

Assimilation and Resistance: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era¹

-by Thomas E. Woods Jr.
Suffolk Community College

A new public philosophy began to emerge in the United States during the Progressive Era. Promoted by such intellectuals as John Dewey, William James, and the collectivists of the *New Republic* magazine, it called for a citizenry trained in an experimental milieu, free of dogma and emancipated from sources of allegiance (e.g., the Church) other than the new centralized democratic state then being forged. Catholics, however, neither capitulated to the new creed nor retreated into a self-righteous isolation. In a culture whose chief value was pluralism they insisted on the uniqueness of the Church and the need for making value judgments based on a sound philosophy of man.

The assimilation of Catholics into a pluralistic society is never a simple matter. An institution claiming to be in exclusive possession of the fullness of the truth and the bearer of moral norms binding on all men must always be in a state of awkward coexistence with a society whose settled policy it is not to render judgments regarding substantial goods, but instead simply to allow its citizens to lead the good life as they understand it. Likewise, such a society must hold in suspicion any group attempting to make the kind of astonishing claims for itself that the Catholic Church routinely makes. In such an environment the Church must always be careful to maintain its identity and integrity without retreating into a ghetto-like isolation.

The experience of the Catholic Church in the United States during the so-called Progressive Era of the early twentieth century is an outstanding if curiously neglected example of how the Church can maintain her identity and vitality without at the same time withdrawing from intellectual life altogether. At that time Catholics found themselves in a society and an intellectual milieu that may not always have been explicitly anti-Catholic, but were in fact all the more insidious for not seeming to be directed against any one group. The American Church proved during this period that there need be no conflict between engaging the surrounding culture and preserving the purity of the Faith.

In a recent study of Progressivism, historian Eldon Eisenach correctly identified one of the movement's key aims as the construction of a kind of civic religion, a nondogmatic ethic that could serve as a national bond that would lift

Americans out of the dual parochialism of geography and religion. Emblematic of this effort was the attempt by the progressive sociologist Albion Small to persuade his fellow intellectuals of the need to "invent" a new American religion.² "[B]y 1915," Eisenach explains, "Small is really codifying the results of a long-standing theological-ethical enterprise when he concludes that the symbolic centerpiece of this 'new' national religion is the now historically recovered '*Weltanschauung* of Jesus' excavated from barbarism, superstition, church, and dogma."³ A corollary to such a national creed, so to speak, was the construction of a truly national community, of a social democracy in which the locus of people's affections and loyalties would be transferred from local authorities and various subsidiary institutions to the central state. According to Eisenach, Progressives held that "all social knowledge deserving a hearing must be cosmopolitan in origin and national in import." They "invented a conception of citizenship," moreover, "that stipulated that the possession of social knowledge entailed the duty of reflecting on and articulating ideas of national public good *unmediated by party, interest, region, or sectarian religion*." Social-gospel Christians could be considered allies by secular Progressives and could play an important role in the Progressive Movement precisely because they portrayed Christ's message in a naturalistic way that posed little threat to this new secular ethic. Gone was the cry, "No salvation outside the church." "The candid democrat," stated the *New Republic*, insists that "no one has a monopoly in salvation."⁴

The whole spirit of the new creed was positively hostile to any sectarian group claiming exclusive possession of the truth. What Eisenach does not mention in his book, however, is that the Catholic Church was precisely such a sectarian group. Catholics considered their dogmas binding not merely on themselves--in which case the Progressives could have had less of a quarrel with them--but ultimately on the entire human race. They were not prepared to be just another faction, with no more claim to men's allegiance than any other, in a new American syncretism.

The struggle over progressive education provides only the most obvious example of this conflict. John Dewey's schools did inculcate values, but they were procedural rather than substantial: tolerance, respect for democratic procedures, and the like. But education in the Catholic sense, the educator Edward A. Pace wrote in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "*aims at an ideal*, and this in turn depends on the view that is taken of man and his destiny, of his relations to God, to his fellowmen, and to the physical world."⁵ In an article critical of Catholicism, the *New Republic*--described by one scholar as given to "a continuing, though normally low-key anti-Catholicism"⁶--insisted that "freedom and tolerance mean the development of independent powers of judgment in the young, not the freedom of older people to impose their dogmas on the young."⁷

