

CATHOLIC LIVES,

CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

THOMAS J. FERRARO, EDITOR

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In shepherding the journal issue into book form, editor Rachel Toor reminded me, fortunately, that what is worth doing is worth doing well; Steve Cohn and Peter Guzzardi, *menschen*, sustained the faith from ‘above’; and editor Ken Wissoker not only took on the project at the eleventh hour, but formulated questions I still needed to hear—in the ways I needed to hear them.

Thank you, finally, to Paul Elie, James W. Arnold, Susan Bello, Mary Lee Freeman, Jon Butler, Lisa Mulman, Thomas Pfau, Sarah Beckwith, and Beth Eastlick (in-house editorial), for nays and yeas at crucial moments, in forums public and private.

THOMAS J. FERRARO

Not-Just-Cultural Catholics

In the film *Big Night* (1996), set largely in a restaurant in the early 1950s, there is not a crucifix or a medallion, not a plaster cast of the Blessed Virgin or a picture of Pius XII anywhere in sight—at least not in plain sight. Yet its evocation of “gustatory sacramentalism” speaks with unprecedented power and clarity to a complex of Catholic practices that I was raised with (among other forms) and continue to pursue (with difficulty but not alone). By gustatory sacramentalism I mean food prepared with fierce dedication and fiercer hope: a banquet table made open to those who have always been there *and* to those this day passing by, and a resplendent insistent conviviality that renews love while forcing the hand of integrity. “To eat well—good food, really good food—is to come closer to God,” the traditionalist chef, Primo, sputters in halted and exasperated English: the one obvious reference to what the nineteenth century denominated *religion*—inserted, alas, to make sure the philistines (as Primo terms them) get it.

Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott, the directors, mean not just to preach at the audience, but, ultimately, to seduce it, by performing,

not just intoning, Primo's creed.¹ *Big Night* aspires to what is almost a missionary practice: tempting, indeed graced hospitality *in cinematic form*. Such a practice is rooted in a single ethnic tradition—not just excellence, but gastronomic excellence, and not just any gastronomic excellence, but the traditions of Naples, Rome, and especially Bologna—yet it constitutes a *religious vision* that even in today's world has the hubris to claim universal wisdom and the chutzpah to imagine for itself a form—the movie—that calls to others beyond its institutional boundaries into identity, into communion, however liminally. Not just Italians and not just Christians, evidently enough, come to eat at Primo and his brother's place, and we in the audience are supposed to, too.

This collection of essays is meant as a banquet like Primo's, in which the food being served is splendid conversation and debate, auto-ethnography to revisionist purpose especially; the myriad cooks are spirited virtuoso writers, within and along the borders of the academy, who have thought much about contemporary Catholicism, yet through diverse professional lenses and with regard to different phenomenological foci; the topic is how Catholics have gotten and should go from here to there (from fifties self-assurance to nineties self-challenge, from intellectual insularity to congress, and from second-class cultural citizenship to center stage); and the guests of honor are our readers, of whatever experience or persuasion, who seek stronger, more original "stuff"—probing or subtle or just plain forthright—than what either the mass media can afford or the academic establishment has heretofore seen fit to circulate. It is a party of the intellect and the word, I wish to suggest, a long time in the making.

It ought to be a commonplace that there has long been, and to a certain extent continues to be, a marked discrepancy between the hypersalience of Catholic matters in public discourse (especially contemporary matters) and their relative absence in academic discourse other than that sponsored by the Church and its orders (medieval and colonial history notwithstanding). In October of 1996, for instance, when a Durham, North Carolina, parish with an African American mission announced it was discontinuing its Sunday afternoon Spanish mass, the resultant walkout, modeled of course on black civil rights praxis, made

front page and prime time.² What resulted was sustained (if not always accurate) coverage, coverage explicable in part by the perceived threat, both within and without the parish, of ethnic disenfranchisement—a new pastor lacking Spanish but seeking unity, an African American community's rich traditions and meager resources put at risk by the migrant influx from Mexico and Central America—but also, on a larger scale, by a general fear of Catholic inroads into what is statistically the most Protestant fundamentalist state in the nation: if the U.S. Catholic hierarchy is once again fumbling the ball of Latino renewal, can massive conversions to Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity be far behind?

