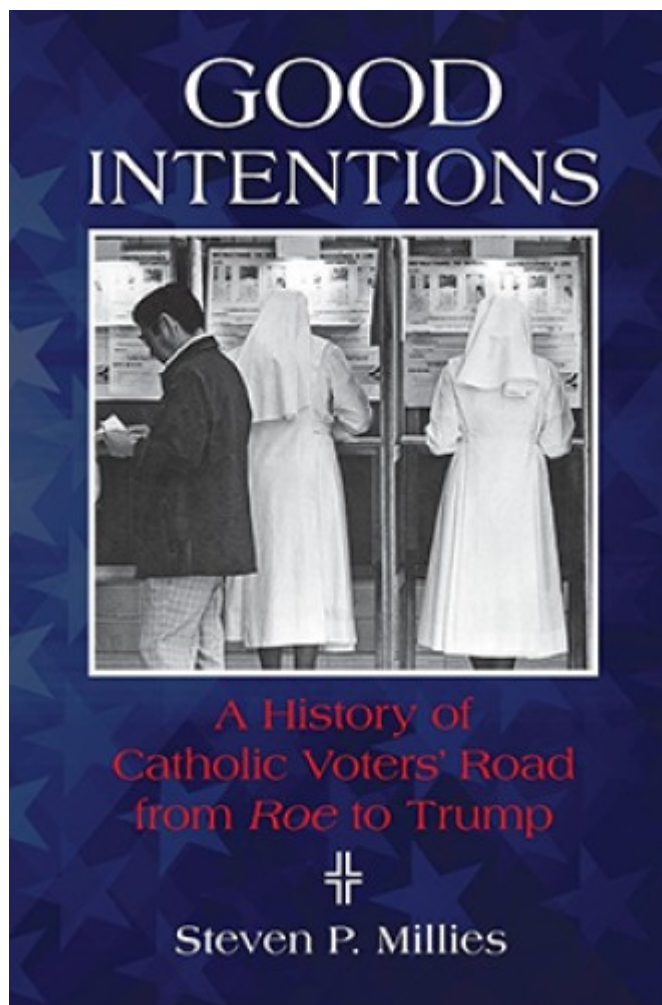


Catholicism and the secular state

## **The intertwining of the Catholic Church and politics, from World War I to Trump**

by [George Dennis O'Brien](#) in the [April 21, 2019](#) issue

### **In Review**

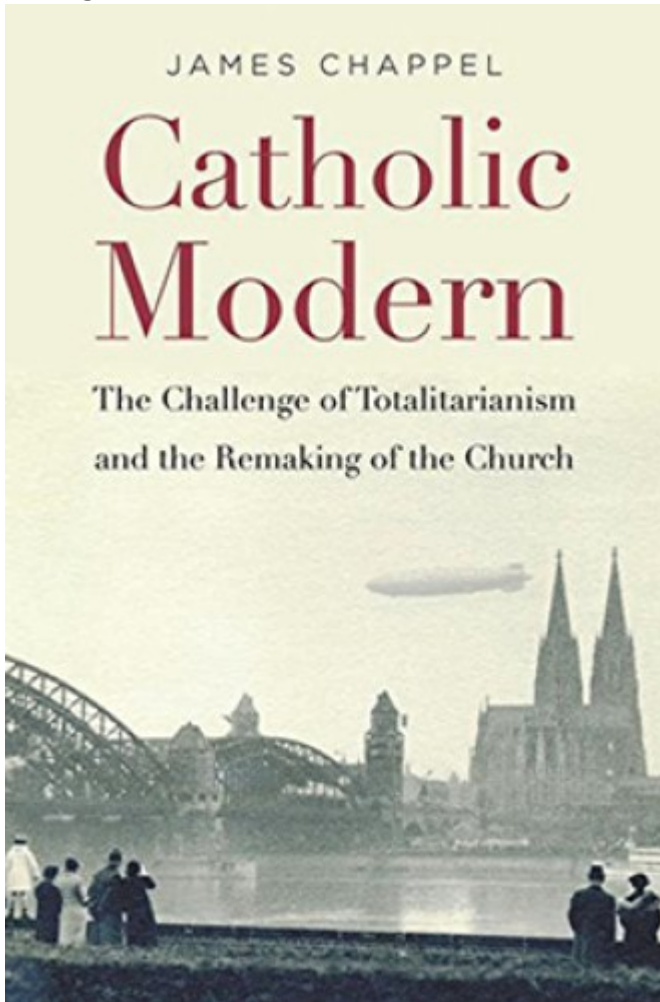


### **Good Intentions**

A History of Catholic Voters' Road from Roe to Trump

By Steven P. Millies

Liturgical Press



## **Catholic Modern**

The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church

By James Chappel

Harvard University Press

Catholic voters may have provided the margin of victory for Donald Trump in 2016. Trump won in the Electoral College because of a shift of some 80,000 votes in four crucial states— Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota—and there is evidence that it was the Catholic vote that gave Trump the edge of victory. How much was the official Catholic opposition to abortion the deciding factor for these voters? In *Good Intentions*, Steven Millies addresses this question as part of a larger exploration of Catholic voting.