Dewey was far from being the first philosopher to look to mathematics and the sciences, with their verifiable certainties, as his models for knowledge, and to look with a jaundiced eye on the endless bickering of theologians and metaphysicians. If only the scientific method could be imported into the political and ethical spheres, he and others believed, dissension and discord might at last give way to unanimity. He had no patience whatever with sectarian infighting among Christians. In fact it is not unfair to say that Dewey, while he seemed to appreciate the value of a kind of natural religion, wanted the ideas of the supernatural and transcendent more or less excluded from society or at least from serious intellectual discussion. As one Dewey scholar put it, "For Dewey, there is no room for the churches in secular society."⁸ His desire for unanimity is precisely what Progressive intellectuals sought with such earnestness, and which, it seemed, would be accelerated by discouraging dogmatic attachment to one sect or another in favor of a greater national ideological convergence. Thus when Dewey studiously excluded religious instruction from his curriculum, and indeed discouraged it altogether as unhelpful in forming the spirit of scientific inquiry that he wanted to see inculcated in the new American citizen, it was easy for Catholics to see at work not the benign creation of a truly national community, as Dewey understood his project, but instead something sinister. Would they find themselves under pressure, in the name of this new national unity, to retreat from their position as a universal institution with a claim upon the consciences of all men and uniquely in possession of the fullness of truth? Only when Dewey's distaste for religious instruction in the schools is understood in this light can the intensity and vigor of the Catholic response be properly understood.

While Catholics insisted on an education whose primary end was the cultivation of the soul that it might reach its last end--eternal beatitude--for Dewey, as historian Robert Crunden has argued, the school had replaced the church as "the key institution in the saving of souls for democracy."⁹ The Dewey school sought, among other things, to inculcate in children a proper social spirit; but Thomas Edward Shields pointed out at a meeting of the Catholic Educational Association that while the Church recognizes "the indispensable necessity of educating for citizenship," she "can never accept it as the ultimate aim of the education given to her children" because "her vision of life is not bounded by the grave."¹⁰ To Dewey's insistence that "the child is for democracy" Catholics answered, "the child is for God."¹¹ As Catholic University of America Rector Fr. Thomas J. Shahan put it, the Catholic teacher saw in the child "not only mental capacities that are to be unfolded, but a life that is to be shaped and a soul that is to be saved."¹² The difference between the two approaches thus lay chiefly in the fact that the Catholic school taught a "clear and solid philosophy of life" which was the very kind of all-encompassing outlook on the world, the very essence of the closed and abstract

systematization that Dewey's philosophy, and Pragmatism in general, explicitly rejected.¹³ Another writer compared Catholic and non-Catholic systems of education to two vessels, the latter of which was "without compass or rudder."¹⁴ This, then, was where Catholic educators took their stand. Aware that fashionable trends in education were at least implicitly hostile to the Faith and intended to bring about a certain ideological convergence among all kinds of Americans, Catholic writers insisted with special vigor that in no way would the Catholic Church allow itself to be absorbed into any such amalgamation.¹⁵ "Professor Dewey assures us that the public schools are developing a new and higher form of religion that is devoid of all denominational content,"¹⁶ scoffed Thomas Edward Shields, the first head of Catholic University's education department. The result of such an effort would be to undermine all religion.

Yet in education as elsewhere Catholic thinkers were not slow to acknowledge the genuine contributions of the modern era, and spoke freely of the benefits to Catholic pedagogy to be reaped from a selective appropriation of certain progressive principles. As authoritative a source as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* distinguished between the aims of education, which were constant, and the methods employed, which ought to be "based on the findings of biology, physiology, and psychology."¹⁷ According to Edward Pace, one of the great virtues of Catholic education was that while its subject matter of course remained static over the centuries, divine revelation being unchanging, it adapted itself as circumstances dictated. The Church could, therefore, glean from the so-called new education those principles it found in harmony with its mission and liable to increase the effectiveness with which it transmitted the contents of its sacred deposit of faith. Even the tough-minded Fr. Paul Blakely, S.J., a frequent contributor to *America*, a weekly Jesuit-run periodical, conceded that modern pedagogy "unconsciously perhaps, has suggested many a new and useful application of old principles to modern instances."¹⁸

Of all major Catholic educators and theorists it was Fr. Thomas Edward Shields who has been seen as most sympathetic to the cause of progressive education. And in some ways Shields' views on educational method did indeed reflect those of John Dewey. Shields' first and most important book, *The Psychology of Education* (1906), emphasized a number of standard progressive ideas. The importance of activity, the conformity of the curriculum to the development of the child's mind, the development of a center of correlation among the various subjects taught, all these and more were relatively familiar themes by the time Shields' early work began to appear.¹⁹ He developed an important textbook series for the study of religion that moved away from the traditional emphasis on memorization to an approach that, he believed, was more likely to be naturally assimilated by the child's mind and truly incorporated into his everyday thought and activity. The catechism, Shields explained, was a relative novelty in Catholic pedagogy, dating back only to the

sixteenth century when it emerged to compete with Luther's catechisms. Even then they were intended to be tools for teachers and theologians, not students. It was only by a twist of fate that the catechism should have come to be viewed not only as the student's principal instrument in religious education, but also as the traditional method of imparting such education. A related concern for Shields was the erection of a Sisters College to train women religious (and lay women as well) in the new kind of instruction he was advocating. (Pope St. Pius X, a notorious foe of ill-considered innovation, not only supported Shields' Sisters College project but also sent a financial contribution of his own.) Merely distributing his textbooks to American dioceses was worse than useless if teachers were not properly trained in the method that Shields had intended to accompany them. In the meantime, and at great personal expense, Shields joined fellow Catholic University educator Edward Pace in launching the *Catholic Educational Review*, a scholarly periodical that sought to create a forum within which Catholic educational principles could be discussed.

