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William B. Kurtz, *Excommunicated from the Union: How the Civil War Created a Separate Catholic America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016, \$120.00 hardcover, \$35.00 paper). Pp. 250. ISBN 978 0 8232 6753 8, 978 0 8232 6886 3.

William B. Kurtz argues that books about the Catholic experience in the US Civil War have devoted too little attention to questions of religion, and too much to those of Irish identity. He sees participation in the war as having offered Catholics an opportunity to disprove nativist claims that their faith was ill-suited to citizens of a republic. Many Catholics were Democrats who opposed the war, but they could be condemned as unpatriotic Catholics, instead of merely unpatriotic. The visceral violence of the New York City draft riots of 1863 made a lasting, negative impression of Catholics as violent and irresponsible citizens. Their war service was largely forgotten, Kurtz writes, and Catholic memorialization efforts gained little attention. As a result, the opportunity for integration was lost, and “the war and its aftermath ultimately accelerated the growth of a separate Catholic subculture in the United States” (162).

Kurtz begins with the Mexican–American War, which offered vast scope for anti-Catholicism, and the Know-Nothing movement of the 1850s. He also notes when Protestant and Catholic opinions coincide once the Civil War starts. Orestes Brownson voiced fears of a slave-power conspiracy like any good Republican, and sent his sons off to war. Catholic opinion rallied around the flag after Fort Sumter, then grew nervous after Bull Run, just like Protestant opinion. The long war and the move towards emancipation discouraged many northerners, Protestant and Catholic, and most whites were racist regardless of their faith. Archbishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati was unusual in his criticisms of slavery.

Kurtz makes extensive use of Catholic newspapers from a range of cities. Complicating efforts to understand Catholic thought are the loudest and least reasonable voices, such as that of James McMaster, editor of the *New York Freeman’s Journal*. McMaster was so antiwar that he was jailed by the Lincoln administration. Unfortunately, the German Catholic newspapers seem to have written little about current affairs. *Der Wahrheits Freund* of Cincinnati, for example, abandoned its short-lived support of emancipation in the face of criticism from its own readers. Only Lincoln’s death seems to have jolted these papers into commentary on contemporary politics. And German immigrants out farming, whose letters Kurtz has tracked down, sometimes seem oblivious to the concerns that surfaced in urban Catholic populations. German veterans had little interest in commemoration efforts, unlike the Irish. As a relatively poor group, Catholics left few letters, and Kurtz is careful to note when he relies on elites like Ellen Ewing Sherman, wife of General William T. Sherman. Kurtz includes nuns in hospitals alongside accounts of priests who were chaplains, and both encountered and – most effectively in the case of the sisters – dispelled prejudice. In fact, nuns are one of the few groups of Catholic women with a historiography, perhaps because they left such rich records.

Sometimes Catholics brought a distinct view to the conflict, as when they blamed the Protestant right of private judgment in interpreting the Bible for the abolitionist

cause. Some opportunities slip by for direct comparison. Surely it is worthwhile to consider how the religious, Protestant or Catholic, faced similar spiritual problems. For example, the Catholic concern over a lack of priests to perform the sacraments for Union soldiers, which Kurtz details, might be compared with Drew Gilpin Faust's work in *This Republic of Suffering* (2008), which discusses how Protestants, who needed to be reborn to be saved, worried about "a good death." Kurtz's discussion of Catholics treating their war dead as martyrs calls to mind Stonewall Jackson's renowned piety and the significance of his death to Protestants; it is worth considering how martyrdoms differed.

As for the claim that the war accelerated Catholic separatism, it seems unnecessary to Kurtz's valuable and detailed account of the varied experiences of Irish and German, of Unionist and antiwar Democrat. True, the American bishops decided to focus on building parish schools, but that was in 1884, almost two decades after war's end. More Catholic schools, colleges, and newspapers, and more wealth in the late nineteenth century, may have marked a new phase in parish life, but Catholics seem plenty separate before and during the war. For example, the struggle in Cincinnati over the King James Bible in the public schools in 1869 had prewar counterparts in New York and Philadelphia. Something very like the Blaine Amendment, a failed constitutional amendment to bar tax funding of Catholic schools on the national level in the late nineteenth century, had been written into the Ohio Constitution of 1851. The Civil War may not have helped gain Catholics much acceptance from Protestants, but their separatism pre-dated the conflict.

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