It would come as a surprise, then, given such intensity of local interest and activity (we support two synagogues, one mosque, and more churches than you could count), that during my first five years in this very town, 1988–1993, Duke University carried on its books only one religious studies course in "The Roman Catholic Tradition," at the introductory level, and without regular faculty qualified to teach its developments after the Reformation; and not even one course in history and the social sciences focused on the Catholic presence *in the United States* after the French and Spanish conquests. A fact sobering in itself; disturbing, perhaps, given university demographics. In 1990, upwards of 40 percent of the undergraduate population at the university had at least one Catholic parent, or so one well-placed sociologist at the time discreetly estimated; whatever their backgrounds, 23 percent of the entire student body did in fact identify themselves, officially, as Catholic; and a startling 11 percent of the total student body attended the Sunday night (9:30 PM) mass on campus each week.³ Hereabouts folks refer ruefully to the undergraduate program as the State College of New Jersey at Durham, North Carolina, not without reason. It is into the breach between the anxious talk of the public at large ("What is to be done?") and the anxious silence of the non-Catholic academy ("Hopefully nothing has to") that this collection is launched.

As an American studies major in college—at Amherst, in the late 1970s—the only version of twentieth-century U.S. Catholicism that made a lasting impression on me was that of Garry Wills: a hermetic, near-singular Catholicism put into crisis in the mid-1960s by the sym-

2 Thomas J. Ferraro

biosis of its own design and the national moment. In *Bare Ruined Choirs*, Wills paints a lucid picture of midcentury homogeneity, of intellectual enclosure, of a world taken for granted, with enough detail and texture that to reread it today is to be taken in once again: yes, it was—wasn't it?—that way. "The church was enclosed, perfected in circular inner logic, strength distributed through all its interlocking aspects; turned in on itself, giving a good account of itself to itself—but so vulnerable, so fragile, if one looked outward, away from it." For Wills, the Church offered the near-true and hence unpenetrated illusion of *changelessness* as its primary value. The sixties were a wake-up call to another sense, another idea, entirely: "*it let out the dirty little secret*. It forced upon Catholics, in the most startling symbolic way, the fact that *the church changes*."⁴

The inspiration for this volume was the sense that coming on the scene was a coterie of writers raised largely if not entirely after Vatican II, whose work treated Catholic lives—and the life of Catholicism—in the recent and contemporary United States in wondrous new ways: work that on the one hand was tutored outside the Catholic academy by the paradigms of self-division, dissensus, and contestation entailing gender and sexuality, ethnicity if not race, and blue-collar alienation; and that on the other hand (re)turned to disparate Catholic materials to recover for critical interrogation less-official, often unsuspected, and at critical points unsanctioned forms of Catholic practice. In their writing to date and here, these scholars and essayists identify disjunctive forms of experience and even dissensus predating Vatican II—tensions and fissures held in check by uniform liturgy and a web of familiarity, "changes" already under way or roads not taken; and they trace the trajectories of such modalities across the putative sixties watershed and its related passages (secularization, ethnic assimilation)—countervailing *continuities* that continue to surprise, or revolutionary pushes not yet in effect.

The practices these writers bring forward include street festivals and Mardi Gras, devotions to Mary and the communion of saints, the sanctification of the cripple, and the martyring ethos of the hospital auxiliary; New Left and Brown Power civil disobedience, the con-

servative think tanks and organs of policy debate, and quietist communions centered on working-class bars and professional playing fields; the visual and performing arts, not only Flannery O'Connor and *Going My Way*, but the films of Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock, beat writing and postmodern art, the stadium rock of Madonna and Springsteen, and cops-and-robbers TV; as well as the revisionary responses, active and contemplative, to the "gender crisis" (make that *crises*) in the Church, the topical but no less insistent matters of reproductive responsibility, the ordination of women, gay personhood, and AIDS devastation. What has emerged is a remarkable constellation of writing, known but not quite well enough known—a constellation warranting the refocus and provocation that dissemination across disciplinary boundaries begets.⁵