It is Shields himself, who warned his fellow Catholics of the need to "discriminate real advance from mere innovation," who best demonstrates the limited extent to which Catholics embraced modern trends in education.²⁰ For all his differences with his Catholic opponents--of whom there were, in fact, relatively few strong ones--together they constituted the broad front against progressivism that united Catholic intellectuals of the period.²¹ They shared the suspicion that they were being asked to abandon their posture of distinctiveness in the name of the centralized democratic state that was being forged both institutionally and ideologically during the Progressive Era. Whatever diversity of opinion existed regarding practical educational questions was subordinated to this overriding concern. While John Dewey and other progressive educators sought to employ the educational process as a means of weaning Americans away from too pronounced an attachment to particular sects in favor of a conception of citizenship thought to be more consonant with the demands of an emergent social democracy, Shields was one with his critics in emphasizing the crucial importance for Catholics to maintain and strengthen this kind of attachment. It is for this reason that the only book-length study of Shields' life and work noted that it was only from "a superficial standpoint" that the Catholic University educator's theories "might appear to have much in common with that of John Dewey and the other men of his time," and why the most recent student of Shields' work took special notice of how Shields' philosophy, at its root, seemed to run counter to progressive currents.²² Shields intended his contributions to Church education to strengthen and deepen children's Catholic faith and to prepare their minds for the reception of absolute truth. The new pedagogy "was to serve the primary purpose of Christian education, the transformation of man to a child of God."²³ To allow for greater initiative on the part of the student on the one hand, and yet on the other to guide him

inexorably to assent to an external dogma, had been far from the intention of proponents of progressive education. In this way did Catholics turn John Dewey on his head. Recognizing and denouncing the threat posed to the traditional faith by an uncritical acceptance of Dewey's methods, the Church nevertheless remained eager to adopt whatever approach might help her accomplish her mission more effectively, even going so far as to use Dewey's own ideas to solidify the very edifice that Dewey had been seeking to undermine.

Just as progressive educators sought to instruct the child without consideration of his ultimate end, so also did progressive sociologists seek to make recommendations for the improvement of human society without consideration of man's nature and destiny. The Catholic press of the early twentieth century is filled with denunciations of the progressive sociologist on just these grounds. The main practitioners of modern sociology "frankly avow their complete independence of what they would doubtless term the outworn creed and morality of the Catholic Church," said Fr. Paul Blakely, associate editor of *America*.²⁴ Modern thinkers "declared that the source of moral obligation was to be found, not in the mandate of any power above earth, but in man himself, or in society, or in the present state of human evolution," said another.²⁵ "Our entire view of life will obviously take shape and color according as we admit or reject a Divine plan," wrote Fr. Joseph Husslein; and modern sociologists, who fell into the latter category, do not "admit any unchanging laws of morality." Some, it is true, suggested certain broad guidelines for morality--Harvard's B.M. Anderson, for example, defined the moral law simply as "the will of the group"--but rarely any whose actual contents were constant over time. The will of a group, for example, is far from constant. The economist and social thinker Simon Patten confirmed Catholic fears when he noted that "[s]ocial morality gets its force from its consequences; it has no antecedent principle from which it is derived nor any authoritative sanction by which it is enforced."²⁶ From the Catholic point of view, all this represented a "new creed, cunningly invented to displace Christianity."²⁷ Still another observer noted that "in the minds of almost all professors of sociology who are not Catholic, whatever has come down to us from the past must be condemned. Its very age is its death warrant."²⁸

There can be no real question that Catholic concerns were justified, and that within the mainstream of the discipline the overwhelming majority of scholars, activists, and theologians who took a favorable view of religion agreed that religious belief, while valuable, needed to undergo a radical restructuring if it were to perform the socially useful functions they envisioned for it. The same Charles Ellwood who praised the social utility of religion also published *The Reconstruction of Religion* (1922), whose very title reveals its thesis. The Christianity he envisions will all but dispense with theology. Beyond that, it

will be "concretely ethical," social rather than theological, collective rather than individualistic, active rather than contemplative, affirmative rather than negative; and, instead of hurling anathemas at the modern world, it will cooperate in constructing the good society with all men of good will.²⁹ Simon Patten's *Social Basis of Religion* (1911) likewise spoke of the need to "reconstruct religion in ways that meet modern needs," and reinterpreted all the elements of the Christian creed in naturalistic terms. Had St. Paul not perverted Christ's message into one of personal sanctification and a preoccupation with otherworldly concerns, he argued, then "Christ to us would be a social leader, preaching salvation only in terms of love, cooperation and service."³⁰ As for the enthusiastic support that W.D.P. Bliss and his social-gospel colleagues showed for modern sociology, this phenomenon seemed to be more a reflection of the gradual secularization of the Christian creed under social-gospel guidance than a clear indication that the principles of the new sociology posed no difficulties for the orthodox believer.³¹

