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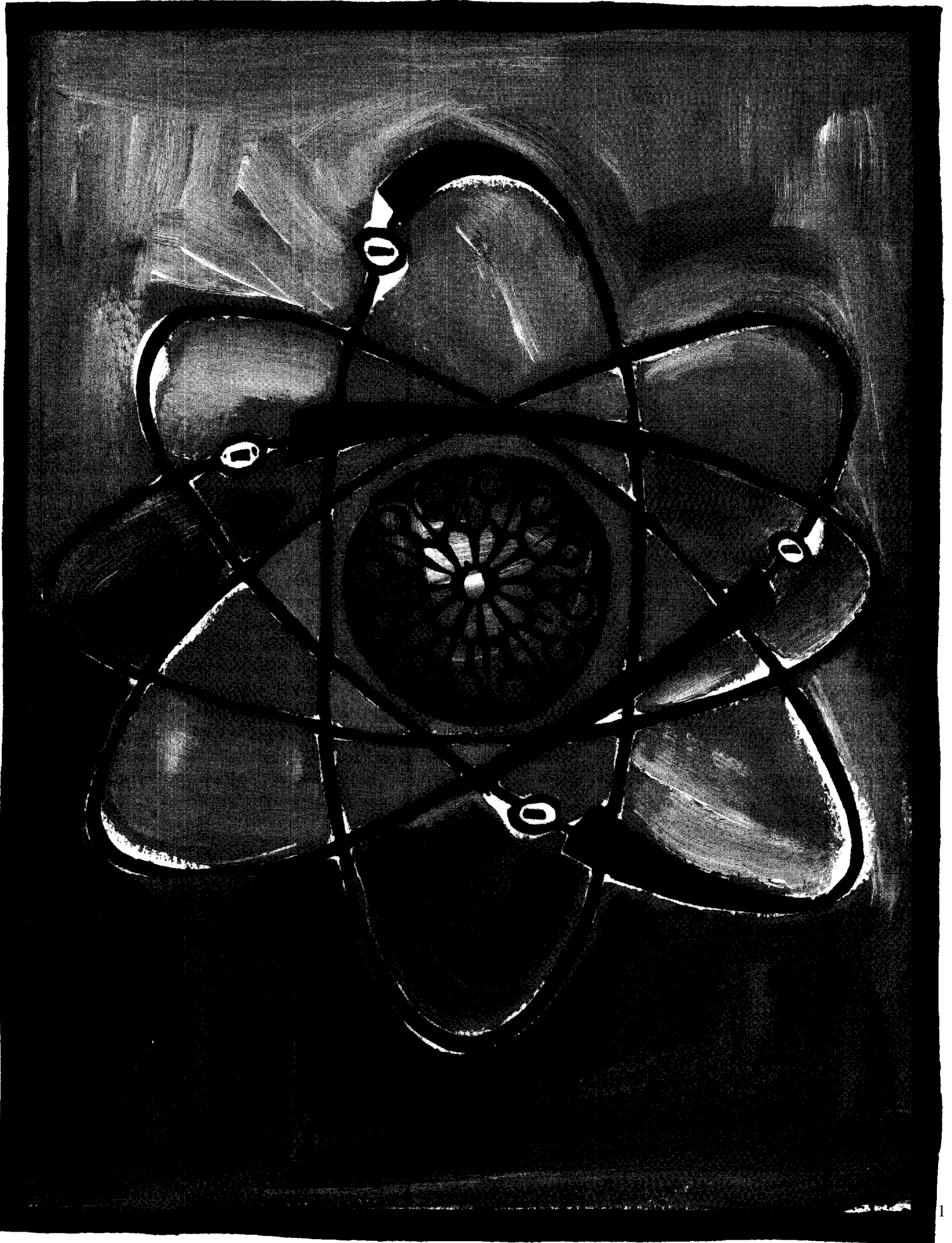
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The Backwardness of American Catholicism

MICHAEL J. LACEY

Let me begin with a bit of indirection. There is a passage at the opening of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) where W.E.B. DuBois speaks about one of those awkward moments in the etiquette of race relations that sometimes strained the conversation of the liberals of a century ago. "Between me and the other world," he says, referring to his relations with the white people, mostly good hearted Congregationalists, who surrounded and supported him as he grew up in late-nineteenth-century New England, "there is ever an unasked question, unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter around it. They approach me in a half hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly how does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or I fought at Mechanicsville; or Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?" At these, says DuBois, "I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, how does it feel to be a problem, I answer seldom a word" (363).