During the postwar era of "consensus," U.S. academics, as a group, found ethnicity (including the ethnicities of Catholic immigrants) easy to talk about, and religion (Puritanism excepted) difficult, except (this may be a tautology) in sociological terms. We can begin to account for this. In the mid-1950s what John Murray Cuddihy has called the "no offense" pact was struck, on a brilliantly Protestant foundation of compromise, entailing a separate peace between private matters of the spirit and the American civil religion of liberal individualism. Tensions between cultures of faith and national vision were to be kept quiet, voiced only at home if at all, in houses of worship set apart.⁶ By 1955, sociologist Will Herberg had given denominational pluralism its classic articulation as a tripartite melting pot: *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. The Catholics, especially, demurred. "The orthodox have no need of consolation," Mary Gordon recalls, "and a closed world has no need of descriptions of itself."⁷

A problem, then: if the U.S. legacy of Protestant exceptionalism incorporated Catholicism as a minority sect, one denomination among others, what was supposed to happen to its antisectarian ideals; its dissent from Enlightenment individualism, from ethnic factionalism, from European-style nationalism; its belief in common humanity, common condition, common cause? Had the Roman Catholic conscience on such matters disappeared, or somehow gone underground, become

a family secret?⁸ U.S. Catholic historiography, which flourished during the postwar period (under the rapprochement of John Tracy Ellis), suggested that what was actually going on behind immigrant doors was assimilation: the rededication of paganish folk Christianity to “Truth, Justice, and the American Way.” Notre Dame’s Touchdown Jesus existed; his flock was becoming legion; was it not he who stood for Catholic modernity in America? In the early 1970s, with the popular renewal of ethnic self-consciousness and the concomitant rise of the new social history, most chroniclers of immigration weren’t so sure. But however much they emphasized cultural continuity—immigrants and their descendants now figured as the transplanted, not the uprooted—the social historians still weren’t themselves talking *faith*, at least not very much, and not very loudly.

It was in the early 1990s, during the final stages of finishing a book on immigrant literature, that I first noticed testings of the accommodationist waters from the Catholic side—testings nearly as tough-minded and provocative as the rise of Black Atlantic studies, which took the lead. One monograph in particular, from 1985, recognized the vexed nature of the ethnicity/Catholicism dialectic, and went after it. In *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*, Robert A. Orsi investigated the reciprocal shaping, through the female-centered “domus” of East Harlem, between Italian migration and uncertain mobility on the one hand and immigrant women’s piety and popular devotions to Mary on the other. Awarded the John Gilmary Shea Prize of the American Catholic Historical Association (ACHA), *The Madonna of 115th Street* was hailed by Philip Gleason (a former ACHA president) as the first “comprehensive analysis of the place of religion in the life of an American ethnic group” since 1932 (the publication year of a volume on Lutheran Swedes).⁹ To the Orthodox, the coming of the Italians must have felt like a mixed blessing, as usual: in crediting Italian-American spirituality, Orsi not only foregrounded the home over the institutional church, and the Sunday family meal over the eucharist, but went on to demystify the Marian Catholicism that reigned there. For my part, however, I sensed that the maternal focus and sublime empathy of *The Madonna of 115th Street* harbored more

of a residual Marianism than Orsi (an offspring of its world) let on; and I believed, more importantly, that it was his combination of testament and suspicion (love *and* irony) that made the work, whatever its wellspring, so persuasive to almost all who read it: a natural crossover study if ever there was one.

Yet I remained unsure whether Orsi’s *Madonna*, as well as several superb case studies that soon followed (by Paula Kane on the Irish of Boston, Ana María Díaz-Stevens on Puerto Ricans in New York, and Ramón A. Gutiérrez on mestizos in New Mexico), would find a significant audience outside the subdiscipline, and if so whether they would be read as complicating the rule of multiculturalism in American studies, or simply confirming it.¹⁰ What I feared was the long-standing strategy of intellectual containment, in which the sociology rubric enabled attention to Catholicism while circumscribing its impact; what I wondered about was the potential of Catholic history for reconceiving U.S. culture writ large, and the potential of a Catholic sensibility for reimagining the subject of history.