Yet in rejecting the errors and the anti-Catholic prejudice of what they sneeringly dismissed as modern sociology, Catholics were careful to distinguish between what they considered a perversion of a potentially valuable discipline on the one hand and true sociology, a science properly informed by Catholic truth, on the other. Every Catholic university, in fact, should have a school of sociology; otherwise, good Catholic students would have to go elsewhere, where they would doubtless be taught principles that ran contrary to their faith.³² "[F]or the thousandth time," demanded one Catholic thinker, "what about the future faith and morality of our Catholic young men and women who attend these secular universities?"³³ Joseph Husslein, who joined his colleagues in insisting that the Church's unique mission consisted in the salvation of souls, argued that it was precisely a catholicized social science that in modern times had become a principal means for securing this end. Without a Catholic sociology, not only would Catholic students of social science wind up lost in a labyrinth of error, but also countless needy souls, ministered to by secular-trained social workers, would be fed the stones of naturalism instead of the bread of life.³⁴ Simply put, the "moral riot" introduced by modern sociology--Blakely called it "the ethics of the barnyard and the stock-farm"--would continue apace unless Catholics put the discipline on the proper track. "We must not only engage in destructive criticism," insisted John Maguire. "We must enter the field, and do constructive work."³⁵

This was precisely what Fr. William J. Kerby, who joined the faculty of the Catholic University of America in 1897 as its first professor of sociology, sought to encourage.³⁶ Kerby had a broad educational background, entering Milwaukee's St. Francis de Sales Seminary in 1884, where he remained until 1892; he went on to study at Catholic University as well as for a brief period in Berlin, and ultimately earned his Ph.D. from Belgium's University of

Louvain. His doctoral dissertation was an examination of the American socialist movement. Kerby was of the opinion that the appeal of socialism would dwindle in proportion to Catholics' determination to see their own social teachings put into practice.³⁷

Kerby was more optimistic than some of his fellow Catholics about sociology's potential for good; but he began the *Catholic Encyclopedia's* entry on the discipline by frankly acknowledging its defects as currently practiced. He accused it of showing "a marked tendency towards Agnosticism, Materialism, and Determinism."³⁸ Too many sociologists "eliminate God from their social science" and "drop the word sin from their vocabulary"; the result is a one-dimensional view of the human person, one that fails to take into account both body and soul. The principal difficulty with modern sociology, Kerby explained, was that its practitioners, when not openly hostile towards Catholic principles, sought to arrive at a metaphysics without the compass of the natural-law tradition, through mere social observation and the collection of data. In the process "it often takes on a tone with which the Christian cannot agree."³⁹

Kerby's main interest was not so much in sociological theory as it was in applied sociology, the application of sociological principles to the problems of poverty and human suffering. Hence Kerby promoted the idea of professional social service training for Catholics, and from a distinctly Catholic point of view. Catholic institutions were slow to take up the challenge. By the end of World War I, only two Catholic universities, Fordham University in New York and Chicago's Loyola University, could claim to offer courses in social service, the former in its sociology department and the latter in a separate School of Social Study that had opened in 1914. Kerby was convinced of the need for a specifically Catholic school of social service so that Catholics interested in the field could receive the professional training they needed in an environment that was not only not contemptuous of Catholic teaching (which he believed secular schools tended to be) but whose entire outlook was suffused with the Faith. Like Thomas Edward Shields before him, who set his sights on a college for teacher training that would combine the highest professional standards with a firm commitment to the Catholic faith, Kerby was determined to make his social service school a reality. He did this in 1921, with the opening of the National Catholic School of Social Service.⁴⁰

One of the instructors at the new school would be John J. Burke, the Paulist Father who headed the National Catholic War Council (which in 1919 became the National Catholic Welfare Council, still under Burke's leadership) and edited the *Catholic World* from 1903 to 1922. A central point of his writing and lecturing concerned the supernatural element of charity.⁴¹ For two millennia, Burke told the 1915 graduating class of New York's College of Mount Saint Vincent-on-Hudson, the Church had pursued as her "one great

purpose" to lead souls to the love of God. "Whatever other claims she makes as to her mission," he insisted, "are at best but secondary."⁴² This was to be the outlook of the National Catholic Welfare Council for at least the first several decades of its existence. It was not a mere sentimental humanitarianism that inspired the work that the new organization coordinated. The purpose and motivating force of Catholic charity was to sanctify souls as it alleviated human want. Merely to duplicate the work of other charitable organizations would have been to misunderstand the Church's mission and to forfeit an opportunity for evangelization. "We are in this cause not to do simply a negative work," said Burke. "We are in the cause not simply to do something after a non-Catholic organization has done it. We are in it as the cause of Christ, as Christian men possessing and alone possessing the truth of Jesus Christ."⁴³