His book was an exploration of what it felt like to be a problem, to be caught up in the turmoil of a fast-moving, secularizing, improvisational culture, too busy for the most part to reflect upon itself, and only dimly aware even of the burden of its racism and thus ill prepared to comprehend it. It was a culture deeply infatuated with science, which it believed to be the authentic source of dynamism in modern life, and with the new universities that served the needs of the spirit of science and critical scholarship. It was a culture increasingly ill at ease with theology, suspicious of philosophy, and proud of the practical bent it brought as a matter

of course to every question, no matter how recondite. It was a culture confident, finally, that given enough time and technology, free enterprise and mass education, everything would be all right—there would be enough of everything for everyone, even those who made up the "backward races," as they were called, those thirsty riders who trailed the caravan.

DuBois, too, was intrigued by the problem-solving potential of the scientific enterprise; he, too, had the highest hopes for the modern university, which he considered to be the real "secret of civilization." But unlike some of his contemporaries he nonetheless perceived the futility of scientism when confronted with stubborn moral and political questions, and he never lost sight of the deeper philosophical issues at stake in late-century social and economic developments. "So woefully unorganized is sociological knowledge," he tells us, "that the meaning of progress, the meaning of swift and slow in human doing, and the limits of human perfectability, are veiled, unanswered sphinxes on the shores of science" (544).

It is a painful thing to be a problem, to feel oneself a member of a backward group in a forward age, and DuBois's genius was to write memorably about the truths he discovered as he thought through the attempts of black folk to live with and into the dynamism of modern civilization. He writes about the stress of liv-

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ing in a white man's world which yields the black man "no true self consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others" (364). One ever feels one's "twoness," as DuBois puts it.

I cite DuBois here because I think there is something in his outlook on modern American culture that speaks to our own experience of it, and thus may have some bearing, however indirect, on my main theme. The feeling of "twoness" or double consciousness that DuBois talks about is hardly limited to African-Americans. On the contrary, as we have come slowly to understand, it is the mark of intelligent participation in modernity itself and is quite characteristic, to a greater or lesser degree, of all reflective people in today's vast, overactive society, so beset by the problems of multiculturalism even while it continues rather hopefully to extol the virtues of its diversity. In recent decades with the almost painful growth of consciousness about the nuances of our differences along the lines of race, class, gender, and worldview—with the new awareness of the potent influence of these subtle nuances upon whatever identities we choose personally to assert or to repress—we have been exploring in all its possible combinations, it seems, this sense of doubleness, or perhaps more accurately, of multiple identity, in which DuBois pioneered.

I believe it to be the case that American Catholics of whatever racial and ethnic background, like African Americans and many other groups, suffer, if that is the proper term, from this sense of twoness or double consciousness. In saying so I don't mean to highjack DuBois's understandably proprietary feeling for the really distinctive injury and memory of it suffered by blacks. Like him I would find absurd the suggestion that the Irish, Italians, and Poles, for example, were treated as badly by those who led the caravan as were those once enslaved who were so easily identified by color thereafter as outsiders.

I do mean to suggest, however, that in broad cultural terms, Catholics, too, have long been regarded by America's non-Catholic intellectual elites as something of a problem. It is only the difficulty of "rightly framing the question," to use DuBois's phrasing, that has spared us from being asked more often what it feels like to be members of a backward race, intellectually speaking, with an old-world mumbo jumbo all our own, fraught with formalism and clericalism, and marked by a communal history that was shaped in America by a spirit of defensiveness and the feeling, so long evident to outsiders, of being beleaguered by the main currents in modern thought. Like African Americans, Catholics, too, have long been uncomfortably conscious of being watched, of a kind of cultural surveillance in which the condition of their minds and hearts was monitored not only by Rome but by many impressive and perhaps equally well intentioned non-Catholic communities in America as well. As a result Catholics, too, have experienced the sense, as DuBois put it, of "always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (364).

