional culture.⁶⁶

The “new” religious historiography benefited from the quarterly journal *U.S. Catholic Historian*, under the direction of Christopher J. Kauffman of

62. See Joseph P. Chinnici, *Devotion to the Holy Spirit in American Catholicism, Sources of American Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) and *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

63. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

64. Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

65. Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) and *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

66. Thomas A. Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and *America’s Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation’s Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Catholic University of America. Kauffman edited the journal for three decades beginning in the early 1980s, publishing significant articles on numerous topics, including race, nativism, the role of women, and spirituality.⁶⁷

During the 1980s American Catholic history showed great development as a discipline, situating itself on the same academic plane as Protestant religious history; it had consciously sought to overcome reductive confessional perspectives; it had improved its methods in dialogue with other disciplines; it had emerged from the clerical isolation in which it had been secluded and had initiated a dialogue with scientific historiography as a whole. These historiographical changes can be explained as a response, at least in part, to Vatican II.

Protestant historiography began for the first time to consider seriously Catholic historiography. For example, Martin E. Marty, in his overview of the historiographical work on American Catholicism in the 1980s, in which he drew from some 300 relevant books, argued that it was not possible to study U.S. Catholicism outside of the main current of American historiographical work.⁶⁸ For her part, Leslie Woodcock Tentler, author of another interesting reflection on Catholic historiography, agreed with Marty that the discipline had come of age, but she lamented that it had not yet achieved general acceptance within the intellectual circles of American historians.⁶⁹

Religious history's coming of age at the end of the 1980s manifested two other characteristics common to non-Catholic religious history. First, as a consequence of "secularization" or "laicization," by which traditional Church history had given way to the new religious history, many of the new historians entering this field lacked concrete biblical, ecclesiastical, liturgical, or theological training.⁷⁰ Many attempts to introduce the conciliar innova-

67. James T. Fisher, "Christopher Kauffman, the *U.S. Catholic Historian*, and the Future of American Catholic History," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 19–26. This issue of *U.S. Catholic Historian* is dedicated to Kauffman: "Historian, Mentor, and Editor: Studies in Honor of Christopher Kauffman." On women's history, see Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth Century America, The American Catholic Tradition* (New York: Arno Press, 1978); Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985); and Karen Kennelly, *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

68. Martin E. Marty, "American Religious History in the Eighties: A Decade of Achievement," *Church History* 62 (1993): 335–377. Another interesting assessment from the same time period is Dolan, "New Directions in American Catholic History," 152–174. On the state of graduate research up to the late 1980s, see Richard R. Duncan, "Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations on Roman Catholic History in the United States: A Selected Bibliography," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 51–114.

69. See Tentler, "On the Margins," 104–127.

70. See Henry Warner Bowden, ed., *A Century of Church History: The Legacy of Philip Schaff* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), x.

tions into the historiographical realm took shape in an important development of “social history,” but not exclusively. Cultural anthropology and particularly the work of American anthropologist Clifford Geertz had a great impact.⁷¹ Secondly, religious history had expanded its focuses, methodologies, and assumptions in such a way that the field began to be fragmented.⁷²

Toward a Rereading of American Catholicism and American History: Vatican II’s Historiographical Legacy?

From the 1990s forward, historians of U.S. Catholicism have shifted their approaches. On one hand, some of the tendencies already initiated in previous decades became mutually reinforcing; at the same time, new tendencies emerged, above all in the realm of the interpretation of the council, which, as an event, was increasingly chronologically distant. We will look at this context briefly.

Catholicism’s influence in the social, economic, cultural and political sphere was growing.⁷³ In the late 1980s when Richard John Neuhaus (1936–2009), an intellectual and convert to Catholicism, published *The Catholic Moment*,⁷⁴ he maintained that Catholicism was in a position to lead the ethical and moral renewal of the country.⁷⁵ At the same time, the integration of Catholicism into the national historiographical narratives remained unfinished, especially those pertaining to the period following the Civil War. But voices were beginning to speak out from non-Catholic contexts in favor of such an integration, including the provocative article that Jon Butler, now professor emeritus at Yale, published in 1991, “Historiographical Heresy: Catholicism as a Model for American Religious History.”⁷⁶

71. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

72. Noll, “American Religious History, 1907–2007,” 98; Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History*.

73. See Richard J. Gelm, *Politics and Religious Authority: American Catholics since the Second Vatican Council* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 3.

74. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Post-modern World* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

75. The “moment” was overshadowed by the sexual abuse crisis. Although not much time has elapsed since, the topic has begun to impact historiography. See Fisher, “Christopher Kauffman, the *U.S. Catholic Historian*, and the Future of American Catholic History,” 25; Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

76. Jon Butler, “Historiographical Heresy: Catholicism as a Model for American Religious History,” in Thomas A. Kselman, ed., *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 286–309. In the same vein almost a decade later Butler wrote “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *The Journal of American History* 90 (2004): 1357–1378.

The council and its interpretation continued to shape the context of historiography from the 1990s onward. First, the ecumenical perspective was strengthened and, as a result, a progressive assimilation of Catholic historiography was seen among some Protestant historians. The historiographical compartmentalization of different confessions has persisted, but more as a fact than by design, though attempts have been made to avoid a reductive confessional focus.⁷⁷ Secondly, Catholic historians have begun to focus on the council's innovations while at the same time emphasizing the connection with previous stages of Church history rather than viewing such changes as a radical rupture with the past. Support for such an approach came from the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, called by John Paul II on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the council's close, and in subsequent decades, Pope Benedict XVI's proposal for a "hermeneutic of reform" or renewal in continuity. Thirdly, it must be pointed out that, since the 1990s, a generation that had not experienced the council firsthand has begun to enter the historical profession.

In this context U.S. Catholic historiography continued to develop consistent with the approaches initiated in the preceding decade. The enormous growth and diversification that historiographical production has undergone in the last two decades makes it impossible to attempt a systematic overview. Thus, we will focus on some continuities with previous periods and, above all, will identify some distinctive characteristics that can be placed in connection with the new context, particularly with the changing perception of the council.⁷⁸

First, we observe in historiography from the 1990s onward a thematic continuity with the awakening of religious history in the 1980s and with the attempt to write a history of the "People of God." Many studies have been produced on parish life, devotions and the spiritual experience, the laity, minorities, and women. In this latter field, the perspective of gender has been significant, noting especially the important work of Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Paula M. Kane, and Margaret McGuinness, among others.⁷⁹

77. Peter W. Williams, "Does American Religious History Have a Center?," *Church History* 71 (2002): 386–90; and the monographic issue "The Ecumenical Legacy of the Second Vatican Council, 50 Years Later," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48 (2013).

78. Several works that cover historiographical production since the 1990s include Albanese, *American Religious History: A Bibliographical Essay*; Koehlinger, "Catholic Distinctiveness and the Challenge of America Denominationalism," 7–30; Noll, "American Religious History, 1907–2007," 90–102; Philip Gleason, "Catholicism Since 1945," in Philip Goff, *The Blackwell Companion to Religion in America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2010), 491–507; Leslie Woodcock Tentler, "Catholicism in America," in Edward J. Blum, eds., *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 321–337; Thomas A. Tweed, "Expanding the Study of U.S. Religion: Reflections on the State of a Sub-field," *Religion* 40 (2010): 250–258.

79. We ought to make mention of the work of Paula M. Kane, James J. Kennelly and Karen Kennelly, eds., *Gender Identities in American Catholicism* in the series, "American

Together with these previously explored topics, other new topics appeared such as celibacy and monasticism; sexuality, with particular attention given to the topic of birth control; and anti-Catholicism. Since 1987 the Conference on the History of Women Religious has met every three years, focusing on religious sisters and nuns. Some less developed but incipient topics in recent historiography can also be cited: Catholicism's relationship to childhood, embodiment, art and literature, the African-American experience, the workplace, the university and higher education, and labor unions.⁸⁰

But, more than thematic renewal, the most salient feature of recent decades seems to be the openness to new interpretive models of U.S. Catholicism and its relationship with the nation's history. In this realm it is possible to identify significant trends: 1) An emphasis on "continuity;" 2) From a paradigm of "uniqueness" to one of "difference;" 3) A less "Americanized" and more "global" Catholicism; 4) A more "religious" religious history; and 5) Catholic history contributing to a new reading of U.S. history.

To the degree that we have become chronologically distant from the event of the council, however, it is more difficult to distinguish between its direct impact and the consequences of the historiographical changes begun in the 1970s and 1980s in the wake of the council and the changes produced in Catholic historiography as a consequence of scholarship's entrance into the domain of non-confessional historiography.

