Speaking of Diversity
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As was noted in chapter 10, the interaction between religion and immigration has only recently begun to attract the attention of historians. In the field of American Catholic history—to stick to the work I know best—religion was in the past so closely identified with the institutional church and its official leaders that Catholic historians traditionally paid little attention to immigration or “nationality” except when it became a problem disturbing the ecclesiastical scene. This, to be sure, began to change when the vogue of social history turned the attention of younger scholars to ethnicity and other nonecclesiastical dimensions of Catholic group life. But the social historians’ tendency to interpret religion as merely an “aspect” of ethnicity leads to its own distortion by undervaluing the importance of religion as an independent variable.

My own view, which goes back to my doctoral work on German-American Catholics, is that ethnicity and religion must both be taken into account and that the interaction between them is not only complex but also shifting and situational—that is, shaped by generational transition and a multitude of contingent historical factors. The following essay was not written to illustrate that belief, but it is impossible to follow the use of Americanism in Catholic discourse without observing that it and the related term Americanization have been applied both to the very “ethnic” issue of immigrant assimilation and to broader ideological or “religious” questions having to do with the adaptation of Catholic belief and practice to American circumstances. Tracing this semantic history over the long term reveals many shifts in the close interrelationship between the two kinds of issue; but it also shows that over time the religious connotations of “Americanism” became more important and the ethnic less so. Another quite interesting finding brought to light by this survey of usage is that historical study of a particular episode of “Americanism” played a key role in reintroducing the term into Catholic discourse in the mid twentieth century.

The essay that follows synthesizes two articles, both extensively
The terms Americanism and Americanization loom large in the history and historiography of the Roman Catholic church in the United States. Generally speaking, they refer to the relationship of the Catholic church, or of Catholics as a subgroup of the population, to the social, political, and cultural environment of the nation. From their form alone, one would expect to find Americanism employed where these relationships are discussed at the level of abstract principle and Americanization used where attention is focused on the actual processes of interaction between church and society. This is a good rule of thumb, but there are some complications. For example, historians who talk about “Americanism” often have in mind an intra-Catholic controversy that arose in the 1890s over an alleged heresy known by that name; and “Americanization” may refer either to the assimilation of Catholic immigrants or to changes in the structure or mode of operation of the church as an institution. The evaluative overtones carried by these terms can be either positive or negative, depending on whether the user approves or disapproves the phenomena to which they refer.

The phenomena in question are important not only to understanding the development of American Catholicism but also to understanding the nature and limits of American “diversity.” For discussions employing these terms have to do with the compatibility of the Catholic religion with American values and institutions; with the social, cultural, and ideological accommodations the church has had to make to the American environment; and with the interaction of Catholic ethnic groups among
themselves, with other elements of the population, and with the institutions of the host society.

These issues are too broad and complex for comprehensive treatment in a short essay, but they lend themselves to the semantic history approach. We can, in other words, follow the same method employed in part 1 of this book, inquiring how the terms Americanism and Americanization have functioned in the discourse of American Catholics. Such a review will shed useful light on the substantive issues involved and help us identify elements of both continuity and change over a considerable span of time.

According to lexicographers, John Witherspoon, a well known Presbyterian divine and Revolutionary War patriot, introduced the term Americanism in 1781 to designate words or usages distinctive to the English language as it was spoken in the United States. As early as 1797, however, Thomas Jefferson referred to "the dictates of reason and pure Americanism," and in 1806 Noah Webster gave as one of the definitions of the word: "a love of America and preference of her interest." The standard Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles cites several examples of usage in this sense between 1807 and 1884, but Mitford M. Mathews points out that Americanism became associated with Know-Nothingism in the 1850s when it was applied to the principles of the nativist "American Party."

Americanization first appeared in the Know-Nothing era. It is of special interest for us that the earliest example cited by lexical scholars is from a Catholic source, Brownson's Quarterly Review for April 1858. Orestes A. Brownson, a convert to Catholicism, wrote in the passage cited, "All the Americanization I insist on is, that our Catholic population shall feel and believe that a man may be a true American and a good Catholic." I have not found earlier use of either term by Catholic writers; that negative finding, coupled with the evidence supplied by the lexicographers, strongly suggests that Catholics did not begin talking about Americanism and Americanization until the 1850s and that they did so then against the background of Know-Nothing nativism.

Since the nativists claimed to stand for Americanism, Catholic immigrants who were the object of their hostility tended to regard such terms as part of the polemic directed against them. Thus the Irish-American protested in 1858: "There is no cant more in vogue than that the Irish ought to lose their identity in the American people. Forget your past and become Americanized, is the common cry. It is, nevertheless, a false, foolish, and absurd cry. The great fault is the other way. The
Irish become *Americanized*, in a certain sense, far too thoroughly and too soon." Too rapid adoption of traits like individualism and materialism demoralized the newcomers, according to the *Irish-American*, but preserving the best of their old-country heritage would help immigrants "adopt and love what [was] good and noble" in the new homeland.  

Brownson, a Vermont Yankee by birth, did not find this line of argumentation to his liking. Although staunchly Catholic, he was also thoroughly American and could not enter fully into the feeling of his immigrant coreligionists on these matters. He could understand that they felt strong ties to their homelands and that religion and nationality were tightly interwoven in the case of the Irish. But these facts did not excuse immigrant Catholics from trying to understand American ways and endeavoring to accommodate to them as fully as possible. Unfortunately, in Brownson’s view, they did not always do this; on the contrary, he was convinced that many Catholic priests and bishops actively disliked "the American people and character." This attitude contributed materially to nativism because it stood in the way of "getting our religion fairly presented to the American mind."  

Brownson repudiated nativism insofar as it rested on religious prejudice, but he understood the alarm felt by Americans as they reacted against the threat to national values posed by the flood of immigration. In 1854 he undertook to explain the situation to his fellow Catholics in two articles entitled "Native Americanism" and "The Know Nothings."  

The nativists, Brownson conceded, were misguided in their bigotry, but they also gave voice to legitimate national concerns. What their outcry signified—and what Catholics must realize—was that America had a nationality of its own and that Americans would not tolerate the perpetuation of foreign nationalities on their soil. For that reason, the Catholic religion would never prosper here if it were inseparably linked to a foreign nationality. Immigrant Irish Catholics must therefore distinguish their Catholicity from their Irish nationality and learn American ways.  

Catholic schools also came in for censure from Brownson, for he perceived that they served, and were intended to serve, ethnic-national as well as religious purposes. He deprecated the hostility with which Catholic leaders regarded the common schools, for he did not think it was always justified on strictly religious grounds. Where real anti-Catholicism made Catholic schools a necessity, he approved their existence but regretted the social separation of Catholic from Protestant youngsters they entailed. Above all, he opposed schools that, "under the pretext of providing for Catholic education . . . train up our children to be foreigners in the land of their birth."
His reflection on these issues persuaded Brownson that one had to distinguish between “the traditions of Catholics” and “Catholic tradition.” This perception, I suspect, played a key role in moving him toward the most “liberal” position on religious questions he ever adopted in his career as a Catholic. Alerted by the ethnic issue, Brownson realized that many “traditional” Catholic positions were the product of social custom and historical contingency, rather than being essential to the faith. Hence he urged flexibility in seeking to bring the church into fruitful contact with the modern world. After all, he pointed out, if the universality of the Catholic church were to be made real, it must be at home in all ages as well as in all climes.