One sign of the presence of this double consciousness and the anxieties it produces has been the recurrent appearance in recent historiography on American Catholicism of the so called "Catholic

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rian Philip Gleason has noted, emerged in the 1950's to become "the central issue in American Catholic life" (72). While it can hardly be construed as a truly popular concern within the Church (understandably enough the millions do not fret over it), for me personally it remains the central issue, and its eventual resolution has implications not only for Catholics but perhaps for the future character of modern culture more generally.

There are two good reasons for this worry about backwardness. They are closely related and there is enough truth in each of them rightly to cause us some discomfort. First is the generally undistinguished quality of Catholic colleges and universities as centers for research—not, I hasten to observe, as centers for education, where they often do very well. The Catholic educational system attempts to replicate the public educational system top to bottom, but it is weak at the topmost level, while the system made up of the public universities and the now non-denominational private ones is very strong at that level, indeed, the strongest in the world. This public system is at the heart of modern American culture, and for good or ill the conduct of research, led by autonomous, self-governing academic disciplines, is at the heart of the public system. Catholics long ago chose not to commend the system to their young, first because of its Protestantism, later because of its secularism. These were not groundless concerns. Bottom to top the schools *were* rooted in a Protestant ethos, and now they are indeed secular; but they are also the institutions which at their best sustain the most powerful and difficult and fruitful forms of intellectual inquiry developed in the modern world. Their Catholic counterparts, on the other hand, from the beginning had difficulty with the spirit of modern inquiry itself, and over the long run did not generate the vivid alternative that many hoped for when Catholic educators rather haphazardly set themselves to replicating the non-Catholic system at the level of the research oriented-graduate school. Catholic universities and colleges simply did not become centers for research and interpretation of comparable vitality.

The Catholic intellectualism debate is a complex, many-angled affair, difficult to reduce to a few simple points; but for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that it turns on relations between a secular culture and a religious subculture. Implicitly or otherwise the debate involves a comparison. On the one hand we find the intellectual achievements in the arts and sciences of a vast, well funded and organized, elaborately specialized, and in principle secular academic culture. It is a culture that is open—again in principle—to all without regard to gender, creed, class, or color. On the other hand we find the corresponding intellectual achievements of a clerically led, denominational subculture, perceived by outsiders and by many insiders as less concerned with the increase of knowledge than with the maintenance of tradition and the preservation of the faith.

I do not mean to belittle these aims; the maintenance of tradition and the preservation of the faith are as valid as objectives can be. Nor as I see it are they necessarily conservative aims, in either theological or political terms, as is so often charged by the cultured despisers of religion. The question is whether the aims can be achieved without more confident address to the challenge of <http://publications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol8/iss1/3> modernity in the arts and sciences, theology most certainly included, and on this issue I have doubts.

Stated starkly as I have done it here, the unevenness of the contest of the two systems is apparent. In the most comprehensive and scientifically sophisticated survey yet conducted of the quality and prestige of American scholarship and science in all departments in all universities, public and private (a multi-million dollar project conducted nearly a decade ago under the auspices of the Conference Board of Associated Research Councils), the Catholic universities simply did not do well. With one exception, and that of minor importance, Catholic departments did not rank in the top twenty in any field of study. (The philosophy department of the University of Notre Dame ranked twentieth.) The Catholic University of America, which played such an important historic role in the attempts to upgrade higher education within the subculture, ranked in the lowest one-sixth of universities involved in doctoral education.

