

McGREEVY BOOK REVIEW FORUM

## Introduction for John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis* (2022)

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Approximately one third of the world is Christian, and half of those are Roman Catholics. The demographics alone make writing a global history of Catholicism a mammoth task. To attempt the impossible, Professor John T. McGreevy of Notre Dame University has tackled a theme that plays itself out over multiple centuries and diverse cultural settings—the conversation, negotiation, tension, and conflict between traditionalism and modernization. Given that conservatism and progressivism shift meanings according to historical context, the implications of each position *in situ* are complex and surprising. Only a scholar of McGreevy’s maturity and erudition could hope to succeed in such a bold enterprise.

*Catholicism* is a major contribution to framing the history of Roman Catholicism as transnational history. McGreevy has moved beyond parochial and nationalist interpretations to situate Christianity’s largest faith as a vibrant network of interconnected theologies, personalities, and ecclesial interests. According to the participants in this book forum, he has made a substantial contribution both to the larger history of Catholicism and to their own specializations. Each scholar works on Catholicism in the modern period but in a different geographic region. Charles Keith, author of *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*, is a historian of Southeast Asia. Religious historian Jennifer Scheper Hughes works on lived religion in Catholic Mexico, as seen in her book *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present*. Head of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Nairobi, Jean-Luc Enyegue, S.J., is author of *Competing Catholicisms: The Jesuits, the Vatican & the Making of Postcolonial French Africa*. Catholic historian Leslie Woodcock Tentler has written numerous works on twentieth-century Catholicism in the United States, including *American Catholics: A History*. Together, McGreevy and the panelists constitute an exciting and robust exchange of diverse perspectives on the meaning of Catholicism in the modern and postmodern worlds.

McGreevy’s *Catholicism* was at the top of my summer reading list. Like the panelists, I deeply appreciate his global and comparative approach and find that it gives me fresh insights into such issues as the multivalent meaning of ultramontanist and the incisive importance of the Second Vatican Council. As mission historian, I particularly appreciate McGreevy’s focus on bridge figures who, for good or for ill, linked theologies

across empires and cultures. I agree with the panelists that this book is still but an introduction to the massive expansion of Catholicism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How the world church has become largely African and Latin American is a story waiting to be told. As this panel attests, McGreevy's creative scholarship confirms the importance of the global turn in religious history. *Catholicism* will inspire new insights for years to come.

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