Brownson later repented his lapse into liberalism and reverted to a rigid hostility toward the modern world. He did not, to the best of my knowledge, apply the term Americanism to the liberal tendency of his thinking between 1854 and 1864, although that was what the word came to mean in Catholic discourse three decades later. In the context of the strictly ethnic-national discussion, however, Brownson alluded to “that Americanism which we have uniformly professed . . . since we became a Catholic.” And this kind of Americanism sufficed to bring down upon his head a storm of criticism from immigrant Catholics who equated his position with outright nativism.

Americanize and its variations, unlike Americanism, were used freely by Brownson in the 1850s. The passage cited by lexicographers as the first recorded usage of Americanization occurred in a dialogue, a literary device Brownson often used to present divergent views on a complex issue. The following exchange between characters called Dieffenbach and Father John furnishes the context of the passage.

“But you forget, Father John,” said Dieffenbach, “that this Catholic body, large as it is, and zealous as it may be, is separated from the American community by difference of national origin, manners, and customs, and to some extent even of language. The Church they support is still regarded as the church of a foreign body in the American community . . . . Your Catholic body does not act on the American body, and you want . . . a larger infusion of the American element. Instead of relying on this foreign body, you should direct all your efforts to the conversion of Americans, who have the sentiment of American nationality, and thus Americanize the Church.”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Father John, “it is desirable that the Catholic body should be or become American, so far as to avoid
all that is repugnant to a just American national sentiment; but I want the Church Americanized no more than I want her Irishized, Germanized, Englishized, or Gallicized. The Church always suffers from having imposed on her the form of any nationality. . . . The Americanization of the Catholic body does and will go on of itself, as rapidly as is desirable, and all we have to do with it is, to take care that they do not imbibe the notion that to Americanize is necessarily to Protestantize. The transition from one nationality to another is always a dangerous process, and all the Americanization I insist on is, that our Catholic population shall feel and believe that a man may be a true American and a good Catholic.¹⁹

Thus were the issues associated with Americanization laid out when the term was introduced. The circumstances surrounding its introduction also made clear that these issues had terrific explosive potential.

The explosion came some thirty years later. This time the conflict began in the 1880s over the place of German nationality in American Catholicism; by the late 1890s, the focal point of conflict had shifted to something called “Americanism.” Few of the participants recalled the controversy of Brownson’s time, but the parallels are striking.¹⁰

Most pertinently, the words Americanization and (in the latter period) Americanism figured prominently in the disputes. Secondly, both sets of “Americanizers” deprecated the tendency to identify the Catholic church with imported cultural forms, striving instead to bring her into closer touch with the modern world. Thirdly, both Brownson and the later Americanists, most notably Archbishop John Ireland of Saint Paul, were sanguine about the future of Catholicism in America. They believed the spirit of the American people would dispose them to accept the Catholic faith once it took root in the national culture and expressed itself in indigenous forms. Hence they took a more positive stand than the “conservatives” on Catholics’ mixing with non-Catholics; they were more open-minded about the public schools, and they disapproved Catholic schooling that served to perpetuate a foreign language or culture in the United States.

A fourth broad parallel is that both sets of controversies took place against a background of nativism, and the place of foreign nationalities in the American church was basic in both cases. Brownson and the later Americanizers were accused of being nativists themselves, and they were, indeed, tinged with a nationalistic Anglo-Saxonism. They both, however, denied being hostile to the ethnic groups in question, main-
taining that they opposed only deliberate efforts to frustrate the natural processes of assimilation.

Finally, Brownson and Archbishop Ireland explained what they meant by Americanization of Catholic immigrants in very similar terms. Brownson was not asking the Irish to forget their homeland, he maintained. However, he did “ask them not to regard this country as the land of their exile, but . . . as their new home, freely chosen, around which they are to cluster the affections of their hearts, and with whose fortunes, not with those of Ireland, are henceforth bound up their own fortunes, and those of their children and their children’s children.” Thirty-eight years later, Archbishop Ireland told a group of German Catholics that he did not favor “hasty, over-active Americanization”; nor did he demand “the forgetting of the old land, or the setting aside of precious traditions.” Rather, he continued:

What I do mean by Americanization is the filling up of the heart with love for America and for her institutions. It is the harmonizing of ourselves with our surroundings, so that we will be as to the manner born, and not as strangers in a strange land, caring but slightly for it, and entitled to receive from it but meagre favors. It is the knowing of the language of the land and failing in nothing to prove our attachment to our laws, and our willingness to adopt, as dutiful citizens, all that is good and laudable in its social life and civilization.¹¹

There were, of course, differences between the two controversies over Americanization. For one thing, the battles of the 1880s and 1890s lasted longer and constituted a more important chapter in the history of American Catholicism. A chapter, incidentally, that historians have studied intently, while the storm that swirled around Brownson in the 1850s has been largely overlooked by scholars.

The dramatis personae had also changed. Brownson died in 1876, and the Irish, whom he chided for resisting Americanization in the fifties, furnished all the leading Americanizers in the later episode. The role previously played by the Irish was taken over by the Germans, who had not figured at all in the earlier controversy.

Finally, the Americanist controversy had a much higher ideological content than the skirmishes of the fifties. Its history is tangled but may be summarized as follows. Difficulties arising in the 1880s between German- and English-speaking Catholics persisted through the next decade, becoming interwoven in the process with liberal-conservative splits across a wide spectrum of other issues—such as whether Catholics could
belong to secret societies, including the Knights of Labor; the theories of Henry George; the question of parochial versus public schooling; and the appointment of an apostolic delegate to the United States. These disputes involved intense politicking in Rome and eventually drew the attention of European Catholics, both liberals and conservatives, to what was going on in this country. The Europeans were engaged in their own quarrels, and both parties attempted to make polemical use of the American example. Especially in France, Catholic progressives pointed to the American church as leading the way in the reconciliation of Catholicism with the modern world, while conservatives portrayed “Americanism” as tantamount to surrendering the faith. By 1899 the quarrel had reached such a pitch that Pope Leo XIII issued the Apostolic Letter Testem Benevolentiae, in which he pronounced unacceptable “the opinions which some comprise under the head of Americanism.”

The basic principle rejected by the pope was that “the Church ought to adapt herself somewhat to our advanced civilization” and relax “her ancient rigor,” not only with respect to practical matters “but also to the doctrines in which the deposit of faith is contained.” From this principle there flowed several opinions concerning the role of the church in guiding the religious life of the individual, the importance of the natural as compared to the supernatural virtues, the place of religious orders in the church, and methods of evangelization—all of which the pope condemned in detail.