Faculty members of the Catholic colleges and universities routinely have fared poorly in competition for the fellowships and grants provided by government and the major foundations. As Andrew Greeley, who since the 1960's has paid close attention to the interlocking problems involved, puts the matter in the nutshell, the Catholic universities are "thus far failures as research institutions" and have not "on the average even begun to approach what would be considered presentable mediocrity in the American academic marketplace" (146).

The second reason for the feeling of backwardness is related to the first, and helps to explain why the Catholic universities have been so half-hearted in their commitment to scholarly inquiry of the contemporary type. If one knows the truth, a joking friend once said to me, then why worry about research? No doubt there is much to be said for the contemplative life as something distinct from the life of academic inquiry, but to insist on the point *ab initio* is not a very promising approach to the mysteries of the scholarly disciplines. And perhaps it is too close to representing an official Catholic point of view on the vexations of scholarship. We are not alone in this, since all the great religions have had their problems in responding to the incessant challenges to belief and to the practices derived from belief that have been raised by the growth of modern knowledge.

But the Catholic response in the last third of nineteenth century and thereafter was so sweeping, so bent on authoritative teaching while so indifferent to secular learning, so centralized, so confident in identifying scholasticism as the proper way through the maze, so well communicated throughout the vastness of its ecclesiastical system, and finally so well and so publicly policed at the cost frequently of silencing its most brilliant people, that Catholic intellectuals have been suspect in non-Catholic circles ever since. With good reason outsiders suspect that their loyalty to the church is stronger than their commitment to the life of the mind. Outsiders suspect that they do not really understand the depth and intensity of the struggle that modern secular scholarship at its best has been engaged in, the heroic side of it, and just how hard won its victories have been. A certain element of strenuousness is felt to be missing in Catholic intellectual life, and outsiders suspect that rather than wrestling with the real demons of modernity, too often Catholics have been wrestling with straw men, under the approving gaze of their ecclesiastical superiors. With standards so low (for so it seems to the suspicious), it is no wonder

*Works on the history of Catholic intellectual life in the United States,
the Catholic intellectualism debate, and antimodernism*

Daly, Gabriel. *Transcendence and Immanence: A Study in Catholic Modernism and Integralism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.

Gleason, Philip. "American Catholic Higher Education: A Historical Perspective." In *The Shape of Catholic Higher Education*, edited by Robert Hassinger, 15-43. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Kurtz, Lester R. *The Politics of Heresy: The Modernist Crisis in Roman Catholicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Leahy, William P. *Adapting to America: Catholics, Jesuits, and Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991.

Neuhaus, Richard. *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Post-Modern World*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.

George Weigel. *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy*. New York: Paulist Press, 1989.

that belief comes easily to them. But of course it is no great achievement, either.

The whole legacy of Catholic antimodernism has been especially problematic in this regard, because it cast doubt not only upon certain dead ends in modern religious thought, but on many trends in thinking devoted to live ends also, and thus drew attention away from the kind of mental and moral work that needed doing at the time.¹ A critical rethinking of the antimodernist heritage is important, I think, because we need to recover some more generous and capacious sense of modern religious thought in all its complexity if we are seriously to remedy the kinds of backwardness we have been discussing.

The recovery might well begin by paying more attention than we have to the writings of those who did wrestle with the demons of modernity. Such creatures exist, though we have some difficulty in knowing how and where to look for them. As I see it there exists beneath the manifest, contentious pluralism of American culture a rather limited number of powerfully opposed, basic outlooks on the whole complex of modernity itself. Of these fundamental positions two are especially important. There is a naturalist standpoint, on the one hand, and on the other a standpoint that appears in many forms of religious modernism. I understand naturalism to mean what John Herman Randall, one of its ablest historians and expositors intended it to mean, namely, an epistemology, growing out of the premises and assumptions of scientific method, that "finds itself in thoroughgoing opposition to all forms of thought which assert the existence of a supernatural or transcendental realm of being and which make knowledge of that realm of fundamental importance to human living" (358). It is the distinctions that matter, not the name, and naturalism goes under different names in different contexts—pragmatism, instrumentalism, deconstruction, structural functionalism, antifoundationalism, and others. Whatever the name, the important point is that theology has no place in the discourse. In American intellectual culture, naturalism remains the supposition of the major shapers of the discourse.

