



PROJECT MUSE®

What They Wished for: American Catholics and American Presidents, 1960–2004 by Lawrence J. McAndrews (review)

Thomas J. Carty

The Catholic Historical Review, Volume 102, Number 1, Winter 2016,
pp. 199–201 (Review)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.2016.0004>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/615407>

Graham written by people from all around the world, which totaled in the millions. Graham claimed at one point near the apex of his crusade held in Madison Square Garden in 1957 that he was getting more than 10,000 letters every day. Although this statement came at a high point of his national popularity, the letters kept coming. In the late 1970s, he was still receiving nearly 2.5 million a year. Several thousand of these survive. As Wacker makes clear, “they offer a direct reading of how partisans perceived and constructed Graham as pastor.” That is, they “reveal the emotional exchange *between* Graham and his audience. They enabled him to keep his finger on the pulse of broadly evangelical Americans and at the same time enabled them to know what he thought about their fears and aspirations” (pp. 266–67, emphasis in original).

This is a marvelous monograph. Wacker exhibits a finer feel than previous scholars for Graham’s importance to his converts and middle-American fans, explaining why these followers became so influential during the late-twentieth century. A stronger emphasis would have been advisable on Graham’s acute concern—sparked by colleague Dawson Trotman in the late 1940s—for the spiritual maturation of the millions who walked the aisles at his stadium events. Wacker states that, for Graham, “the goal was converts, not disciples” (p. 44). In a sense, this is true. Graham devoted more time, and spent a lot more money, on evangelizing strangers than on educating friends. But he also championed “follow up” on those who signed his pledge cards, performed by local Christians representing local churches—sometimes even Catholic churches—but facilitated by Graham. Too much attention to the wide array of churches and their leaders (both clerical and lay) who helped to organize and execute these massive urban meetings might have blurred the book’s focus, but a word or two about them would have strengthened Wacker’s emphasis on Graham’s expanding ecumenical vision.

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, IL

DOUGLAS A. SWEENEY

What They Wished for: American Catholics and American Presidents, 1960–2004. By Lawrence J. McAndrews. (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2014. Pp. xiv, 503. \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-8203-4683-0.)

Historian Lawrence McAndrews provides a welcome addition to a growing body of scholarship that incorporates the Catholic experience more fully within U.S. history. McAndrews’s experience—as the author of several books and articles on Catholic schools and education policy in the United States—provides gravitas to this work, which effectively navigates Catholicism’s complexity. Scholars of post-1960 U.S. religion and politics will find this book a critical starting point for research.

One of the central questions confronted by McAndrews is: Who speaks for the Catholic Church in the United States? *What They Wished for* attempts to explain the varying degrees of weight represented by the international voices of

popes and Vatican officials; the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; and individual priests, nuns, and Catholic laypersons of varying education level and political status. In seeking to identify the causal relationship between Catholic appeals and presidential decisions, McAndrews also demonstrates mastery of the chronology of recent U.S. history.

What They Wished for analyzes the impact of Catholic opinion on presidential policy in three areas—defined by McAndrews as war and peace, social justice, and life and death. Chapters are organized around presidential administrations beginning with John F. Kennedy and concluding with the first term of George W. Bush. The elections of 1960 and 2004 serve as useful bookends, because the former resulted in the election of the nation's first Catholic president, and the latter ended with the voters' rejection of John F. Kerry—another Catholic senator from Massachusetts with the initials JFK. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, McAndrews believes, Catholic viewpoints received much more consideration in presidential politics than at any other time in U.S. history.

Regarding war and peace, McAndrews's argument appears most persuasive. During Ronald Reagan's presidency, for example, U.S. Catholic bishops developed a powerful moral critique of the administration's plans to modernize and expand the U.S. military. Rather than ignore the clerics, Reagan officials actively engaged in correspondence and discussions with U.S. bishops. McAndrews attributes the dovish turn in Reagan's second term to Catholic lobbying. This idea seems generally convincing, although the Catholic bishops were not alone in calling for nuclear disarmament.

In life-and-death issues such as abortion, McAndrews concedes the limits of his theory that presidents adhered to Catholic appeals. Despite more than forty years of organized opposition to *Roe v. Wade*, Democratic presidents rebuffed direct, personal pleas—even from Mother Theresa—for protection of the unborn. Republican presidents—who professed to agree with the Catholic Church's official stance that abortion is morally wrong—refused to prioritize pro-life policies. Most glaringly, George W. Bush failed to pass any substantial anti-abortion legislation, despite working with a Republican Congress during his first term.

Social-justice issues prove the most difficult for McAndrews to measure the impact of Catholic lobbying. His definition of social justice includes the push for racial equality and national health insurance. Although the Catholic hierarchy demonstrated exceptional unity and consistency in opposing abortion and nuclear weapons, Catholic bishops and laypersons differed significantly in their ideas about the pace of racial integration.

Although graduate students and other researchers may find this book especially useful, undergraduates would likely struggle with the book's structure. The narrative flow is disrupted by a tendency to explain causal relationships through long lists of factors. Nonetheless, McAndrews's broad use of archival and oral-history resources has provided historians with an excellent foundation for future study.

Whereas pundits and scholars of this period have recently focused primarily on secularization and the Religious Right, *What They Wished* for offers useful insights into Catholicism's multifaceted role in this conversation.

Springfield College
Springfield, MA

THOMAS J. CARTY

Saint John's Abbey Church: Marcel Breuer and the Creation of a Modern Sacred Space.

By Victoria M. Young. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2014. Pp. xxi, 216. \$34.95. ISBN 978-0-8166-7616-3.)

Architectural historian Victoria M. Young wastes no time early in this study reminding readers of the degree to which Marcel Breuer's famous abbey church for the Benedictines of Collegeville, Minnesota, deviates from the building conventions of Catholic monasticism. She is just as quick to note that the church, completed in 1961, was intended from its inception to support the most ancient ritual practices of its users. Herein lies part of the "paradox" that resurfaces throughout Young's behind-the-scenes account of how Saint John's Abbey Church came to stand amidst the groundswell in Catholic liturgical reform of the mid-twentieth century.

Young devotes considerable attention at the outset of her book to the abbey's physical appearance prior to Breuer's arrival in the early 1950s for the purpose of designing a centenary church. The brothers of Saint John's had twice modified their existing place of worship to bolster participation by the lay assembly that regularly joined them in prayer. In preparation for the 1956 anniversary of their establishment as a community of educators on the outskirts of St. Cloud, Minnesota, however, they proposed erection of an entirely new edifice reflective of such recent instructions on the renewal of sacred worship and art as had been promulgated in Pope Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* (1947). Young chronicles this effort in detail and explains in one of the book's most intriguing sections how it was that a committee of "Twelve Apostles" selected the Bauhaus-trained Breuer (1902–81) to serve as architect from a field of celebrated modernists. Aided by previously unpublished photographs and drawings, she likewise records the experimental give-and-take of ideas that prevailed between the members of Breuer's New York-based firm and their Collegeville clients as the project unfolded.

Young's facility for dissecting the formal components of architectural expression is evident in her analysis of the novel interior scheme ultimately devised by Breuer for his church, which accommodated lay worshipers in shallow ranks of pews played outward from a centralized altar. She properly notes Breuer's enthusiasm for wrapping the whole of this ritual setting in vast expanses of reinforced concrete, although her suggestion that the medium's inherent plasticity represents "a metaphor for the vision the Benedictines had" and even an essential ingredient for "shap[ing] liturgical reform" (p. 33) may be too literal an interpretive stretch. Young situates the Abbey Church project nicely within the evolutionary history of twentieth-century church architecture, however, and correctly measures the