But while he condemned “Americanism” so defined, Leo took care to add that Americanism was unobjectionable if it meant “the characteristic qualities which reflect honor on the people of America . . . or if it implies the condition of your commonwealth, or the laws and customs which prevail in them.” Archbishop Ireland and his fellow Americanizers maintained that this was all they understood by Americanism, and they denied holding the opinions condemned by the pope. Their opponents, however, insisted that the dangerous tendencies singled out in Testem did exist in America and that the papal admonition was necessary and timely.

The equivocal nature of the term gave rise to disagreements not only at the time; it also caused difficulties for later historians. Thomas T. McAvoy, who became the leading authority on the subject in the mid-twentieth century, distinguished three varieties of Americanism: 1) the civic and political principles on which American society and government rest; 2) the views of certain progressive Catholics in France which were tinctured with a theological liberalism regarded at the time as heretical; and 3) the Americanism that was the shorthand term for the practical
modifications of Catholic life made in response to the pressures of the American environment. But McAvoy conceded that it was difficult to determine "when the word Americanism acquired a religious meaning above its normal political and social meanings."11

We can, however, say with some confidence that the controversy moved from a focus on Americanization to primary concern with Americanism. The former term occurs frequently in the 1880s in disputes over the status of German Catholics and the German language in the American church. When the term Americanism appears in this phase of the controversy, the context usually links it closely with matters of language and ethnicity. At least one contemporary traced the origins of that term back to the German issue, arguing that the German Catholics who opposed Ireland's emphasis on Americanization "retorted upon him the name of 'Americanism' as a stigma ... redolent of 'Liberalism' and all evil things."11

The publication in France of a biography of Isaac T. Hecker was a landmark in the controversy and also with respect to the semantics of Americanism. Hecker, a New Yorker born in 1819, was a convert to Catholicism who became a priest and founded the Congregation of St. Paul (popularly known as Paulists), a religious community that Hecker hoped would become the instrument through which America would be converted to the Catholic faith. Hecker's ironic temper and his confidence that Catholicism would thrive as never before in republican America made him an appealing figure to the French Catholic progressives who wished to break away from the tradition of Catholic hostility to the French republic. Hence the appearance in 1897 of a French Life of Father Hecker, and the exaggerated publicity accompanying it, intensified the conflict between liberals and conservatives in the French church. The posthumous figure of Hecker became the symbol of Americanism and a polemical storm center. Looking back on the controversy two decades later, the historian Peter Guilday asserted that "it was Paris that coined the much abused word, 'Americanism.' "11

A key episode linking Hecker and Americanism was a talk given by Denis J. O'Connell at a congress of Catholic savants in Fribourg, Switzerland. At that time (1897) rector of the North American College in Rome (a residence for American seminarians), O'Connell was a fervent Americanist. His lecture, entitled "A New Idea in the Life of Father Hecker," constituted an important theoretical statement of Americanism which emphasized the tradition of Anglo-American law as contrasted to Roman and canon law. The talk is particularly relevant here because O'Connell stated that this "new idea" was "called by the name of 'Amer-
icanism.'" The term, he said, was not merely to be found here and there in the biography of Hecker; rather, "the idea expressed by it shines like a golden thread from the beginning to the end of the volume." It was, he added, a term "that one will not find in any dictionary of Europe, and hardly, I may venture to say, in any dictionary of America—never, I am sure, in that full precise significance that it bore in the mind of the illustrious Founder of the Paulists." Unfortunately, O'Connell thereupon dismissed as unnecessary "the consideration of its etymology or genesis."16

Since O'Connell later admitted he had not read the Hecker biography, he can scarcely be considered a reliable authority on what Hecker thought Americanism might be. In view of the word's occurring only once in the original American version of the biography in question, we can safely conclude that its widespread usage in the late 1890s did not trace back to that source.17 What actually seems to have happened is that the term Americanization was employed in a number of disputes about the adjustment of Catholicism to American circumstances; eventually Americanism became a label designating the position of one party in those disputes—the "liberals" who favored flexibility and accommodation wherever possible. Vague enough as a political term, it became even more ambiguous when carried over into the realm of religious controversy. With the complications resulting from its use by both friendly and unfriendly Catholic publicists in France, Americanism became so diffuse that it could be interpreted to mean almost anything. But the pope condemned one interpretation. And although he exempted another meaning from his censure, the papal letter Testem Benevolentiae effectively removed Americanism from Catholic discourse for a long time.

While papal disfavor put Americanism under a cloud, other developments around 1900 caused the German Catholics to soft-pedal their resistance to Americanization. They really had no choice because generational transition and other social changes made accommodation imperative. The most revealing incident concerned orders issued by two German bishops in Wisconsin that sermons be preached in English at least once on Sunday. When Polish and French-Canadian Catholics attacked this "Americanizing ukase," a leading German Catholic journalist defended the bishops' actions. Arthur Preuss, who had founded his Review to combat the liberals in the 1890s and who then characterized Americanization as a demand for "national apostasy," now warned the critics against making Americanization a "scarecrow." Drawing the same basic distinction as Archbishop Ireland had earlier, Preuss rejected "par-
force Americanization” but declared that recognition of the natural processes of assimilation could “prove beneficial.” The German Catholics had realized “almost too late,” he explained, that the process of assimilation now required concessions to the English language if many of the old German parishes were to survive.

The almost complete cessation of German immigration after 1900, along with emergence of the second generation as the dominant element, had in fact plunged the German-American Catholics into a crisis of assimilation. Although the erosion of ethnic feeling could not be wholly stemmed, the German Catholics’ national organization, the Central-Verein, responded to the challenge very creatively. A reorganization brought its structure up to date; a newly developed interest in social reform gave it a mission attuned to the spirit of the Progressive Era; and new leadership guided it to greater visibility on the national Catholic scene than it had ever enjoyed before, especially through its bilingual journal, Central-Blatt and Social Justice (est. 1909). The partial acceptance of English, along with the social reform mission, in fact constituted a kind of Americanization, but the Central-Verein’s leaders never called it that. They continued to regard the positions taken by the Americanists of the 1890s as mistaken, and it probably never occurred to them that they were in effect Americanizing the structure and outlook of the principal organizational symbol of their ethnoreligious consciousness. But neither did they keep up the anti-Americanizing rhetoric of the past, and as the German Catholics quietly dropped the subject, the word Americanization receded from view for several years.