Continuity

Throughout the last few decades, it has been highlighted that the historiography of the 1970s and 1980s had emphasized almost exclusively discontinuities between pre- and post-conciliar U.S. Catholicism. Consequently, the continuities remained in the shadows, rendering incomplete narratives.⁸¹

Catholic Identities: A Documentary History" (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and "American Saints: Gender and the Re-Imaging of U.S. Catholicism in the Early Twentieth Century," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 22 (2012): 203-231; R. Marie Griffith, "Crossing the Catholic Divide. Gender, Sexuality, and Historiography," in Appleby and Sprows Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 81-107.

80. Koehlinger, "Catholic Distinctiveness and the Challenge of America Denominationalism," 20-26.

81. Sugrue, "The Catholic Encounter with the 1960s," 62.

In this new perspective we situate works like those of Robert J. Wuthnow, Timothy I. Kelly or David J. Endres, who, without minimizing the importance of the changes made after the council, recover the continuity with the Catholicism of the 1950s, and grant more unity to historical processes whose origins lie often more in post-war America than in the 1960s.⁸²

From “Uniqueness” to “Difference”

Recent evaluations of historiographical production emphasize that since the 1990s we have seen a decrease in both the Americanist and exceptionalist paradigms to assess Catholicism’s role in American history. It seems that the post-conciliar ecumenical climate has contributed. On one hand, the interest in differentiating Catholicism from other Christian denominations has lost intensity; at the same time, the anti-Catholicism often present in American culture has notably diminished and thus Catholics no longer feel the need to demonstrate their Americanism, as if it were in question, even if the role of Catholic identity in America remains uncertain.

The decrease of the two previous paradigms has benefitted a new model: that of “difference.” The paradigm of “difference” is the fruit of a more profound understanding of the complex ties that bind Catholicism to American culture. The “difference” paradigm emphasizes the specificity but not the isolation of the American Catholicism. Two collections in the historiographical realm can be employed as examples of this approach. The Orbis Books series, “American Catholic Identities: A Documentary History,” edited by Christopher Kauffman⁸³ and the series, “Cushwa Center Studies of Catholi-

82. See Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism*; and David J. Endres, *American Crusade: Catholic Youth in the World Mission Movement from World War I through Vatican II* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

83. Steven M. Avella and Elizabeth McKeown, *Public Voices: Catholics in the American Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); Anne M. Butler, Michael, E. Engh, and Thomas W. Spalding, *The Frontiers and Catholic Identities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); Jeffrey M. Burns, Ellen Skerrett and Joseph M. White, *Keeping Faith: European and Asian Catholic Immigrants* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Joseph P. Chinnici and Angelyn Dries, *Prayer and Practice in the American Catholic Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Timothy M. Matovina and Gerald Eugene Poyo, *Presente!: U.S. Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Paula M. Kane, James J. Kennelly and Karen Kennelly, eds., *Gender Identities in American Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Marie Therese Archambault, Mark G. Thiel, and Christopher Vecsey, *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003); Cyprian Davis and Jamie T. Phelps, *Stamped with the Image of God: African Americans as God’s Image in Black* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003); R. Scott Appleby, Patricia Byrne, and William L. Portier, *Creative Fidelity: American Catholic Intellectual Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

cism in Twentieth-Century America,” edited by R. Scott Appleby.⁸⁴ We also ought to make reference to the work of historian John T. McGreevy, probably one of the best-known scholars of American Catholic religious history.⁸⁵ Appleby and McGreevy could be considered the leaders of this new generation of historians.

Global Catholicism

In relation to the Americanist paradigm’s diminishment, we ought to situate the tendency to understand U.S. Catholicism more in connection with global Catholicism. The celebration of the Second Vatican Council was a moment of awareness of a more global Church. In this same vein, the paradigm of “globalization” has been proposed.⁸⁶ This has included attempts to study U.S. Catholicism from the perspective of the dilemmas that affect the universal Church and not only from the American perspective.⁸⁷ A chief contributor to this approach has been the flowering of mission history studies, including the important work of Angelyn Dries, OSF, among others.⁸⁸

While the council prompted historians to discover the global, it has been noted that the emergence of a new generation of historians who did not experience the council, let alone pre-conciliar Catholicism, has allowed for a

84. Una M. Cadejan, *All Good Books Are Catholic Books: Print Culture, Censorship, and Modernity in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Mary Lethert Wingerd, *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Timothy M. Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella, *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots & Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); James M. O’Toole, *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); James T. Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie, and the Soul of the Port of New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

85. John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

86. See Joseph P. Chinnici, “The Cold War, the Council, and American Catholicism in a Global World,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 3. Other relevant example on this trend is the recent Rome Seminar, June 2014, organized by the University of Notre Dame: “American Catholicism in a World Made Small: Transnational Approaches to U.S. Catholic History.”