Burke warned Catholics about the modern superstition that "experts in the social sciences might well be trusted with our social betterment"--a view that encouraged the trend towards making of religion "a private and an almost secret matter." "It is difficult to stand against such a tide," he admitted; but he insisted on these principles to his students at the National Catholic School of Social Service.⁴⁴ They responded warmly to Burke's counsel. "We have realized how favored we are in having your wealth of spiritual thought unfolded so generously," one student wrote to him, "and if we, as Catholics, are to do any worthwhile social service, surely that is the side we should stress--there are many humanitarians better equipped than some of us, if that were the one thing necessary."⁴⁵

Yet there was more to Catholic misgivings about the modern trend toward so-called "scientific charity" than its failure to acknowledge the spiritual element in charitable giving. They discovered that applied sociology also suffered from the same defects as its theoretical counterpart--namely, the danger that social science, emancipated from the Christian natural-law tradition, would advocate remedies offensive to Catholic belief.

This concern became critically important when advocates of scientific charity urged investigation into the ultimate causes behind the widespread destitution that existed in the early twentieth century. One advocate, for example, listed the "two new expedients" of scientific charity as, first, "helping the poor to help themselves--an innocuous and worthy sentiment with which Catholics could agree--but second, "preventing extreme destitution by prophylactic measures."⁴⁶ Indeed, many of its advocates considered the prudent use of contraception an essential element of the scientific approach to charity. Was it not obvious that large families created financial burdens that could lead to impoverishment?⁴⁷ Dr. John J. Cronin observed in the *American Monthly Review of Reviews* that a "very little study of sociology will convince the advocates of the 'race suicide' idea that a few perfect children are far better for the nation and the family than a dozen unkempt degenerates, who add pathos

to the struggle for existence, and who sink under the inflexible law of the survival of the fittest."⁴⁸ Yet Fr. John A. Ryan, who ranked among the most progressive of Catholic thinkers in matters economic, spoke tirelessly and with fervor against what he saw as the despicable moral evil of artificial contraception.⁴⁹

Catholic and secular sociologists, like Catholic and secular educators, were in a sense speaking past each other. Catholics persisted in a metaphysical outlook that viewed nature in terms of teleology; that is, each faculty and each being as a whole was thought to possess a nature, towards whose full realization its actions must be directed. The kind of argument that Catholic sociologists were making was unlikely to persuade their secular counterparts, for whom so-called metaphysical truths--of which natural law and the principles deduced therefrom were one--were of little value next to the scientific knowledge gained through social observation. Secular sociology was a science whose ultimate purpose was the improvement of man's material condition. Philosophical investigation into the natures and proper ends of things seemed antiquated and unhelpful. Blakely put the matter less kindly when he wrote that while the Catholic argument against contraception is "easily stated," it "has no appeal to any man who has determined to rule God out of his world, and very little to those who make self-gratification, or utility, private or communal, the norm of right and wrong."⁵⁰

Yet while both Catholic and non-Catholic sought the good of man, secular sociologists all too rarely specified in what that good consisted. What *was* the good towards which man should strive? What kind of behavior would most conduce to his happiness? Sensual pleasure and physical comfort? Or reaching man's final end, the eternal enjoyment of the beatific vision?

At no level of sociology could these questions at last be evaded. Whether studying man at a distance, as in pure sociology, or seeking via applied sociology to improve his earthly lot, it was ultimately impossible for secular and Catholic sociologists alike to escape value judgments and first principles. Even an endeavor as ostensibly innocuous and free from controversy as poor relief turned out to be pregnant with spiritual and ideological ramifications. The kind of relief administered, as well as the method employed in extending it must, from a Catholic point of view, be consistent with the demands of natural law and of the dignity of the human person. If poor relief were to aim at the genuine well-being of the recipient it must, moreover, be mindful of his supernatural end, and through its offices bring him closer to its attainment. The progressive or scientific approach, on the other hand, generally viewed poor relief without recourse to teleology, without an appreciation of the proper end of man's life. Paul Blakely noted for this reason that "we will soon realize to our cost and perhaps to the loss of immortal souls for whom Christ died, that

the modern social worker constitutes a greater danger to faith and morals, than godless schools or the despicable ever-present proselyter."⁵¹

