
Kurtz’s book examines the northern-Catholic experience during the American Civil War and its aftermath. Despite the 200,000 American-Catholic laymen and more than fifty priest-chaplains who served in the Union Army during the conflict, American Catholics found their sacrifices discounted, distorted, and ultimately forgotten by their non-Catholic neighbors. Facing the return of nativism after the War, northern Catholics sought “refuge in a separate Catholic subculture” (7). Kurtz incorporates the Civil War into the conventional Catholic historical narrative of post-1815 America: immigrant Catholics built ghettos instead of directly engaging the culture around them. Ultimately, as the story goes, their flawed model would have to be destroyed in the 1960s to produce a more robust faith experience. Although the book deserves to be read for Kurtz’s insights and deep research, it fails to establish the war as central to the process of Catholic retreat.

Kurtz depicts northern Catholics as deeply divided over the war and its many issues. A minority of pro-war Catholics endorsed and collaborated with the Republican Party (31). Orestes Brownson and the students and priests at Notre Dame serve as chief examples in the book (45). Brownson supported a war to save the Union, opposed attempts to negotiate a peace with the Confederate States during the war, and endorsed the Emancipation Proclamation. The Republican Catholic minority complained about the deep southern sympathies of many northern-Catholic clergy and endorsed a strong patriotism to prove Catholic loyalty to the United States (42, 48–51). The majority of northern Catholics, Kurtz notes, were Democrats and ambivalent about the War for many reasons (29). Some German Catholics, Kurtz finds, opposed the war effort because their fellow German immigrants, the radical Forty-Eighters, supported the Republican Party and the War (47, 89). Other northern Catholics, citing a lack of Catholic army chaplains, refused to enlist so that they would not be deprived of the sacraments (69). Irish Catholics who enlisted sometimes sought “homogeneous units,” like the famed Irish Brigade, in order to shield themselves from nativism (52–53, 55). Still other northern Catholics associated the Republican Party with dangerous radicalism and, while denouncing secession, rejected the larger goals of the Lincoln administration, especially emancipation (64, 90, 95–100). The 1863 New York City draft riots gained a reputation, to the chagrin and protest of northern-Catholic newspaper editors and bishops, as an Irish Catholic rebellion against the Union, fur-
thering northerners’ suspicions about Catholic loyalty to the United States (111–12). Kurtz believes that these divisions prevented a united response that could convince non-Catholic northerners of Catholic patriotism (162).

Kurtz demonstrates that after the war nativism again appeared as a handy political tool for some “prominent northern Protestant and Republican leaders” (129). Nativists seized upon Pope Pius IX’s Syllabus of Errors, Vatican I’s definition of papal infallibility, and continued American Catholic attention to issues of Irish and Italian nationalism, as evidence of Catholicism’s incompatibility with American republicanism. Even President Grant, who should have known better given his military experience, invoked nativist themes that depicted Catholics as unpatriotic (139–40). Some Catholics, particularly the priests at Notre Dame who had served as chaplains and some Irish veterans, kept alive memories of Catholic sacrifices in the Union Army through their participation in veterans’ organizations (145–60). Despite these efforts, Kurtz maintains, Catholics were “still seen as an anti-modern, anti-democratic and alien threat to the nation’s Protestant identity, its democratic government, and its society” (144).

Kurtz undermines his argument with several pieces of evidence. The excellent opening chapter covers the Mexican War, and in brief, the 1850s. Kurtz writes, “Many of the arguments developed during the Mexican War to counteract nativism and anti-Catholicism were later refined and put into service again in the Civil War” (9). They had little success either time. Kurtz observes that after the Mexican War and the rise of the Know Nothing Party, Catholics sought “protection for their community and religious beliefs by increasinglywalling themselves off from the seemingly hostile forces surrounding them in secular and Protestant American society” (10). The process that Kurtz identifies with the Civil War, then, was already in progress during the 1850s. He claims that the Civil War “and its aftermath ultimately accelerated the growth of a separate Catholic subculture,” but, with no hard baseline established for the process before the war, it is hard to accept that claim (162).

Kurtz includes evidence that hints at a more plausible narrative, however. Concerning the 1850s, he admits that, “Similar religious and social constituencies in the North supported both nativism and antislaveryism, and these groups would prove to be prominent in the Republican Party” (28). This suggests that nativism in the North had little to do with Catholic behavior in wartime and much more to do with political forces in the region. The work of Ernest Tuveson and Susan-Mary Grant has uncovered the northern, chauvinistic nationalism that defined the Union in sectional and religious terms. One Protestant America under one sovereign, central government, directed by one people, left no room for groups such as
Catholics who fell outside such a definition. It was not their record during the Civil War, then, that excommunicated Catholics from the Union; it was the northern, Protestant, liberal nationalism animating the victorious Republican Party that excluded Catholics (as well as southerners) from the “Promised Land.”

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Faced with the continued decline of Christian principles in society, Fr. Brian Mullady, OP, STD, sets out to expose the roots of the issues and provide a foundational and systematic overview of Catholic social teaching. Identifying the demise of the traditional family in particular as the cause of many other woes, he seeks to rearticulate a conceptual foundation for a Christian social order based on the teachings of modern popes, and especially St. John Paul II. Fr. Mullady emphasizes the continuity of Catholic tradition with particular focus on the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, which grounded that of many of the popes who contributed to modern Catholic social teaching.

Fr. Mullady takes Aristotelian Thomistic metaphysics as his starting point for Christian social order, laying the groundwork for a worldview in which all being has its source in God and is intelligible, first by natural reason and then with the help of faith. The philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas holds that action follows being and that the God-given nature of a being grounds its purpose and potentiality—a concept lost in our society, which idolizes license.

Christian social order is society as governed in accord with the plan in the mind of God, to which St. Thomas refers as the Eternal Law. Man can participate in the Eternal Law according to natural reason by way of the Natural Law—the principles written by the Creator into human nature. He can further and more clearly participate in the Eternal Law through the Revealed Law, given in the Old and New Testaments. Laws promulgated by human authority, namely Positive Law, must be in accord with the Natural Law and the Revealed Law. Mullady points out that today we encounter a serious problem in that many civil laws no longer take any account of the Natural Law and are thus not grounded in objective reality. Even though