Thus my surprise—and pleasure—when in the early nineties I also began hearing religious inflections in cultural history more broadly, in art and literary criticism, and in intellectual journalism. In *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933–1962* (1989), for instance, James T. Fisher relied upon the usual coterie of twentieth-century converts—Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton—to identify a counterhegemonic American mysticism, only to give us, in stunning illumination, beat icon Jack Kerouac and jungle doc Tom Dooley. In *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990), Camille Paglia, at the time of publication an unknown professor at the Philadelphia College of the Arts, deployed a vivid catechistic style to pay homage to the visual mystery of a canonical line, with an irreverence toward humankind (especially mankind) foreign to the optative mood of U.S. criticism. Richard Rodriguez, whose analysis of the impact of Vatican II in *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1981) went virtually unnoticed in the controversy surrounding its politics of race and language, was now writing on sanctity and mourning in gay San Francisco, and on the Murrietta cult that possesses Mexican California, includ-

ing its Jesuit priesthood—a trajectory that soon culminated in *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992).¹¹ Increasingly I was intrigued: who were these folks, and what did these apparent convergences mean? How aware were they of one another? Had anyone else taken notice?¹²

Rodriguez likes to kvetch that as a writer he still gets classified as ethnic, Chicano, or, as he sardonically puts it, *pocho*, so that the full force of what he is doing—in *Days of Obligation*, especially—doesn't register. Like other things worth objecting to, the problem is not just Rodriguez's, but reflects several decades of decorous attribution, in which acknowledging ethnic identity screens out fundamentally religious energies. The label *Latino* might be said to be doing Rodriguez a favor—it is meant to incorporate him under current dispensations, however reluctantly—yet the scope and quality of his inquiry requires that that which dare not speaketh its name “on the American campus” be addressed head-on.¹³

In an interview with Rodriguez, published in the Jesuit organ *America* in September 1995, Paul Crowley, S.J., a theologian, puts one and one together, ventures to name what he sees, and lays down an implicit challenge: “In recent years there has been a wild, sometimes heretical cultural Catholicism abroad in ‘post-Protestant’ America. I’m thinking of Camille Paglia, Andy Warhol, Madonna, Martin Scorsese. Do you consider yourself part of this renegade Catholic movement?” As a catchphrase, *cultural Catholicism* suggests the development and deployment of Catholic ways of knowing and habits of being outside the official precincts and sanction, if not purview, of the Church. Although *movement* is perhaps too concerted, too teleological a term, Crowley has indexed a remarkable demographic cohort: a coterie of artists and intellectuals, once raised in but now somewhat distant from immigrant devotionism, whose work is deliberately, often tantalizingly, at times insistently, “religious”—without being or wanting to be catechistic.

Madonna, Richard Rodriguez, Andy Warhol, Camille Paglia, Martin Scorsese: when cultural Catholicism first gets noticed, those intellectuals meant to exemplify it (a high-end essayist, a lit-crit agent

provocateur) are observed side by side with, and are not distinguished from, those operating in the visual and performing arts (pop art's late icon, rock music's dancing queen, the cinematic auteur of the mean streets).¹⁴ In a history that is just beginning to be recovered, Catholics in the United States have gravitated into the arts more easily than into the academy, not just because the parochial environment has been anti-intellectual and the secular academy anti-Catholic, but because populist forms of Catholic knowing reside more in gesture than in explication, more in the mass of common spectacle than in the monastery of individual contemplation, and more in public theaters of aesthetic transformation than in the sequestered libraries of its preservation.¹⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that as folks with Catholic backgrounds move forthrightly into “secular” intellectual ranks and the academy, the Catholic culture that they bear (and reproduce and transform) reemerges as a cluster of performative predispositions—not only or primarily a choice of subject or pronounced belief.¹⁶ The national *habitus* affords critical distance on the Church and its members, yet even the criticism that ensues may exhibit Catholic modalities, tutored in the catechism and confessional, of course, but also in the pews, playgrounds, kitchens, bedrooms, and hospitals, where the lay practicum—including much of its mysticism—really happens.

I am especially interested in how fundamental Catholic discourses—iconicity and ritual, original sin and sacramentality, intercessory mediation and corpus christi—function in social and cultural contexts beyond the narrowly religious, including where least expected. To me, *cultural* as a qualifier to *Catholicism* does not necessarily mean dilution or dissolution—a draining of the religious imagination into banal secularity—but can in fact signify the opposite, a form of transfigurative reenvisioning that refuses to quarantine the sacred.¹⁷

The Catholicizing of culture is to be found in how, not just what, culturally Catholic intellectuals do: in the style and rhythms and unstated operations of their writing and scholarship, yet also in how they approach the classroom and public lecture hall, departmental meetings and the conclaves of their universities and professional organizations—for which, indeed, many will feel tempted to give either more

or less emphasis than is the profession's wont. The dynamics of the Catholic/non-Catholic interface are thus overdetermined. Intellectuals of Catholic bent are going to attract or, as frequently, discomfort non-Catholics—not just because of their ideas, but because of how they hold and conduct themselves, because of how they understand ideas to be generated in the first place, and what in the final analysis they feel ideas are for. In short, the business of the intellectual community at large, not just the keeping or discarding of an individual tradition, is fundamentally *at stake*. Which is to say, from the hegemonic perspective of those who do not share those emphases, *at risk*.