Equally disquieting from the progressive point of view, with its dislike of dogma and its emphasis on the construction of a unified national community, was what progressive intellectuals would have considered the sectarian nature of the Catholic approach. Paul Blakely, in a parody of scientific charity he wrote for *America*, pinpointed this developing antagonism, paraphrasing his opponents thus: "Private agencies, especially when dominated by the 'sectarian outlook,' can never hope to suppress public evils. This is the work of the State, committing its duty into the hands of capable persons possessed of the 'social outlook.'"⁵² Catholic charities, moreover, "resolutely [oppose] race-suicide [that is, birth control], divorce, lawless marriages, sterilization, and such like evils, suggested by modern sociology to the consideration of man's supreme guardian, the State." The two positions were not easily reconciled, and both Catholics and secular progressives knew it. "[W]hile welcoming all possible cooperation," Paul Blakely noted, "the present is surely no time for the Catholic social student either to hide his principles, or to gloss over fundamental differences. . . . No power of diplomatic speech can reconcile the radical antagonism of the two forces which today are aligned with Christ, and with what Christ called 'the world.'"⁵³

Paradoxically, it was precisely this partial isolation, this refusal to be assimilated to the spirit of the age, that would prove a source of vibrancy and life for American Catholicism in the ensuing decades. Hilaire Belloc remarked that "the more powerful, the more acute, and the more sensitive minds of our time are clearly inclining toward the Catholic side."⁵⁴ Although Pope St. Pius X found himself the subject of ceaseless ridicule at the hands of European intellectuals for the vigor with which he battled Modernism, for others this otherwise gentle man's obstinacy seemed to be the mark of a true man of God. In fact it was only after the issuance of the Pope's *Lamentabili Sane* (1907), the list of condemned errors of the Modernists, that many of the Church's great converts made their way into her fold. In England, for instance, the great historian Christopher Dawson entered the Church in 1914, former Anglican Ronald Knox in 1917 and G.K. Chesterton in 1922. Dawson, for his part, vigorously defended Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* as an antidote to modern secular liberalism which denied "the subordination of human society to divine law."⁵⁵ Hence it was the Church's uncompromising stance itself that ultimately compelled many to enter her fold. As for the United States, Peter Huff notes that the American Church "witnessed such a steady stream of notable literary conversions that the statistics tended to support Calvert Alexander's hypothesis of something suggesting a cultural trend." The pre-Vatican II Catholic Church in the United States was, he argues, "a highly

imaginative world of myth, meaning, and ritual, based upon the classical vision of Catholicism's cultural mission."⁵⁶

The so-called Catholic revival of 1920-1960, which built on the intellectual foundations that Catholics had laid during the Progressive Era, was multifaceted. Surveying this cultural phenomenon, William Halsey describes pre-Vatican II American Catholicism as constituting a full-fledged "countersociety", foreshadowed in the Church's distinctive approaches to education and sociology described above. His "partial listing" of Catholic organizations is impressive:

In chronological order from 1900 to 1950, Catholics organized: The National Catholic Educational Association (1904), the Catholic Press Association (1911), Catholic Writers Guild of America (1919), the American Catholic Historical Association (1919), Catholic Library Association (1921), American Catholic Philosophical Association (1926), Catholic Association for International Peace (1926), Catholic Anthropological Association (1928), Catholic Book Club (1928), Catholic Poetry Society of America (1931), Catholic Biblical Association of America (1936), Catholic Art Association (1937), the Catholic Theatre Conference (1937), American Catholic Sociological Society (1938), Catholic Renaissance Society (1940), Catholic Economic Association (1941), Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (1946), and the American Catholic Psychological Association (1947).⁵⁷

And yet, Halsey goes on to argue, although Catholics established an extraordinary array of parallel associations such as those listed above, they did so not because they cherished separateness or exclusion for their own sake. What at times was an institutional isolation did not indicate a lack of concern with the nation as a whole; on the contrary, Catholics supposed that it was only through cultivating a robust Catholic culture that they could truly serve their country. Catholic culture, he writes, "was an attempt to save middle-class culture from its own decadence. While isolating themselves from disillusionment, these agencies were busy affirming values which were either under attack, forgotten, or going through the disquieting process of transformation."⁵⁸

In the midst of an intellectual milieu given over to pragmatism and subjectivism, American Catholics insisted that man at his best could come to know a truth outside himself, and by following that truth could both sanctify his soul and regenerate the world around him. In a culture whose sole dogma was pluralism, they held forth the uniqueness of the Church of Christ. Where progressives wanted to reconstruct the social sciences in a nondogmatic, nonsectarian way and without recourse to natural law, Catholics continued to pioneer in these disciplines, convinced that only a sound philosophy of man could render these fields truly fruitful. There was, of course, a heavy price to

pay in scorn, ridicule, and contempt. But it was this strategy of assimilation and resistance that sustained American Catholics in a hostile environment, and that kept the Church ever mindful of the unique mission it possessed, in the words of Pius X's personal motto, "to restore all things in Christ."