It—and to a lesser extent Americanism—reappeared in Catholic discourse in the context of the “Americanization movement” set off by World War I. Against the background of wartime patriotism and suspicion of “hyphenated Americans,” Catholics mobilized their energies for participation in the war effort through a new organization, the National Catholic War Council (NCWC). An account of its activities published in 1921 illustrates how Catholics’ pride in their wartime service was assimilated to their fundamental commitment to the nation. As a preamble to his story of American Catholics and the War, Michael Williams devoted four chapters to the history of Catholicism in the United States. He did not apply the term Americanism to Catholic devotion to the nation; nor did he conceive the relationship between church and society as involving a process of adjustment that could be called Americanization. No such adjustment was needed because “the very marrow” of Williams’s story was “the blessed harmony that has always existed, and which now exists, and which, please God, shall always exist, between the spirit of the
Catholic Church and the spirit of the United States of America." Thanks to this natural harmony, an "intimate . . . inseparable intermingling" had always subsisted between Catholic and national values, of which the most recent testimony was the Catholic contribution to the war effort and postwar reconstruction.21

The only time Williams used the word Americanization in the book, he placed quotation marks around it and applied it specifically to the citizenship education program carried on by the NCWC. This program was designed to provide a deeper understanding of American institutions. The NCWC professed itself to be "interested especially in emphasizing the lessons of American patriotism for the benefit of the foreigners within our shores; in pointing out to them . . . the opportunities for happy and useful employment in American industries; in inspiring them with the desire to become American citizens; and in teaching them the lessons of sanitation, better housing, and better living."11

Carrying out this program was a major activity of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which succeeded the National Catholic War Council and continued to be known as the NCWC for nearly a half-century. Much of the NCWC's Americanization work in the twenties featured Italian-Americans, but some attention was also devoted to the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest. Although the program was prosecuted energetically, its director, John A. Lapp, warned against the abuses that sometimes accompanied Americanization campaigns. In certain unfortunate instances, Lapp wrote, "the terms 'Americanism' and 'Americanization' were found to be . . . mere cloaks for un-American activities" such as reactionary antiunion drives. As a result, not a few people grew distrustful of "the very idea of Americanization itself." Lapp regretted this development, prescribing for its remedy the removal of "the dollar sign" from programs of Americanization. In more positive terms, he asserted that nothing less than "complete social justice should be held as a goal for good citizenship or Americanization."22 Lapp thus attempted to give Americanization a progressive orientation by associating it with the reformist goals being pursued by his more famous colleague, John A. Ryan, the head of the NCWC's Social Action Department.

Other Catholic observers took note of Americanization as a new word that had come into great vogue and was not infrequently applied to highly questionable activities—such as efforts to proselytize among Catholic children by means of Protestant-sponsored recreational programs. At the same time, Catholics boasted that their own religious education work among immigrants was the best kind of Americanization.
Such a claim found little resonance in the larger culture, for most Americans still regarded the Catholic church and its adherents as a foreign presence on the national scene. As restrictionist feeling mounted in the early twenties, the Ku Klux Klan gave powerful expression to the fear of Catholicism that was a perennial feature of American nativism. The emergence of Al Smith as a serious contender for the presidency not only reinforced crude no-papery; it also aroused uneasiness among those less susceptible to bigotry over how fully Catholics were committed to church-state separation. Catholics felt the need to respond to these developments, and by 1923 items protesting the Klan’s appropriation of the term Americanism began to appear in the National Catholic Welfare Conference Bulletin alongside reports of the Americanization work being carried on by the NCWC itself. The following year Frederick J. Kinsman, a former bishop of the Protestant Episcopal church who had embraced Catholicism, published a book entitled Americanism and Catholicism dedicated to proving the compatibility of the two.

The weekly magazine Commonweal, founded in 1924 as an organ of Catholic liberalism, took up the same task. Although critical of shortcomings in Catholic life and hoping to follow an irenic editorial line, its editors had to spend much of their energy in the early years defending the church against misrepresentation and affirming the Americanism of the Catholic faithful. The 1928 presidential campaign, when it portrayed attacks on Al Smith’s religion as betrayals of true Americanism, brought this phase of Commonweal’s existence to its climax. After Smith’s defeat, Michael Williams, who had resigned from the NCWC in order to found the magazine, wrote a book called The Shadow of the Pope, which he said was about religious liberty but which actually focused on the history of anti-Catholicism in America.

The year before Smith ran for president, George N. Shuster, who was managing editor of Commonweal, published a book entitled The Catholic Spirit in America. Here Shuster restated once again the position Williams had built into his earlier book on the NCWC—and that Commonweal and virtually all American Catholic commentators maintained in the twenties—namely, that a natural harmony existed between the Catholic spirit and the American spirit. So perfect was the congruence between religious principles and national values, Shuster argued, that native-born converts to Catholicism “did not attain to the full stature of their Americanism until they joined the Church.”

Although Catholics might still have agreed with Shuster after the 1928 election, the eruption of virulent anti-Catholicism which impugned their civic integrity was a severe shock to their morale. To a “bitterly
resigned" nun teaching in a parochial school in Chicago, Al Smith's defeat meant that none of the boys in her classroom could aspire to be president. Her telling them that stuck in the memory of a youngster named John Cogley, who was later to serve as an editor of Commonweal and who had a hand in writing John F. Kennedy's most famous statement on the church-state issue, his speech before the Houston Ministerial Association. Even after Kennedy's election, Cogley recalled his teacher's remark as the occasion of his "first doubts about the power of prayer, and the power of the American idea as well."128

Summarizing the years from World War I to 1928, we should note first that the terms Americanism and Americanization were widely used by, or in reference to, Catholics. But the context of usage and the connotations of the terms had shifted since the 1890s. Then Catholics were talking largely among themselves about Americanism and Americanization, while their fellow countrymen stood by as interested spectators. The context was an intra-Catholic quarrel, and the terms had reference to socio-religious policy or theological stance. In the 1920s, however, the discussion engaged the whole national community and dealt with political ideology and civic loyalty. At first, Catholics were merely one among the parties to the discussion. But by the middle of the decade, they were the object of discussion as well—it was their Americanism, or the lack thereof, that was being talked about. In the first phase, Catholic self-confidence and a sense of national belongingness that grew out of wartime solidarity encouraged the NCWC to throw itself into the work of Americanization. By the end of the decade, Catholics had absorbed the bitter lesson that their own Americanism was still in question.

The passing of the Americanization movement and the freighting of Americanism with negative overtones contributed to the relative absence of these terms in Catholic discourse in the 1930s. But the economic depression, the New Deal, and ominous international developments operated more decisively to turn the attention of Catholics to concrete economic and political issues. In these circumstances, the relevance of "papal social teaching" to the American situation became the primary context in which Catholics explored the relationship between their religious principles and their civic commitments. In general, Catholic leaders strongly reaffirmed the consistency between their prescriptions for a Christian social order on the one hand and true Americanism on the other. But Catholics also disagreed among themselves about both terms of this equation. For as David J. O'Brien concluded after a painstaking survey of Catholic social thought in the 1930s, "Americanism, like Catholic social doctrine, turned out to be a magician's hat that produced
prepackaged rabbits. On the whole, however, the issues of the New
Deal era did not lend themselves very readily to discussion under the
categories of “Americanism” or “Americanization.” The shifting
dynamics were vividly illustrated in the case of John A. Lapp. The former
director of the NCWC’s Americanization program found himself dealing
in the 1930s with such matters as “Christian Principles Applied to the
Building Trades.”