Richard Rodriguez and Camille Paglia, Crowley's nominees among the intellectuals, are disaffected academics of some notoriety, both of whom have stepped off and/or have been excused from the fast track they were once groomed for, at Berkeley and Yale, respectively. Paglia in particular makes no bones about why, guaranteeing by her bluntness that the feeling is mutual. Such alienation is *not* characteristic of cultural Catholics—gathered here, as well, are everyday citizens of the university, distinguished chaired faculty, and respectful fellow travelers—but it may be suggestive nonetheless. Why are both of them so readily, often preemptively dismissed? Why do they touch the nerves that they do? I think answers lie in how these “academic renegades,” in other ways distinctive, challenge professional protocol and writerly norms—that is, in where their intellectual personae meet.

The principal paradox is that Rodriguez and Paglia are both ethnically and class-consciously trenchant, transnationalist in impulse, and gender bending, thus in tune with “the times,” yet somehow beyond academic sanction, neither politically correct nor happily neoconservative, at once too down-to-earth and too venturesome. Philosophically, each is acutely aware of the idealist (Protestant) liberatory impulse underlying mainstream Americanist work (the jeremiad, the manifesto), but does not capitulate to it, ideologically or formally; each is fatalistic with regard to matters social and psychological, yet holds the line crucially, one might even say “religiously,” as an aficionado unwilling to dissolve the aesthetic into the mist of postcanonical relativism.¹⁸ Learned *and* highly stylized, serious of purpose yet wickedly

witty, locally sensuous but with mythic reach, their writings produce aftershocks that cannot be reduced, I believe, to temperament (“mavericks”) or posture (“iconoclasm for iconoclasm's sake”) alone. One dresses up and the other down, one tends to intone liturgically and the other to sermonize improvisationally, one is diplomatic and the other is not, yet both are hell on wheels in front of the classroom, an audience, and the camera, where they practice, quite emphatically, what they preach.

Crowley asks Rodriguez, “Do you consider yourself part of this renegade Catholic movement?” The point Rodriguez makes in response is that his experience of ethnic, including racial, marginality has reinforced his sense of spiritual difference, and thus has prompted him to sustain or renew (it's not clear which) actual sacramental practice (that by implication could be understood to constitute a form of ethnic resistance). At least that would appear to be Rodriguez's argument when rendered, according to academic custom, in propositional logic. What Rodriguez actually says, or rather how he says it, offers a provocative illustration, in miniature, of how intellectual performance enacts (I really should say *embodies*) Catholic sensibility.

In Rodriguez's response, ideation emerges with necessary sound-bite compactness, but only so far as it is induced from narrative, which takes precedence and generates the oomph. That is, Rodriguez deals in the actions of the body (personal, social, personal because social) before the mind, assuming that worship is the precondition of belief, not the other (Protestant) way around. I quote in full: “In blond, crewcut America, my soul is hairy and dark. And has a mouth! So I need to be a communicant; I am more than a ‘cultural Catholic.’ But yes.” He's a glamorous man of reddish-brown hue and spirit (dark of skin, dark of philosophy) at risk in straitlaced white-bread (because white-bred) America, despite his upper-middle-class status; and that fact—of a difference read semiotically but experienced *materially*—sends him to Mass, where he goes to partake of what is there made available. The idiom here (“my soul is hairy and dark”) begins as familiar ethnic shorthand, then metamorphoses almost instantaneously (“And it has a mouth!”) into the signal metaphoric regime of gustatory sacramental-

ism: the medium, to cite an earlier Canadian Catholic visionary (whose message we've let lie fallow), is Rodriguez's massage.¹⁹

He is not alone.