Notes

1. A much lengthier treatment of the issues raised here, and others besides, can be found in Thomas E. Woods Jr., "Ever Ancient, Ever New: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2000).
2. Albion Small, "The Bonds of Nationality," *American Journal of Sociology* 20 (1915): 678.
3. Eldon J. Eisenach, *The Lost Promise of Progressivism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp. 60, 7. Emphasis added.
4. "Father Blakely States the Issue," *New Republic* 7 (July 29, 1916): 320.
5. Edward A. Pace, "Education," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 1913. Emphasis added.
6. James A. Nuechterlein, "The Dream of Scientific Liberalism: The *New Republic* and American Progressive Thought, 1914-1920," *Review of Politics* 42 (1980): 175.
7. "Father Blakely States the Issue," p. 320.
8. Jude P. Dougherty, "Dewey and the Value of Religion," *New Scholasticism* 1 (Summer 1977): 324-25. Horace Kallen, who was a close associate of Dewey, would later set forth a vision of liberty that "cannot favor any race or cult of man over any other; nor any human doctrine and discipline over any other." The God of the theologians was also *ipso facto* excluded from this new society, which called for a deity who "brings forth impartially all the infinite diversities of experience and who allows men to survive or to perish by their own dispositions and abilities." Horace M. Kallen, *The Liberal Spirit: Essays on the Problems of Freedom in the Modern World* (New York and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), pp. 190; 91-127; quoted in Paul Edward Gottfried, *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 60-61.
9. Robert M. Crunden, "Essay," in John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, *Progressivism* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1977), pp. 75-76, 96.
10. Thomas Edward Shields, "Some Relations Between the Catholic School and the Public School System," *Catholic Educational Review* 12 (September 1916): 137.
11. "Survey of the Field," *Catholic Educational Review* 1 (March 1911): 259.
12. Thomas J. Shahan, D.D., "Fifty Years of Catholic Education," *Catholic World* (April 1915): 25.
13. Cf. Thomas J. Shahan, "The Teaching Office of the Catholic Church," *Catholic Educational Review* 6 (September 1916): 108; Robert M. Barry and John D. Fearon, "John Dewey and American Thomism," *American Benedictine Review* 10 (1959): 219-28.
14. John J. Tracy, "The Church as an Educational Factor," *Catholic Educational Review* 6 (October 1913): 213.

15. Pace, "Education."
16. Thomas Edward Shields, "The Teaching of Religion," *Catholic Educational Review* 1 (January 1911): 56.
17. Pace, "Education."
18. Paul L. Blakely, "The Era of Reconstruction," *America* 12 (October 17, 1914): 21.
19. Thomas Edward Shields, *The Psychology of Education* (Washington: The Catholic Correspondence School, 1906).
20. Thomas Edward Shields, "Catholic Teachers and Educational Progress," *Catholic World* 83 (April 1906): 101.
21. Shields insisted that Catholics' readiness to adopt salutary innovations from the secular world did not reflect a readiness to surrender their distinctiveness or to become assimilated to values foreign to their faith: "The willingness of our Catholic teachers to look for help beyond their own order, or even outside the Catholic Church and her institutions, must not be taken as evidence of the surrender of principle, nor must it be taken to mean an abandonment of anything which these teachers consider essential; nor does it mean an express desire on the part of our schools or of our teaching communities to coalesce with non-Catholic systems of education." Shields, "Catholic Teachers and Educational Progress," p. 98.
22. Justine Ward, *Thomas Edward Shields: Biologist, Psychologist, Educator* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 219; John Francis Murphy, "Thomas Edward Shields: Religious Educator" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), pp. 108-109.
23. Murphy, "Thomas Edward Shields: Religious Educator," p. 104.
24. Paul Blakely, S.J., "The Catholic Charities and the Strong Commission," *America* 15 (May 6, 1916): 78.
25. J. Harding Fisher, S.J., "What Is the Natural Law?" *America* 14 (March 25, 1916): 557; cf. James J. Fox, "The 'Evolution' Theory of Morality," *Catholic University Bulletin* 3 (October 1897): 373-403.
26. Simon N. Patten, *The Social Basis of Religion* (New York, Macmillan, 1911), p. 239.
27. Joseph Husslein, S.J., "The Literature of Materialistic Sociology," *America* 18 (March 29, 1918): 635.
28. Thomas F. Coakley, "Sin or Psychoneurosis?" *America* 27 (July 1, 1922): 261.
29. Charles A. Ellwood, *The Reconstruction of Religion: A Sociological View* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 127-32.
30. See Patten, *Social Basis of Religion*, pp. 193-205, 227-47 and *passim*; see also Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), pp. 273-74.
31. Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel*, pp. 257-79. The Protestant revivalist preacher Billy Sunday remarked: "The trouble with the church, the YMCA, and the Young People's Societies is that they have taken up sociology and settlement work but are not winning souls to Christ." William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 148.
32. Paul L. Blakely, S.J., "A Neglected Faculty," *America* 13 (September 4, 1915): 527.