87. Appleby and Sprows Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 8.

88. Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998) and the special issue of *U.S. Catholic Historian*: “Missionary Thought and Experiences,” 24, no. 3 (Summer 2006).

fresh consideration of the complex relationships that have historically connected U.S. Catholicism with Rome.⁸⁹

“Religious” Religious History

In the last few decades, some attention has been drawn to the risk of cultivating a religious history that leads to reductionist narratives of religious practice. For example, it has been noted that some attempts to record the history of the People of God have limited themselves to a study of the “people,” leaving “God” out.⁹⁰ In other cases the excessive functionalism with which some historians have approached the history of Catholicism and religion in general has been lamented as it has confined itself to the study of its impact on socio-political relations. Increasingly, historians have called for a closer examination of the properly religious dimensions of belief to understand the socio-cultural history of the United States.⁹¹

A variety of proposals for writing religious history in a way that surpasses confessionalism have emerged.⁹² To this end scholars have proposed a religious history that does not avoid questions related to the significance of religion as an expression of the transcendent, explaining the ultimate meaning of existence. It has been argued that if religious history cannot open itself up to that perspective, it risks allowing the extraordinary flourishing that this field has experienced in recent decades to be rendered irrelevant.⁹³ A significant contribution from this prospective is James M. O’Toole’s synthesis, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (2008).⁹⁴

Toward a New Reading of U.S. History

The remarkable development that U.S. Catholic historiography has experienced since Vatican II has laid the foundation for general narratives of

89. Koehlinger, “Catholic Distinctiveness and the Challenge of America Denominationalism,” 18. In this vein we should highlight Peter R. D’Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

90. Thomas Wangler, “Theology and American Catholic Historiography,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 21–44.

91. Lizabeth Cohen, “Re-Viewing the Twentieth Century Through an American Catholic Lens,” in Appleby and Sprows Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 50.

92. Brad S. Gregory, *Catholicism and Historical Research: Confessionalism, Assimilation, or Critique?* (Notre Dame, IN: Erasmus Institute, 2005); and “The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 132–149.

93. Noll, “American Religious History, 1907-2007,” 182.

94. James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

U.S. history to begin to properly integrate the role that Catholicism has played in the nation and American culture. One example is the conference, “Catholicism and the American Century,” organized at the University of Notre Dame in 2008. The historians taking part, while experts in United States history, had neglected Catholicism in their studies.

The conference provided an opportunity to rethink their research and writing by including the perspective offered by Catholic historiography. The result was *Catholics in the American Century: Recasting Narratives of U.S. History*,⁹⁵ one of the most significant contributions of recent historiography on U.S. Catholicism and an important landmark in the path toward a rereading of the history of the United States.⁹⁶

Any discussion of Catholicism’s influence on a new reading of America history must mention the studies of Latino or Hispanic Catholics that have emerged in step with the significant increase of Latinos in the United States in recent decades. Moises Sandoval pioneered the historiography of U.S. Latino Catholicism in the 1970s.⁹⁷ However, his impact on historiography was modest until the 1980s when Jay P. Dolan began to include Sandoval’s work in his writing. In Dolan’s scholarship the presence of Latinos was framed by the multiethnic and multicultural concept of the People of God. In the early 1990s Dolan published three volumes on Latino Catholicism.⁹⁸ However, Dolan’s inclusion of the Hispanic element continued to utilize the paradigm of Americanization. It has been within the last few decades, prin-

95. Appleby and Sprows Cummings, *Catholics in the American Century*, 169.

96. The editor of the work offers a list of scholars whose work promotes the inclusion of Catholicism in the general narrative of American history: Robert Orsi, Timothy Matovina, Jay Dolan, Margaret McGuinness, and James McCartin in the study of religious experience, saints, devotions, prayer and sacraments; John McGreevy, Patrick Allit, David O’Brien, and James T. Fischer on the public presence of American Catholics; Evelyn Stern, Mary Wingerd, Paula Kane, and Timothy Kelly on geographical and urban studies; Kathleen Sprows Cummings on the “new women” of the Progressive Era and Leslie Woodcock Tentler on Catholics and contraception; Suellen Hoy, Carol Coburn, and Amy Koehlinger on the twentieth century’s spiritual, institutional, theological, and social trajectories; Joseph Chinnici on the history of suffering; Una Cadegan and Paul Elie on the impact of Catholics on the literary and cultural sphere from the inter-war years onward; James O’Toole on the laity; and Philip Gleason on Catholic higher education.