The group of writers who have contributed to this volume is by no means exhaustive, no more so than Crowley's short list of the wild and woolly. But this group is, I hope, illustrative: conflicted, polysemous, and syncretic, within themselves as well as among one another—but a cohort nonetheless, with intersecting religious trajectories, social concerns, and constructions of knowledge. Like Rodriguez and Paglia, these renegade Catholics have proven hard to classify. In their works, the idioms and topoi of devotional Catholicism have a way of popping up in fascinating, heretofore unexplored, even unsuspected places—in places where the competing claim of ethnicity is expected and would do. But the Catholic thematics are not the half of it. For what characterizes the writing they do is its capacity for crossing boundaries, be they disciplinary, generic, or institutional; its tendency to resist being mapped onto the left-right spectrums of social vision and intellectual change, definitive of American intellectual hegemony and confirmed in part (in the moral sphere primarily) by John Paul II's Vatican; and its talent for making itself felt viscerally, so that it seduces even those readers (myself included) whose established understandings and commitments it contravenes. Such writing achieves, I believe, a mysterious “catholicity”—in which the force of its relevance is felt beyond the borders of a faith community, semi-universalized as it were, without its author necessarily having abandoned the more narrowly Catholic within.

If there is a turn of professional fashion that much of the work in this volume could be said to participate in, it is what has been called *autobiographical criticism*. These writers distinguish what in their memories deserves a public airing and what does not; they know when what they have experienced speaks not individually, in one fallen version of Emerson, but corporately, so that the articulation they achieve is on behalf of others (what Emerson actually envisioned for his “representative men,” though in a strangely disembodied, socially unmediated way); and they demonstrate how religious habits of inquiry, even when (perhaps espe-

cially when) held provisionally, may enhance the still honorable pursuits of critical self-reflection, ethnographic understanding, and objective knowledge.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education's* “Hot Type” column generously issued an advance notice about the special issue of *SAQ* that constituted the earlier, shorter form of this book.²⁰ The *Chronicle* proclaimed, “God is Back”—the implication being that God had disappeared as a legitimate academic subject but was about to be resurrected, perhaps too conveniently, as a site for poststructuralist theorization: that is, divinity as the final frontier of theory's imperial reach. My own sense is that religious energies—a certain form of mysticism—have fueled theory, particularly in its more eloquent reaches, since the very beginning, at times unbeknownst to itself. If poststructuralism has anything to teach its own adherents, however, it is that the discursive formation of religion means that God may not be abstracted from the interpretive community and practices that recognize him, and that any effort to do so will invariably enact, despite itself, for good as well as for ill, one form of religious discourse at the expense of others.²¹ It is my conviction that such a revelation comes as no surprise to those working on or out of Catholic sensibility, since if there is anything that runs bone-deep, in the laity especially, and in the Mediterranean diaspora especially, it is the fact that transcendence and immanence work hand in hand, often ferociously so.

The essays and interviews gathered here, do, I hope, represent an emergent intellectual force, but it is not one that was or can be understood as an effort to get God “back,” as if once gone. The *donné* of these essays, in most cases individually but more importantly as a group, is not God in his Radical Otherness, but rather embodied spirit: the impress of the Church on its people, including forms of worship it generates yet knows not how to sanction. So I have titled the collection *Catholic Lives, Contemporary America*, to foreground the lived experience of those who once were or are expected to be in the pews of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States—where, for instance (among the rich instances investigated here), the “cripple” is sanctified so as to be silenced, the ethnic barfly cityscape is understood in terms of Christ's

mystical body, male celibacy takes on an invulnerable (inhuman, de-incarnated) erotic force, or communal hospitality to children makes a different kind of reproductive choice possible. In locating religion at the nexus of ethnicity, gender, and class (at the nexus, that is, of what cultural anthropologists call *symbolic contestation*), the writers assembled here are able to take us intimately into the God-tangles of actually lived lives; and, in doing so, in writing as it were *incarnationally*, they are able to illuminate the spiritual trajectories of American persons and, in the essays of larger scope, of American personhood, with critical (by which I mean discomfiting) revelatory power.

As my father says at our table, in deep seriousness, especially when guests abound, *buon appetito*.