As we have seen in other contexts, World War II proved once again
to be a major watershed in terminological usage. After the war “American­
ism” and “Americanization” really came into their own as key con­cepts, but they reentered Catholic discourse by an unusual route—
through historiography. That is, Americanism and Americanization re­
gained their currency as a result of historical scholarship devoted to the
controversies of the late nineteenth century and were primarily associated
with the issues that pitted Archbishop Ireland and his friends against
the conservatives of that era. But the underlying issue to which the terms
referred—how the Catholic church should accommodate itself to Amer­
ican society—still existed in the mid twentieth century; hence the re­
cover of the terminology of Americanism had definite ideological im­
plications. The stages through which the semantic development in
question proceeded can be laid out roughly as follows: the basic historical
recovery of Americanism extends from World War II to the late 1950s;
then, after a relative lull, a new wave of scholarship from the late 1960s
to the present has drawn out the ideological implications of Americanism
in much sharper fashion.

A striking feature of the first wave of scholarship on Americanism
was that it came after four decades of near total historical silence on the
controversies of the nineties. Theodore Maynard, who devoted a chapter
to “The American Heresy” in his popular Story of American Catholicism
(1941), observed that few Catholics had ever heard of such a thing and
those who tried to find out more would quickly run into a dead end. All
that was soon to change. 1943 saw the appearance of Daniel F. Reilly’s
important monograph on the “school controversy,” and of Thomas T.
McAvoy’s article “Americanism and Frontier Catholicism,” the first of
the publications that were to make McAvoy the leading authority on
Americanism as such. The July 1945 issue of the Catholic Historical
Review carried two articles on Americanism, one by McAvoy, the other
by the Paulist historian Vincent F. Holden. Six months later the same
journal ran the first of a two-part series by John J. Meng on the German
“nationality question”; soon thereafter Meng’s more comprehensive lec­
tures on the Americanist era appeared in the publication of the U.S. Catholic Historical Society of New York. 12

Between 1946 and 1958 Americanism completely dominated the relatively small world of American Catholic historical scholarship. Besides articles and unpublished dissertations, more than a dozen books dealt with one aspect or another of the controversial era. Included among these works were John Tracy Ellis’s magisterial biography of Cardinal Gibbons; biographies of two other leading Amerizanizers (Archbishop Ireland and Bishop John J. Keane); the memoirs of the Abbé Felix Klein, the only surviving participant in the controversies; McAvoy’s Great Crisis in American Catholic History, which became the standard account; and Robert D. Cross’s Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America, the appearance of which a few months after McAvoy’s book marked the climax of the first wave of Americanist historiography. 34

Cross’s work, originally written as a Harvard dissertation, likewise showed that interest in Americanism had expanded beyond “the Catholic ghetto.” Further evidence of the same kind could be noted in Will Herberg’s Protestant-Catholic-Jew (1955), which drew heavily on the work of Ellis, McAvoy, and other Catholic historians. Among Catholic commentators, the writings of Walter Ong and Daniel Callahan indicated that the new historiographical understanding of Americanism had become a common resource of the Catholic intellectual community. 34

The question that immediately suggests itself about this first wave of Americanist scholarship is why it gushed forth so abundantly after almost a half-century of neglect. Obviously, the generational factor played a role. Except for Klein, the participants in (and historians who could remember) the quarrels of the nineties had passed from the scene, and partisan feeling had subsided. Matters that Peter Guilday, the leading Catholic historian of the interwar years, considered too hot to handle could now be taken up. 35 Nor should we overlook the coincidence of the generational shift with the great postwar expansion of graduate education; hence many more workers were entering the field of American Catholic history as the new historiographical focus emerged.

But why did this focus prove so attractive to these younger scholars? The main reason, I believe, was that Americanism seemed strikingly relevant—that is, attractive as a historical subject to a generation of Catholics who were very self-conscious about their own Americanism. Positively, they were affected like everyone else by the upsurge of democratic fervor set off by World War II and especially by the enthusiasm it engendered for “pluralism” and “tolerance for diversity.” Negatively, they had to deal with the criticism of Paul Blanshard and other secular
liberals who charged the church with being un-American. In these circumstances, Catholic intellectuals, including historians, could hardly avoid thinking about how the church should relate to the national culture. 16

Most of them supported the broadly liberal policy line that deprecated "separatism," exhorted Catholics to "break out of the ghetto," and encouraged them to plunge boldly into the mainstream of American life. 17

The congruence between this policy and the views of the Americanists of the 1890s was obvious, and it is no accident that Archbishop Ireland and his friends were the heroes of the new outpouring of historical scholarship. Whether these historians consciously realized it—much less intended it—their work implicitly supported midcentury Catholic liberalism by supplying it with a historical precedent. Indeed, it could be plausibly asserted that the historical recovery of Americanism played a significant role in mediating the rapprochement between American Catholicism and modernity which was to take more explicit form in the 1960s.

Not that this first wave of Americanist historians wanted to nudge the church toward a more liberal theological position. Consideration of three points will demonstrate that this was definitely not their intention.

First, none of the writings mentioned above made any effort to defend the opinions specified in Testem Benevolentiae as erroneous. On the contrary, these opinions were usually referred to as "heresies." Ironically, the only writer to stress the point that Leo XIII had not actually designated them as heretical was the very conservative theologian Joseph Clifford Fenton, and he strongly insisted that they were errors deserving of reprobation. McAvoy was among those who used the term heresy more loosely than Fenton approved; but even when he was being more careful about terminology, McAvoy was willing to concede that the positions actually held by the Americanists had heretical potentialities. 18

Secondly, the historians of the first wave, including McAvoy, defended the orthodoxy of the Americanists by denying that they actually held the opinions censured in Testem. They often pointed out in this connection that the Americanists were not theologians but active churchmen concerned with practical matters of socio-ecclesiastical policy and therefore not sensitive to the remote doctrinal implications of stands they may have taken on this or that concrete issue. In what became known as its "phantom heresy" form, this interpretation held that the heterodox positions condemned by the pope were wrongly imputed to the Americanists by their ultraconservative critics in France who misunderstood,
or deliberately distorted, the real views of Hecker, Ireland, and the other Americanists.

The third point supplies even stronger evidence that these historians had no desire to make theological liberals out of their subjects. The issue here concerns the relation of Americanism to Modernism, the "synthesis of all heresies" condemned by Pope Pius X in 1907. Given their general adherence to the phantom heresy interpretation, the Americanist historians naturally dismissed the reality of a connection. But they had to address the issue explicitly because European Catholic commentators assumed that Americanism was the "practical preface" to Modernism. In 1952, McAvoy documented the degree to which this view had become the conventional wisdom in Europe and argued that it was an oversimplification based on inadequate knowledge—a deficiency his Great Crisis was designed to correct. And in reviewing McAvoy's book, John Tracy Ellis stressed the point that it should disabuse the Europeans of their erroneous views on the relation of Americanism and Modernism. Thus, only a few years before the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) put the whole issue in a new light, the leading figures in the historical recovery of Americanism strove to distinguish it from theological liberalism.