33. Coakley, "Sin or Psychoneurosis," p. 262.
34. Joseph Husslein, S.J., *The Catholic's Work in the World: A Practical Solution of Religious and Social Problems of Today* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1917), p. 190.
35. John W. Maguire, C.S.V., "'Modern Sociology' Again," *America* 17 (April 21, 1917), p. 48.
36. On Kerby, see Timothy N. Dolan, "Prophet of a Better Hope: The Life and Work of Monsignor William Joseph Kerby" (M.A. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1981); Mary M. Klein, "A Bio-Bibliography of William J. Kerby, 1870-1936" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University, 1955); Bruce H. Lescher, "William J. Kerby: A Lost Voice in American Catholic Spirituality," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Pennsylvania* 102 (Spring 1991): 1-16.
37. Patrick W. Carey, *The Roman Catholics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), pp. 256-57.
38. William J. Kerby, "Sociology," *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 1913.
39. William J. Kerby, *The Social Mission of Charity: A Study of Points of View in Catholic Charities* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 52-53.
40. Loretto R. Lawler, *Full Circle: The Story of the National Catholic School of Social Service, 1918-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), pp. 36-37. In 1947 the School merged with the School of Social Service of the Catholic University of America.
41. The characterization of Burke as a moderate progressive comes from Carey, *The Roman Catholics*, p. 183. On Burke, see John B. Sheerin, C.S.P., *Never Look Back: The Career and Concerns of John Burke* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), a biography written before Burke's papers were opened to scholars; see also Douglas J. Slawson, "John J. Burke, C.S.P.: The Vision and Character of a Public Churchman," *Journal of Paulist Studies* 4 (1995-96): 47-93. On the NCWC, see Douglas J. Slawson, *The Foundation and First Decade of the National Catholic Welfare Council* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992).
42. John J. Burke, Baccalaureate sermon delivered at the College of Mount Saint Vincent-on-Hudson, New York, May 30, 1915. Copy in Burke Papers, Box 31. Burke insisted tirelessly on this point. A merely humanistic altruism starved and impoverished the soul; it was devoid of Christian charity, "the union, the life of the soul with and in God . . . the Holy Spirit, living, reigning within us." John J. Burke, "With Our Readers: Father Hecker and Present Problems," *Catholic World* 110 (January 1920): 564-70.
43. John J. Burke, Address to the National Catholic Welfare Council, n.d. Copy in Burke Papers, Box 54, Paulist Fathers Archives, Washington, D.C.
44. John J. Burke, "The Roots of Catholic Organization," address to the National Council of Catholic Men, n.d. Copy in Burke Papers, Box 54.
45. Rose Ferguson to John J. Burke, Holy Thursday 1923, John J. Burke Papers, Box 65. See also Alice S. Duffy to Burke, Holy Thursday 1923, *ibid.*
46. Henry Pratt Fairchild, *Outline of Applied Sociology* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 176. Catholic intellectuals often spoke in euphemism on topics they considered delicate, so when Kerby alluded to some of the disagreeable aspects of a scientific charity that was uninformed by the Catholic faith, he may well have had its advocacy of contraception in mind.
47. "The Evils of Birth Control," *America* 23 (June 5, 1920): 159.

48. Dr. John J. Cronin, "The Doctor in the Public School," *American Monthly Review of Reviews* 35 (April 1907): 440.

49. Speaking in a natural-law vein, Ryan explained that "it is on exactly the same moral level and is wrong for precisely the same reason as the practice of solitary vice." Quoted in Paul L. Blakely, S.J., "The 'Birth-Controllers,'" *America* 16 (March 24, 1917): 580-81.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

51. Paul Blakely, S.J., "The Catholic Charities and the Strong Commission," *America* 15 (May 6, 1916), p. 78.

52. Paul L. Blakely, S.J., "The Bad Samaritan," *America* 12 (November 21, 1914), p. 154.

53. Paul L. Blakely, S.J., "Cooperation Without Compromise," *America* 16 (November 18, 1916), p. 126.

54. Hilaire Belloc, *The Great Heresies* (1938; reprint, Rockford, IL: TAN, 1991), p. 160.

55. Peter A. Huff, *Allen Tate and the Catholic Revival: Trace of the Fugitive Gods* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 28-29.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

57. William M. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956-57).

58. *Ibid.*, p. 57.