NOTES

- 1 The film is in a technical sense nostalgic—the fifties once again!—but not necessarily rose-colored, since the historical lesson it seems to insist on is fatalistic, anti-immigration, anticapitalist, and ferociously suspicious of America: the restaurant has failed economically, the United States is given over to glitzy joints whose offerings of spaghetti and meatballs Primo likens to *raping* the customer (Pizza Hut not long in coming). The vision that the film overtly, indeed melodramatically, mourns is, paradoxically, at the same time already being resurrected (this is transfigurative Catholicism, after all) by the film, not only in what it recovers but by whom *and* for whom. It was a cohort of contemporary Americans—Stanley Tucci, his Italian American cowriter, codirector Campbell Scott, plus the magnificent performance of Tony Shalhoub(!) as Primo—who made *Big Night* in the mid-1990s; and they found a very enthusiastic audience for it, not a mass audience, but one of intellectuals and aesthetes, well outside of any inner ethnic or religious circle.
- 2 The Holy Cross walkout and its aftermath received front-page coverage in the Durham *Herald Sun* from Monday, 14 October 1996, through Wednesday, 23 October 1996 (with follow-ups thereafter). The 14 October headline read, “Catholic church to drop bilingual service” and featured a full-color photograph of the procession out of the front door of Holy Cross, framed frontally (like a post-courtroom scene), with a woman of determination in the lead cradling the church’s statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, with the caption, “Hispanic parishioners walk out in protest.”
- 3 Tom Curley, “ASDU Debates Clubs’ Budgets,” *Chronicle*, 27 October 1990,

1 ff.; Timothy Stephen Hohman, “Aspirations and Transformations: A Study of the Roman Catholic Church at Duke University” (unpublished undergraduate essay on file at University Archives, Perkins Library, Duke University, 1 April 1991).

- 4 Garry Wills, *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion* (New York, 1972), 33, 21. I have treasured this book, yet on rereading it recently I have also come to suspect how it won its honored place as the at-large report on fifties Catholicism. “It may look contradictory for the liberal to escape Catholic parochialism and chauvinism—what would come to be called ‘triumphalism’ in the Sixties—by creating a cult of Catholic authors, heralding a Catholic renaissance, chanting Gregorian, and trying to start Catholic farms, restaurants, film studies, newspapers, and social organizations. But the liberals’ most acutely experienced urge was to prove that something recognizably Catholic need not be as cramped, ugly, and anti-intellectual as they found at the corner church” (44–45). Not only does Wills’s irony cut in both directions—as it ought to—but so does his condescension. It is my suspicion that those “Catholic restaurants”—and bars!—were always already there, around the corner from the rectory-school complex, and even in certain places frequented by Catholic liberals, if not quite near Columbia uptown, then crosstown, hard by Fordham or St. John’s.
- 5 What do I mean by “not quite well enough known”? For instance, Jenny Franchot has offered a rundown of recent major works in “religion, anthropology, and art history” that have or should become of interest to Americanists in literary and cultural studies. The works she enumerates—entailing the recovery of the Black Atlantic especially, but also of latter-day European-descended “paganism,” including goddess worship—are in fact revitalizing and reshaping critical inquiry along lines at once religious and social, spiritual and material. Tellingly, however, no work in Catholicism or Catholic syncretism is cited. This apparent oversight reflects honorable modesty—Franchot is the author of the formidable *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (1994)—but it is also indicative of cross-disciplinary inattention (disinterest, incomprehension, resistance, or a lack of awareness) more generally. See Jenny Franchot, “Invisible Domain: Religion and American Literary Studies,” *American Literature* 67 (December 1995): 838.
- 6 John Murray Cuddihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (New York, 1978).
- 7 Mary Gordon, *Good Boys and Dead Girls and Other Essays* (New York, 1991), 171.
- 8 Eugene Kennedy suggests that the laity practice a form of universalism

- (“largeness of heart” in “social context”), but do so quietly, without adopting “the pinched cheeks of austere and uncomforted piety” (Kennedy, *Tomorrow's Catholics, Yesterday's Church* [San Francisco, 1990], 25).
- 9 Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1992), 251.
- 10 Ana María Díaz-Stevens, *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration upon the Archdiocese of New York* (Notre Dame, 1993); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, 1991); Paula M. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1994).
- 11 James T. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933–1962* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven, 1990); Richard Rodriguez, “Credo,” in *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Boston, 1981), 75–110; Rodriguez, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (New York, 1992).