Although essayists and popularizers noted that Vatican II vindicated the irenic and progressive policies advocated by the Americanists, little new scholarship on the subject appeared while the council was going on and immediately thereafter. The most important new work published during this historiographic lull was James Hennessy's study of the American bishops at the First Council of the Vatican, which took place in 1869–70, well before the Americanist controversies began. While it did not deal with Americanism as such, Hennessy's book (and later essays) had a direct bearing on that topic because he argued that the historical experience of American Catholics had a theological dimension in that it set them thinking in ways different from European Catholics about religious liberty and other matters fraught with theological implications. Hennessy was the first American Catholic historian to endow his subject with this kind of theological significance. His innovation complemented the new "historical mindedness" of Catholic theologians and constituted a response from history's side of the disciplinary fence to a much more pronounced opening toward history from theology's side.

The relaxation of disciplinary boundaries had asymmetrical results—historians became only marginally more venturesome in theology, but beginning around 1970, a whole cohort of recently trained specialists in
religious studies devoted themselves to historico-theological analysis of Americanism. All this took place under the aegis of the liberalization of Catholic thinking sparked by Vatican II, which legitimized a new way of looking at church/world relations and generally loosened up the church’s doctrinal stance. Historians too were soon affected by “postconciliar mentality,” and their defensiveness about the orthodoxy of the Americanists abated markedly. By contrast to the historians of the previous epoch, a significant proportion of the new cohort of Americanist scholars did indeed want to move the church toward a more liberal theological posture and approached their study of the past with that mindset.

The post-1970 scholarship is too voluminous to survey in detail, but we should note the general categories into which it falls and cite some illustrative titles. Biographies and other studies of the major figures in the Americanist era constitute one important class. These have added much nuance to our understanding of the period, and some are frankly revisionist in approach.  

Other writers have dealt with one or another aspect of Americanism or treated it as part of a larger study. Examples of the former would be Thomas Wangler’s studies of the formation of the Americanist faction and the propagandistic techniques it employed; of the latter, Gerald Fogarty’s treatment of Americanism as an episode in his book on relations between the American bishops and the Vatican.  

And of course recent general works on American Catholic history by James Hennesey, Jay Dolan, and David O’Brien all discuss Americanism.  

Deserving of separate mention are works devoted to Isaac Hecker. So severely was Hecker’s reputation for orthodoxy damaged in the Americanist controversy that biographers steered shy of his later life until after Vatican II. Since 1977, however, at least ten doctoral dissertations on Hecker have been completed, several of which focus directly on his relationship to Americanism. This new work has begun to find its way into print; some of Hecker’s own writings have been reprinted, and a new biography is nearing completion.  

Another area of new scholarship, and one closely related to our interest in Americanism, deals with Modernism. Indeed, the recovery and reassessment of Modernism is one of the most striking historiographic results of the new mentality legitimized by Vatican II. Modernism in Europe is the main focus of interest, even among American scholars. But to the extent it existed in the United States, Modernism has been brought out of the shadows where earlier Catholic historians were quite content to leave it.
That is not the only way the new historiography of Americanism differs from the old. But before looking into the Modernist issue more closely, let us inquire about two other points of comparison between old and new.

First, are the Americanists still the heroes? Does the new historiography endorse their ideological orientation as strongly as the older works did? In general, yes—but not without qualification. For though the Americanists are still clearly preferred to their more conservative opponents, Archbishop Ireland and company have been chided for their hypernationalism, their lack of sensitivity to immigrant cultures, and their uncritical acceptance of American society. And as more has come to light about their manipulative tactics in controversy, the Americanists have lost some of the luster deriving from their ideological liberalism.

Second, do the more recent writers agree with their predecessors that Americanism was a "phantom heresy"? In general, no—but once again distinctions are in order. Among the relatively few scholars who have addressed the issue directly, a rough consensus exists to this effect: 1) the position espoused by Hecker and the Americanists did have theological content, especially with respect to its ecclesiological and theology-of-history implications; and 2) some of the opinions condemned in Testem Benevolentiae were in fact actually held in this country, at least by Hecker and by Bishop John Lancaster Spalding. Those who take this position clearly disagree with the "phantom heresy" interpretation, which, it will be recalled, held that the Americanists didn’t really hold the opinions the pope condemned as Americanism. But, according to the new view, these opinions ought not be considered heretical; rather, they should be seen as legitimate theological options wrongly rejected by churchmen animated by political motives and constrained by an outdated theology.

Turning now to the question of Modernism—specifically to whether a connection existed between Americanism and Modernism—we have a 180-degree shift between the old and the new Americanist scholarship. Where the older generation of scholars strove to deny a connection, the more recent writers are strongly disposed to affirm a connection. Since relatively little new historical evidence bearing on the question has been brought to light, we can safely conclude that this reversal of judgment derives from a more basic change in theological perspective. In other words, historians are now more receptive to the idea of a linkage because Modernism itself is seen more sympathetically.

To sum up the comparison of old and new Americanist scholarship, we might say that what the former interpreted as social or procedural
liberalism the latter tends to interpret as theological liberalism. That sums it up for scholarship on the Americanist period as such. But there is also a new Americanist interpretation much broader in scope. That is, the same shift in outlook—one that gives “Americanism” a sharper ideological accentuation—is discernible across a broader spectrum of Catholic historical studies. And quite recently this historically generalized “Americanist” outlook has been raised to an even higher level of abstraction by writers who deal not with history but with theology or religious studies. This two-stage expansion of Americanism, as we might call it, can at present only be glimpsed in its broad outlines.

In historical studies, it is most clearly discernible in work devoted to early American Catholicism. Here recent scholarship stresses the influence of Enlightenment ideas on the nuclear group of Anglo-American Catholics, especially John Carroll, the new nation’s first Catholic bishop. Patrick Carey’s revisionist work on “lay trusteeism” treats sympathetically the trustees’ argument that “republican” principles should be applied to church government in the United States. Other manifestations of auroral liberalism noted approvingly are the cultivation of good relations with non-Catholics, frequent expressions of attachment to American institutions, a desire on Carroll’s part to hold Roman authorities at arm’s length, and his interest in using the vernacular (rather than Latin) in worship. Jay Dolan goes furthest in speaking of Carroll’s “republican blueprint,” but other authorities agree that an early version of the liberal American spirit set the tone in the age of John Carroll.10

Jay Dolan was also the first to apply the new Americanist perspective in a comprehensive survey of the whole of U.S. Catholic history. The interpretive stance adopted in his American Catholic Experience (1985) is quite self-consciously that of post-Vatican II liberalism. The author’s disappointment over Carroll’s retreat from an early (largely preepiscopal) liberalism is obvious, as is his distaste for the “devotional Catholicism” that swamped the more restrained spirituality of the Anglo-American nucleus. Dolan interprets Americanism and Modernism as successive phases of a progressive development that reached its belated culmination in the Second Vatican Council and the changes it legitimized. He adopts as his own the “new spirit” of postconciliar American Catholicism and concludes that “the twenty-first century belongs to it.”110

Dolan’s historically comprehensive liberalism figures in the next phase of the story, namely, Americanism’s being raised to a new level of abstraction by theologians or specialists in religious studies. The issue here is how Americanism, as recovered and generalized from systematic
reflection on the historical past, is to be appropriated and applied in the here and now.