Though it may not be fully articulated as a system of thought by its adherents, some form of naturalism, which is a vast and complex body of thought, is the predominant common-sense working philosophy on the secular campuses. John Dewey, America's greatest philosopher, was its most impressive and influential spokesman, and worked out the metaphysics of naturalism in *Experience and Nature* and its epistemology in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. Plainly it fits comfortably with the methodological requirements of the natural sciences and with the most straightforward aspects of the social sciences and humanities.

Religious modernism on the other hand is a much more ambiguous thing than naturalism, polyvalent in its reference, difficult to define precisely, and for historical reasons potentially dangerous for Catholics to define at all. Certainly the received notion that it represents "the synthesis of all heresies" is not as helpful a guide to critical reflection on the religious thought of the past century as one might have hoped for, and I am not clear myself on exactly where the post-Vatican II Church stands with respect to the whole legacy of antimodernist combat within the tradition.

Needless to say, I am speaking of modernism with a small "m" here. As I understand it, religious modernism would be nearly the reverse of Randall's definition of naturalism; that is, it would be a philosophical orientation comfortable with some of those forms of thought (a literalist approach to scripture would not be among them) which assert the existence of a supernatural or transcendental realm of being, and which make knowledge of that realm of fundamental importance to human living. Religious modernists, in other words, are not embarrassed by talk about the reality of God or even by the idea of the Church as an institution implicated, historically speaking, in mediating that reality. The religious modernists don't simply condemn modernity. They take it seriously and share in its searching, even the searches conducted by those who regard religious commitment itself as a soft-headed and intellectually irresponsible commitment to make. The modernists are not distressed by ambiguity; they can live with it, and they understand the sense in which they have to. It is a type of religious outlook or disposition that survives undaunted by the challenges of empirical science and critical history about which such a fuss was made in the latter part of the nineteenth century and, with diminishing intensity, long thereafter.

¹ The key Papal documents, of course, are *Pascendi Dominici* (1908) and *Sane Exitu* (July 3, 1907).

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The whereabouts of this disposition in the intellectual history of the twentieth century is an understudied subject, but it appears nevertheless that two important points about it can safely be asserted. First, there are religious modernists in all of the great historic religions and also among the unchurched who, because they are ashamed of the historic performance of the churches both socially and intellectually, prefer not to have anything to do with organized religion of any kind. (The examples that come to mind would include for Protestantism Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich; for Judaism Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, and Emmanuel Levinas; for the vaguely unchurched perhaps Charles S. Peirce, Josiah Royce, and William James.) We know very little, for example, in historical and biographical terms about the religious views of American academics, but no doubt there are many in all of the scientific and scholarly disciplines who would consider themselves, if we knew how to put the question to them rightly, as sympathetic to what I'm calling religious modernism. (I think here, for example, of recent autobiographical and biographical writing by or about Henry F. May, Northrop Frye, and Denis Donoghue.) Second, and in consequence of the first point, there exists an incipient and informal academic modernist community. Ecumenical relations, if you like, are possible; in fact, they are ongoing in the form of personal ties, friendships, and shared intellectual interests that proceed unrecognized and quite independently of whatever happens at the level of officialdom within the churches. Leaders within the Catholic Church show no interest in or knowledge of this community. But no matter—the modernists recognize one another when they meet. To put it differently, I believe there exists within the secular academic establishment an ill-defined ecumenical culture of religious modernists that may represent some untapped potential for the future elaboration of religious thought. It is composed partly of Catholic academics in many scholarly fields other than theology. Perhaps the lack of any formal organization of Catholic intellectuals and academics means that they, like some of their clergymen, perceive no relationship between the life of inquiry and their ecclesial life.

