

McGreevy, John T.  
CATHOLICISM AND AMERICAN FREEDOM  
A History, from Slavery to Abortion  
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A competent survey of the historical and current dilemmas facing Catholics in America. McGreevy is an associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame. His earlier work, *Parish Boundaries*, won the John Gilmary Shea Prize of the American Catholic Historical Association. He begins the present study with an incident that occurred in Boston in 1859, known as the Eliot School Rebellion, which pitted a group of 300 Catholic schoolboys against the public school system for refusing to recite the King James' Bible version of the Ten Commandments. While the differences in wording were minor, the implications were not, and the problem proved emblematic of future showdowns between the "nondenominational" Protestant majority and an increasingly "ethnic" Catholic minority, not infrequently over issues of schooling. The author shows why, in the words of the 19th century's leading Catholic intellectual, Orestes Brownson, a faithful follower was expected to make "himself a foreigner in the land of his birth." McGreevy's time line touches the nearly regular intersections where Roman Catholic teaching and the secular majority diverge on the foremost issue of the age, beginning with opposition to the abolition of slavery. He goes on to examine the historical context surrounding the Church's standing on the side opposite most Americans on liberty, social liberalism, war, abortion, personal freedom, birth control, euthanasia, and other controversies, including the current pedophile scandals. He also delves deeper than the rhetoric and vitriol of the public record to suggest the role the underlying beliefs of Catholics played in their often adamant refusal to join the Protestant mainstream. The first main divergence centers on the incompatibility of a theological view that stresses a hierarchy of obedience and America's "Protestant culture begun in dissent." The second variance results from the Church's insistence on a constancy of belief amid the "degeneracy of the modern world," a position guaranteed to keep it in opposition to a culture of constant change which offers a full assortment of personal liberties without their concomitant social responsibilities.

True to his calling as an historian, not an apologist, McGreevy offers a balanced approach that proves informative and challenging for Catholic and non-Catholic alike.  
[21 illustrations]