The person who has done this most explicitly is Dennis P. McCann, a layman who teaches religious studies at DePaul University in Chicago. His New Experiment in Democracy (1987) uses as a springboard the American bishops’ recent pastoral letter on the economy. McCann argues that the notion of “justice as participation,” which the pastoral espoused in the economic realm, must also be applied to the Catholic church’s internal constitution and mode of operation. He links this thesis to Americanism in his first chapter, which is entitled “The Return of the Repressed: Owning Up to the Americanist Heresy.” Besides the Americanists of the 1890s, McCann refers approvingly to John Carroll’s supposed “republican blueprint,” and he credits a group of early nineteenth-century lay trustees with “brilliant insight” into the theological implications of the American revolution.51

McCann’s book outdoes the Americanists of the past in erecting Americanism into a consciously held principle that is to be understood as normative in religious affairs. But his liberal version of Americanism is not the only ideological variant available. George Weigel, Michael Novak, and Richard John Neuhaus would all agree that Catholicism and Americanism are compatible and should be more purposefully integrated; but as neoconservatives they differ sharply from McCann in the way they understand both elements in the equation.52 David O’Brien and the “evangelical” Catholics whose stance he has recently identified are critical of Americanism from the left; while Joseph Varacalli and Michael Schwartz call attention to its dangers from the traditionalist, or “restorationist,” end of the ideological spectrum.53 Although it is not yet clear how fully these divergent positions will be developed, we are surely justified in saying that a “new Americanism” has emerged which may well set off a new cycle of liberal-conservative controversies among American Catholics.54

What does this review of usage over almost a century and a half suggest by way of conclusions about Catholic Americanism and Americanization? Without pretending to say the final word, it seems to me that the historical record warrants several observations.

First, by way of summary, we note that the salience of the terms has varied over time. They emerged in the 1850s; reached their apex of visibility and importance in the 1890s; reappeared briefly in a very different context in the 1920s; and then made a strong comeback by way of historiography after World War II.
Historically, it is clear that the terms have been used in reference to both ethnic and ideological issues. By *ethnic* is meant issues directly related to the cultural assimilation of Catholic immigrants; by *ideological*, those relating to the Catholic church as a corporate entity and how (or whether) it should adjust its policies and practices to American circumstances. Though they are closely interrelated, the relative importance of these two kinds of issue has changed over time, the former becoming less central, the latter more so. A quick review of the periods of salience listed above will help to clarify this very general statement.

When the terms emerged in the 1850s, *Americanization* referred primarily to the cultural assimilation of Irish Catholic immigrants. But the linkage between the ethnic and the ideological is illustrated by the fact that Brownson’s concern over the former prompted him to distinguish “Catholic tradition” from “the traditions of Catholics” and carried him along to a broader kind of theoretical liberalism. In the classic Americanist period at the end of the century, ethnic and ideological issues were intertangled throughout. However, the same dynamic is observable here as well—the so-called nationality controversy came early in the period; lingering ethnic bitterness accentuated later disputes over matters of a more clearly ideological nature (such as the school question); and the whole conflict finally came into focus over a highly abstract form of Americanism that was defined as theologically aberrant.

By the 1920s, ethnic issues were ostensibly central in that Catholics spoke of Americanization only in connection with programs designed to help immigrants assimilate. Yet this usage was very limited in scope, being confined to a bureaucratically inspired program that was quite marginal to Catholic life in general. By comparison with the 1880s and 1890s, questions related to the assimilation of immigrants were of negligible importance from the viewpoint of national Catholic leaders. Nor did these leaders think they had a problem ideologically. On the contrary, they exulted in the fundamental harmony that existed between Catholic and American principles. Hence there was no need for programmatic adjustments or new emphases in teaching such as those suggested by Americanists such as Hecker and Ireland.

The anti-Catholicism that culminated in Al Smith’s defeat demonstrated that non-Catholics had very different ideas about the relationship of Catholicism and Americanism. Catholics remained staunchly convinced of their own Americanism, but after World War II a growing number of their publicists and intellectuals strove to articulate a Catholic liberalism that would be true to the church’s doctrinal teaching, yet at the same time be critical of rigid and outdated practices and more pos-
itively oriented toward American "pluralism." In these circumstances, the Americanism that was restored to Catholic discourse by historians inevitably took on a more decidedly ideological cast. At first the kind of liberalism implicitly endorsed by the historical recovery of Americanism was strictly social and procedural. But after the upheaval set off by Vatican II, Americanism was broadened out to cover shifts in what had hitherto been regarded as established doctrinal teaching as well.

Although quite recessive, the ethnic dimension was not altogether lacking in the earlier phase of post–World War II Americanism since its adherents also espoused a participationist version of pluralism that deprecated "separatism," ethnic or otherwise, and urged Catholics to plunge into "the mainstream of American life." But this latent assimilationism could not survive the transvaluation of values associated with the revival of ethnicity in which Catholics such as Andrew Greeley and Michael Novak played very prominent roles. The result is that Catholic proponents of ideological Americanism would no doubt reject the imputation that their position implies the Americanization of immigrants.

The promiscuity that these terms have long had in Catholic discourse makes the anomaly just mentioned especially obvious, but the feeling that true Americanism somehow rules out expecting immigrants to become Americanized is not peculiar to Catholics. It is, rather, an example of the conceptual muddle into which Americans have so often been led by the genuine complexities of intergroup relations and the ambiguities of the language we must use in discussing them.

Catholics figure in the overall context of American diversity as the oldest and largest element of the population set apart from the whole by religion. True, religion and ethnicity are closely interwoven. They are, however, distinguishable—especially so in the case of Catholics, whose religion certainly cannot be said to lack definiteness either as a social institution or as a body of beliefs and practices. Because this religion can and does serve as a locus of loyalty and source of motivation, both for individuals and for larger collectivities, the tendency of modern scholarship to deprecate the importance, or even the reality, of religion as an independent variable is seriously misplaced in the case of American Catholics. To be understood in themselves and with respect to their role in American society, Catholics must be studied as a group defined by religious belief as well as—indeed, much more than—by ethnic identity.

What has this contention to do with the foregoing survey of linguistic usage? Simply this. The survey shows that for Catholics, Americanism and Americanization mean more than the cultural assimilation of immigrants. They also point toward beliefs about and disagreements over
what it means to be a Catholic and what it means to be an American. In a word, the prominence of these terms in their discourse testifies to the historic—and continuing—exigency for American Catholics of what H. Richard Niebuhr called the problem of “Christ and culture.” *Americanism* and *Americanization* are the terms Catholics use when they grapple with perennial questions about how church should relate to world, religion to society, faith to life. The degree to which the terms have been and remain “contest[ed]” shows that for American Catholics both of the elements in these polarities make legitimate claims and that neither is to be subsumed into the other. For as long as they remain steadfast in their resolve to do justice to both of these dimensions of reality, Catholics will remain a distinctive element in the kaleidoscope of American diversity.