Naturalists and religious modernists can live amiably together and cooperate on many things. On some questions, however, mutual understanding is difficult because their basic viewpoints are so strongly divergent. Indeed, they are incommensurable. The most important difference is the fact that they look upon human history in very different ways. If we consider history to be, as I do, the stories that in some sense we inhabit (not simply because we like them, but because we believe them to be true), then it is clear that naturalists and religious modernists live in very different neighborhoods. Naturalists are likely to take a rather old-fashioned, secularization view of history, generally of the Comptian family, in which the intellectual experience of the human race proceeds through three historic stages, the theological, which marks the infancy of the race, the metaphysical, which banishes theology, and finally the scientific, which banishes metaphysics.² The modern stage, of course, is the one in which the naturalists

² The work of Richard Rorty, one of the most influential naturalists on the contemporary scene, provides an excellent example of this mind-set. See especially *Consequences of Pragmatism* and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*

Selected works of the religious modernists
(listed in the order in which they are discussed in the text)

BERNARD LONERGAN

The starting points are *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) and *Method in Theology* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1972). I find Lonergan's essays on religion and theology especially pertinent to the religious modernism theme. See particularly those in *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) and in *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). In connection with the theme of "twoness" or multiple identity, see his "Belief: Today's Issue," *Second Collection*, 87-99, for an elaboration of the idea that modern culture is the culture that knows about other cultures.

KARL RAHNER

Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY

We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1960) and *The Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

DAVID TRACY

Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) together with *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1975) and *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroads, 1981).

WILLIAM SHEA

The Naturalists and the Supernatural: Studies in Horizon and an American Philosophy of Religion (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University

Press, 1984); "From Classicism to Method: John Dewey and Bernard Lonergan," *American Journal of Education* (May, 1991): 298-319.

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

CHARLES TAYLOR

Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

ALASDAIR MACINTYRE

Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

NICHOLAS LASH

See his discussion of William James, Von Hügel, Buber and others in *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986) and his analysis of Marx in *A Matter of Hope: a Theologian's Reflections on the Thought of Karl Marx* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981).

DENIS DONOGHUE

For a good example of his style of theologically informed criticism of literary scholarship, see his review of Harold Bloom's *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (1989): "The Sad Captain of Criticism," *New York Review of Books* (March 2, 1989): 22-24. Of Donoghue's many books I would recommend particularly *The Sovereign Ghost* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), together with *Ferocious Alphabets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) and *Connoisseurs of Chaos: Ideas of Order in Modern American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

flourish, and the whole thing is felt by them to have been in some sense fated.

For religious modernists, on the other hand, history did not happen this way at all. Responsibly reporting on it results in a different kind of story altogether. While it is true enough that modern science followed on metaphysics and theology, it does not follow, from the religious modernists' standpoint, that either theology or metaphysics is obsolete nonsense. Secularization is for them, too, a reality, but not so decisive and triumphalist a reality. Religious thought is not routed by other kinds of thought, but rather awakened and challenged by them. Indeed, what finally counts in history is the dynamism of the exchange between the secular and the religious in the life of the mind. Working in that dynamism is what religious modernism is all about.

One implication of this clearly relates to the status of theology as an intellectual discipline. While all religious modernists are not theologians (in fact technically speaking few of them are), all would grant the foundational importance of the discipline itself.

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The sense in which it is the greatest and most difficult of all subjects. Theology

is not simply another academic field, like psychology or the history of art. It is foundational in that it works with the most important of all claims, the reality of God. While theology is no longer conceived as the regulatory master of the other discourses, still it remains stubbornly committed to first principles in a manner different from the other discourses. Religious modernists have an interest in seeing that these stubborn commitments persist. They want theologians to keep their own house in order, and would certainly be among the critics of those theologians who lose confidence in their own proper work and drift away from its peculiar, foundational exigencies.

It follows that while theology has no future in naturalist circles, it may have a future elsewhere, perhaps extending beyond the confines of the denominations, where for the most part it remains a very specialized discourse only imperfectly assimilated by those who are not religious professionals. In most places most of the time theology has been an element of priestcraft, and cannot be said to have been part of the literary and intellectual experience of the people, even the non-priestly intellectual elites among them.⁷ The religious modernists represent the possibility that such may

not be the case in the future. Perhaps they represent in embryo a new kind of audience that will help to sustain the whole theological enterprise, considered simply as a form of critical scholarly inquiry that depends for its cultural vitality on the degree to which it satisfactorily answers questions of interest to its readers.