97. Moises Sandoval, *The Mexican American Experience in the Church: Reflections on Identity and Mission* (New York: Sadlier, 1983); *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

98. Jay P. Dolan and Jaime R. Vidal, *Puerto Rican and Cuban Catholics in the U.S., 1900–1965* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto Miguel Hinojosa, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900–1965* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

cipally through the work of Timothy M. Matovina, that historiography has disputed that paradigm and suggested a new reading and contextualization of American history from the perspective of Latino Catholicism.⁹⁹

This proposal places the presence of Latino Catholicism in the first stages of the history of what would later be the United States, long before the establishment of the colonies. It also emphasizes that not all Latino Catholicism has been the fruit of immigration, but rather was largely a consequence of the expansion of the borders during the period when the nation was being formed. Regarding Latino Catholics who arrived as immigrants, it calls for a closer examination of the relationships with their countries of origin. Therefore, it is important to take into greater account the historical relationships between the U.S. and Latin America and to study the relationships between Catholics of European descent and Latinos.

Conclusion

Vatican II's distinct influence on the United States can be traced in part through American Catholic historiography. The ecclesiology of the People of God has had the more general effect of opening the historiography of Catholicism to the "new histories" that had dominated the Western historiographical landscape since the end of World War II. Initially, in the 1960s and 1970s we observe a strong influence of social history, and soon after in the 1980s, of cultural history. In this process traditional Church history, without disappearing entirely, gave way to religious history that was characterized by its departure from the ecclesiastical academic realm to enter as a full participant in the non-confessional academic landscape. In this way the Catholic narratives became concerned with responding to issues that affected non-confessional narratives. The development of Protestant religious history from the 1960s onward also influenced the maturation of Catholic religious history. The new post-conciliar ecumenical climate helped to diminish prejudices on both sides and to overcome reductive confessional views in the writing of history.

The council's emphasis on the historical and dynamic character of revelation stimulated the realization of the historical dimension of Catholicism and the value of history as a locus of theological reflection. Paradoxically, the theological deficit within post-conciliar historiography has been considerable. In this sense the thematic and methodological renewal, as well as the overcoming of confessional perspectives and openness to church history within the general academic realm, has not always been free of limitations.

99. Timothy M. Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Due to the lack of formation in theology, liturgy, and Catholic spirituality, some historians have produced distorted and biased accounts of Catholicism. At the same time, the fragmentation experienced within religious history is complicating the development of a synthesis. Nevertheless, I argue that the main difficulty for the development of a synthesis lies not so much in the thematic and methodological multiplicity as in the loss of religious meaning in many of these narratives. In fact, there has been no lack in recent decades of a call for the development of a more “religious” religious history.

In Vatican II’s influence on the historiography of American Catholicism, it is possible to observe a significant generational factor, though exceptions remain. An early generation of historians who had experienced pre-conciliar Catholicism and lived during the years of the council highlighted the discontinuities between pre- and post-conciliar Catholicism, which occasionally gave the impression that the very “object of study” had changed. Since the 1990s a new generation of historians who neither knew pre-conciliar Catholicism nor lived during the council have found more elements of continuity and a greater facility for situating the transformations of American Catholicism in broader chronological perspective. This does not preclude historians belonging to this new generation who continue to emphasize rupture.

The council, sometimes indirectly, has also contributed to the revision of some paradigms on which the interpretation of U.S. Catholicism had depended. From the paradigms of “Americanization” and “exceptionalism” emerged the paradigm of “difference,” which is more attentive to the complexity of the relationships between Catholicism and American culture. It has also brought about a transition toward an interpretation of American Catholicism more aware of its relationships with “global Catholicism.”

It is not easy to specify to what degree the historiographical evolution in the realm of American Catholicism has had the council as its primary cause, and to what measure it has been the consequence of the development of the historiographical discipline in general. Yet, this historiographical evolution, driven directly or indirectly by the council’s invitation to discover the Church as the People of God, to ecumenical dialogue and to dialogue between the Church and the world, has contributed to laying the foundation for a rereading of the history of the United States in light of Catholicism. Clearly, the intention of integrating Catholicism into the national narrative was present in the historiographical work of John Tracy Ellis, and earlier still, in that of John Gilmary Shea, although stemming from different assumptions. Perhaps this fact could also support the paradigm of evolution and reform, yet in continuity, as a way of understanding U.S. Catholic history.