For other significant work from outside the academy see Paul Elie, “The Everlasting Dilemma: ‘Young’ Catholics and the Church,” *Commonweal* 118 (27 September 1991): 537–42; Elie, “Hangin’ with the Romeboys,” *New Republic* 206 (11 May 1992): 18–26; occasional pieces by David Gonzales, Bronx bureau chief of the *New York Times*, such as “A Haven for Hopeless Causes,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1993, B1, 10; and Rubén Martínez, *The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City, and Beyond* (London, 1992). For an overview of the seminal work of Andrew Greeley—sociologist, novelist, and agent provocateur in his own right—see Ronald D. Pasquariello, *Conversations with Andrew Greeley* (Boston, 1988).

- 12 As regards artists, writers, and public intellectuals, the fact is others had noticed, and noticed well. I learned belatedly of a book of interviews, whose author I would like to meet: Peter Occhiogrosso, *Once a Catholic: Prominent Catholics and Ex-Catholics Reveal the Influence of the Church on Their Lives and Work* (Boston, 1987); the book includes interviews with Mary Gordon, Bob Guccione, Jimmy Breslin, George Carlin, Robert Stone, Frank Zappa, José Torres (the boxer), Martin Scorsese, Eugene McCarthy, and a dozen others. Occhiogrosso writes, “Both those Catholics who emphatically defend Church orthodoxy and those most evidently at odds with the Church, including ex-Catholics, . . . form a communion, I would even presume to say a mystical body, of Catholics aware of one another and of their divergent and consonant viewpoints” (ix).
- 13 Stanley Hauerwas ends his homage to Notre Dame, “I suspect that the

last legitimate prejudice on the American campus is against the Catholics.” Hauerwas is by no means the first non-Catholic who has put the problem in such powerfully denominational terms. At Amherst College in the late 1970s, a great Americanist scholar and teacher, of German Jewish birth told me, in private but in no uncertain terms, that “the real bias in the secular academy is anti-Catholicism.” His advice was akin to the parting words of the Amish farmer in *Witness* to the Harrison Ford character, “watch it out there amongst them English, John Book.”

- 14 It’s hard to resist noting the short announcement in the 15 October 1996 *Durham Herald Sun*, placed above the treatment of the Holy Cross walk-out, “Madonna and Child Doing Well after Birth”: a tongue-in-cheek reference to Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone and Carlos Leon’s firstborn, whom they christened Lourdes Maria Ciccone Leon. *Oy, vay*.
- 15 See, for instance, Leo Braudy, “The Sacraments of Genre: Coppola, DePalma, Scorsese,” in *Native Informant: Essays on Film, Fiction, and Popular Culture*, ed. Leo Braudy (New York, 1991), 240–52; Thomas J. Ferraro, “Catholic Ethnicity and Modern American Arts,” *New Ethnic American Literature and the Arts: Vol. 1, The Italian American Heritage*, ed. Pellegrino D’Acierno (forthcoming); Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (New York, 1995), chap. 6; and Paul Giles, *American Catholic Arts and Fictions: Culture, Ideology, Aesthetics* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. the introduction and chaps. 12–14. To uncover a related and older genealogy of Protestant aesthetic investments in Catholicism see Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley, 1994), esp. chaps. 7–13; Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York, 1981), esp. chaps. 4–5; and the critical bibliographies of such writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O’Neill, Willa Cather, and James T. Farrell.
- 16 “There is a saving earthiness to sacramental Catholicism. . . . Faith . . . is realized in a social context as much as in church, and is marked by a largeness of heart rather than by the pinched cheeks of austere and uncomforted piety” (Kennedy, *Tomorrow's Catholics*, 25).
- 17 For debate over the term *cultural Catholic* see parts one and two of “The Intellectual Life: Essays in Memory of John Tracy Ellis,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13 (winter 1995), esp. essays by Philip Gleason and James T. Fisher in part one and the short pieces constituting the review symposium on Patrick Allitt’s recent book in part two; and the “Catholicism and Popular Culture” issue of *Commonweal* 122 (22 September 1995).

- 18 For analysis of how Protestant typologies, jeremiadic rhetorical conventions, and romantic Emersonian individualism continue to undergird American studies in the United States, even under the multicultural rubric, see Werner Sollors, introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York, 1989), ix-xx; Sacvan Bercovith, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York, 1993), 1-28; and Paul Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives," *Journal of American Studies* 28 (1994): 335-58.
- 19 Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York, 1967).
- 20 "Hot Type," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 40 (2 February 1994): A10.
- 21 Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies," 344.