No doubt these remarks on religious modernism are too vague to indicate the kinds of writing I have in mind, and perhaps a few examples will help to clarify what I mean. They are taken, necessarily so, from my own reading, and while I mentioned that modernists are found in all the great religious traditions and outside of them as well, the following examples are taken from contemporary Catholicism. Though my exemplars might not be happy with the label, all, I think, represent a modernist sensibility. The point I wish to register is that each of them has been doing intellectually exciting work with modernism, rather than simply prophesying against it.

For me personally Bernard Lonergan was the great central figure in all of this, and while he is not to everyone's taste, his writing still represents for me the most impressive response of any twentieth-century religious thinker to the whole complex of modernity. Of course Karl Rahner and John Courtney Murray are authentic major thinkers and must be read. David Tracy is for me one of the most exciting minds in the American academic community today, and his style of theological interpretation as cultural criticism is new and important to American Catholicism, the sort of thing that no theologian other than Paul Tillich has managed well, and Tillich not so well as Tracy in my view. I think that William Shea's book *The Naturalists and the Supernatural* (1984), a sympathetic retrieval and critique of the thinking of American naturalists on religion, is one of the most impressive achievements of Catholic scholarship in the past decade and a model for how other deep currents in American thought might be usefully addressed. Leszek Kolakowski, the great critic of Marxist thought and practice and commentator on contemporary philosophy and religious thought, a man who underwent the same kind of cultural "formation" that produced Karol Wojtyła, has written brilliantly on the problems of the modern scene. So has Charles Taylor, the Canadian philosopher, and Alasdair MacIntyre, now at Notre Dame, and the English theologian Nicholas Lash. Finally I would mention Denis Donoghue, the Irish literary critic, whose essays and reviews on the modern literatures and literary scholarship of America, England, and Ireland are so deeply yet unobtrusively informed by the most exacting theological and philosophical learning.

Let me conclude on a personal and hortatory note. I grew up in the 1950's and early 1960's at the tail end of that period in our religious history that students of it increasingly have come to call Catholicism's ghetto period—and without so much as a nod to DuBois. It stretched roughly from the late 19th century to the second Vatican Council. In sociological terms the period was about immigration, ethnicity, and the attempts of the Church through its schools to forge and sustain a distinctively Catholic American identity. In cultural and intellectual terms, it was the period of neoscholasticism, our chosen path through the wilderness of modernity, which, as historian Philip Gleason has noted, in fact did function as a common framework and vocabulary for

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Catholic scholars and intellectuals (“Keeping the Faith,” 71-88, 166-177).

But for most of us the ghetto period is over. Its fading coincided with the collapse of neo-scholasticism, which went down to exhaustion after a long period of trial and seems to have died in its sleep. The end of the ghetto period also coincided with the onset of the second Vatican Council and the vast social turmoil of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and so it is no wonder that we all emerged confused and find ourselves at something of a loss about how to characterize the intellectual life that goes on within contemporary Catholicism. We haven’t sorted all this out, and any appraisal of the legacy of neo-scholasticism is complicated business. At its best, the revival of scholasticism did help to keep alive the tradition of Christian realism and a corresponding openness to theology, and that was no mean achievement. It also kept alive in Catholic circles a concern with natural law as the grounding for thinking about human rights claims, an especially important matter given the widespread loss of conviction about the existence of any potent philosophical foundations for rights claims in the contemporary academy.

Its failures were equally important, however. With rare exception it never really did engage the most influential currents in modern thought, though it tried mightily to refute them. We now know from historical study what we sensed all along, for example, that narrow views on scholastic antimodernism could and did render pathetic the intellectual lives of many among our clergy, and seriously hobbled the progress of Catholic biblical scholarship as well. Some among us would like to see scholasticism restored, in the hope that if only we tried harder perhaps we could make it work this time. Speaking for myself, I can’t imagine that any kiss of recognition, no matter who administers it, could bring this sleeping beauty back to life.