**NOTES**


5. Orestes A. Brownson, ”Native Americanism,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, 11 (July, 1854), 328–54; Brownson, ”The Know-Nothings,” ibid., 11 (October 1854), 447–87.

6. Orestes A. Brownson, ”Parochial Schools and Education,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, 16 (July 1859), 324–42; quotation from 331. For a careful study of Brownson’s shifting views on education, see James M. McDonell, *Orestes A. Brownson and Nineteenth-Century Catholic Education* (New York, 1988).


8. Brownson, ”Know Nothings,” 486. The New York Catholic magazine the *Metropolitan*, 2 (August 1854), 442 used the word *Americanism* in discussing Brownson’s article ”Native Americanism.”


10. These generalizations are based on the literature discussed later in this essay. For the most recent scholarly overview of the Americanist era, see Gerald P. Fogarty,
“AMERICANISM” IN CATHOLIC DISCOURSE

11. For Brownson, “Know Nothings,” 486; for Ireland, St. Paul Northwestern Chronicle, October 26, 1888.


13. McAvoy introduced this threefold distinction in his “Americanism and Frontier Catholicism,” Review of Politics, 5 (July 1943), 276; repeated it, with the comment quoted in the text, in his “Americanism, Fact and Fiction,” Catholic Historical Review, 31 (July 1945), 134–35; and left it essentially unmodified in his Great Crisis, 349.


15. Peter Guilday, “The Church in the United States (1870–1920): A Retrospect of Fifty Years,” Catholic Historical Review, 6 (January 1921), 544. For the Hecker biography and the controversy in France, see McAvoy, Great Crisis, chap. 4.


17. For O’Connell’s admission, see McAvoy, Great Crisis, 174n.; for the single occurrence of Americanism in the Hecker biography, see Walter Elliott, Life of Father Hecker (New York, 1891), 339.


19. These matters are discussed at length in Philip Gleason, The Conservative Reformers: German-American Catholics and the Social Order (Notre Dame, Ind., 1968).

20. Michael Williams, American Catholics and the War: National Catholic War Council, 1917–1921 (New York, 1921); quotations from 69–70, 43. The only time Williams used the word Americanism in his historical review (38), it referred to the American cause in the Revolutionary War.


23. Frederick J. Kinsman, Americanism and Catholicism (New York, 1924), esp. 57–58, 127–31, for the author’s views on the need for immigrant assimilation and the role of the Catholic church in this area.


26. This view was based on the supposed congruence between the “higher law” basis of American constitutionalism and the natural law teachings of medieval Catholic theologians, particularly the point that political authority derived its legitimacy from the consent of the people.


36. See above, chaps. 3, 8.


39. McAvoy's threefold distinction (see above, n. 13) is the most sophisticated version of the view that the Americanists did not hold the reprobated positions. "Phantom heresy" comes from the title of Klein's memoirs. Cardinal Gibbons spoke for the Americanists themselves in writing to Leo XIII: "This doctrine, which I deliberately
call extravagant and absurd, this Americanism as it is called, has nothing in common
with the views, aspirations, doctrine and conduct of Americans." Quoted in John Tracy
Ellis, American Catholicism (Chicago, 1956), 119.

40. Thomas T. McAvoy, "Liberalism, Americanism, Modernism," Records of the
American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia, 63 (December 1952), 225–31;
Ellis, review in Theological Studies, 19 (1958), 239.


42. Examples are: David F. Sweeney, The Life of John Lancaster Spalding (New
York, 1965); David P. Killen, "Americanism Revisited: John Spalding and Testem
Benevolentiae," Harvard Theological Review, 66 (October 1973), 413–54; Fogarty,
O'Connell, R. Emmett Curran, Michael Augustine Corrigan and the Shaping of Con­
servative Catholicism in America, 1878–1902 (New York, 1978); Thomas E. Wangler,
"Emergence of John J. Keane as a Liberal Catholic and Americanist," American Ec­
clesiastical Review, 166 (September 1972), 457–78; Wangler, "John Ireland and the
Origins of Liberal Catholicism in the United States," Catholic Historical Review, 56
(January 1971), 617–29; Marvin R. O'Connell, John Ireland and the American Catholic
Church (St. Paul, Minn., 1988).

43. Thomas E. Wangler, "The Birth of Americanism: 'Westward the Apocalyptic
Candlestick,'" Harvard Theological Review, 65 (July 1972), 415–36; Wangler, "American
and American Hierarchy.

44. James Hennesey, American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Com­
Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present (Garden City, N.Y.,
1985), chap. 11; David O'Brien, Public Catholicism (New York, 1989), chap. 5. See
also O'Brien, The Renewal of American Catholicism (New York, 1972); Patrick W.
Carey, American Catholic Religious Thought (New York, 1987).

45. For guides to this new work, see John Farina, ed., Hecker Studies: Essays
on the Thought of Isaac Hecker (New York, 1983); and the March/April 1989 issue
of Catholic World, which is devoted to "Isaac Hecker and the Future of the American
Church."

46. The most recent work here is R. Scott Appleby, Church and Age Unite: The
Modernist Impulse in American Catholicism (Notre Dame, Ind., 1991); more generally,
see Ronald Burke, "Catholic Modernism in the Labor of Centuries," Religious Studies

47. See Margaret Mary Reher, "The Church and the Kingdom of God in America:
The Ecclesiology of the Americanists," (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1972); Reher,
"Pope Leo XIII and Americanism," Theological Studies, 34 (1973), 679–89; Reher,
American Catholic Intellectual Life (New York, 1989), chap. 4; Killen, "Americanism
Revisited."

48. Margaret Mary Reher, "Americanism and Modernism—Continuity or Dis­
continuity," U.S. Catholic Historian, 1 (Summer 1981), 87–103; Christopher J. Kauff­
mann, Tradition and Transformation in Catholic Culture (New York, 1988), chap. 7;
Dolan, American Catholic Experience, 310–11. See also, however, Hennessey, Amer­
ican Catholics, 197; Gerald P. Fogarty, American Catholic Biblical Scholarship (San

49. Joseph P. Chinnici, Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic
Spiritual Life in the United States (New York, 1989), chaps. 1–4; Patrick W. Carey,
People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism
RELIGION AND AMERICAN DIVERSITY


50. Dolan, American Catholic Experience, esp. chaps. 4, 8, 11, 14; quotation from 454.


55. The reversal is strikingly illustrated in the case of Andrew M. Greeley. His popular history of American Catholicism, The Catholic Experience (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), heartily endorsed Americanization; his bicentennial article, “Catholicism in America: Two Hundred Years and Counting,” Critic, 34 (Summer 1976), 14–47, 54–70 was sharply critical of Americanization.

56. I believe, however, that an analogy can be drawn between immigrant assimilation and the challenge confronting the Catholic church after Vatican II. See Gleason, Keeping the Faith, chap. 3.