So where does that leave us, particularly with reference to those reasons for the feelings of cultural backwardness that have been cited, the Catholic ambivalence toward research at the top levels of the disciplines, and the ambiguous relation, historically speaking, of the Church to the growth of knowledge?

What we are searching for, it seems to me as a layman, is a new idiom in which theological discourse can proceed beyond the circles of religious professionals, and can do so without giving the impression that it is not fully honest in its workings as an intellectual discipline. Perhaps we are trying to develop a new kind of theological literacy, and looking for a new and broader conception of religious education, comparable in some fashion to the processes of civic education, as something we are all necessarily engaged in and which goes on throughout the whole of one’s life as a routine aspect of participation in community.

One small part of this problem is the future of our higher educational system, which is plainly crucial to the continuing development of American Catholicism, and I have a closing suggestion to make about that. While we would all like to see our Catholic colleges and universities become more vigorous and active as centers for research, there must be some way of accomplishing this short of the vain hope of bringing into being a “Catholic Harvard,” as some have put the problem. The great universities are great *because* of their secularity, and this is a mixed blessing as many now recognize.⁹ There is no point in trying to imitate them in such a way as to com-

promise the continuity of the Catholic religious tradition, and this is what would surely happen if the standards and norms of the disciplines themselves simply and uncritically were given free reign in university governance. As I see it, there is nothing of value to be gained by Catholic higher education following the secularization process of the Protestant colleges and universities.³ On the other hand, it is equally absurd not to acknowledge that ambivalence about the whole research enterprise is a deep problem within Catholic higher education, and that complacency on this score could become a kind of degenerative disease.

Much more money and time and attention should be spent on Catholic scholarship than is spent at present, and if something is not done about this problem, there will be fewer and fewer reasons for scholars to think about devoting their lives to Catholic universities. There are institutional problems aplenty in this area, but I would recommend that rather than thinking simply in terms of gradually developing through marginal improvements a great, comprehensive Catholic university, we think instead about creating a more modest, more flexible, more specialized, and altogether more modern institutional form. We ought to think about establishing some kind of institute for advanced study to be devoted to the needs of Catholic scholars in all of the humanities and the social sciences, and to involve the participation in governance of both clerical and lay people.

If theology is to be considered a mediating or correlational discipline, as Lonergan, for example, suggested it must be (and Lonergan, let us remember, was as committed to the foundational dimensions of theology as it is possible to be), it follows that theology must be not *simply* foundational, but rooted in something other than itself as well, namely knowledge of the culture in which it is functioning. That knowledge has to be earned and developed the hard way. Such an institute, if properly conceived and funded on a scale proportionate to the problem, might make this needed kind of address to the scholarly life of modern culture more feasible than it has been in the past. Given the institutional density of Catholic higher education in America—with the faculty of some 230 colleges and universities to work with—such an institute might address the needs of the system as a whole and not succumb to the underlying problems of localism, decentralism, and the embarrassing inability to cooperate that have beset the Catholic system from the beginning. For those who insist that problems of practice are somehow more urgent than those of theory and scholarship (a view I find confused and confusing), such an institute might provide a place where problems of the relation between knowledge and action could be brought into useful tension so as to make our mental and moral life more efficient than it seems to be at the moment. Most importantly, perhaps, such an

institute might contribute to insuring that members of the rising Catholic intellectual community, whatever their personal disagreements and differences, had some sense of themselves as a community, which would be something importantly new to American Catholicism.

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³ See in this connection James Tunstead Burtchaell, "The Decline and Fall of the Christian College" and "The Decline and Fall of the Christian College (II)," for a careful discussion of the process of secularization undergone by America's Protestant colleges and universities, together with the pointed warning that the Catholic colleges of today may be stumbling down the same slippery slope. On the vexing problem of academic freedom as a component of the evolving historical situation, see Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Higher Education, Theology, and Academic Freedom*.