Millies sees the Catholic vote as deeply influenced by the long struggle of Catholics to be fully accepted in American society. His account of the church's opposition to the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, rendered in carefully footnoted detail, focuses on how the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has interacted with legislators and the courts. In addition to negotiating with politicians, the bishops have focused attention on the evils of legalized abortion through official statements, preaching, and "right to life" organizations.

In recent elections, the USCCB has published a guide for Catholic voters, *Faithful Citizenship*. While the guidebook cautions against single-issue voting, its repeated attention to abortion is telling. Archbishop Charles Chaput has characterized opposition to abortion as "foundational." There is a compelling story to be told from *Roe* to Trump, and Millies tells it well.

James Chappel's *Catholic Modern* differs in time span, location, scope, cast of characters, and method. It covers the period from the end of World War I to the 1960s, with a glance forward to Pope Francis. The geographical location is France, Germany, and Austria. The cast comprises mostly lay Catholic intellectuals—bishops and popes chime in from time to time, but often discordantly. Chappel, who teaches history at Duke University, undertakes extensive research into everything from manifestos to articles in long-defunct journals.

The problem for the lay intellectuals was defining "Catholic modern" in the face of the official antimodernism of the church. Modernism for the popes was a political heresy initiated by the French Revolution's violent rejection of the traditional Catholic ideal of governance by "throne and altar." Broadly speaking, Catholic antimodernism opposed democratic governance, whereas Catholic modernists sought to accommodate democracy.

Nineteenth-century thinkers like Abbé Lamennais who had tried to reconcile the church to the French Revolution were suppressed by the church. Chappel shows how 20th-century Catholic intellectuals were better able to make a case for democracy because, after blundering into war in 1914, the traditional European autocracies undermined their own credibility by their inability to deal with mass unemployment and poverty.

Democracy (of some sort) became the politics of the day, as in the postwar Weimar Republic. But how would Catholics relate to democratic governance? Beyond mere

pragmatism, Chappel argues, Catholics had two strategies for dealing with the secular state. He labels them *paternal* and *fraternal* Catholicism.

Paternal Catholicism granted broad sovereignty to governments provided they protected the private sphere of “the reproductive family.” Its adherents advocated legislation that banned contraception and abortion and supported a “family wage” policy that allowed women to remain in the home. Hitler’s comment that the place for women was “Kinder, Küche, und Kirche” seemed to confirm this paternal strategy.

Because the concentration on protecting family and reproduction could be linked to the fascist promotion of the Volk ideology, paternal Catholicism often slid into a suspicion of Jews as perpetual aliens. Paternal Catholicism accounts for the most controversial argument of Chappel’s book: that Catholic accommodation to the secular state begins in cooperation with totalitarian governments.

Fraternal Catholics rejected hierarchic paternalism in favor of egalitarianism. In their view, it was not the reproductive family but the communal relation of marriage that was critical. The fraternal Catholic embrace of egalitarianism expanded to support human rights, religious freedom, opposition to totalitarianism, and rejection of anti-Semitism in any form.

Chappel traces in great detail the dialogue between paternal and fraternal Catholics, focusing on the work of one prominent thinker for each of the countries he profiles. The most prominent of all was Jacques Maritain, whose advocacy of fraternal Catholicism spread across all three countries and into the United States, where he concluded his academic career.

Vatican II (1962–1965) marked the official victory of fraternal Catholicism. Paul VI, the pope who concluded Vatican II, called Maritain his mentor. As Chappel tells the subsequent history, however, the fraternal spirit of the council was blunted, if not wholly rejected, by subsequent popes. He regards Pope Francis as the proper heir of Vatican II.

Catholic sexual ethics play a role in each of these books, from the antiabortion politics that shape U.S. elections to the emphasis on marriage that hovered below the surface in paternal and fraternal Catholics’ quest for a relationship to democratic politics. Yet sexuality is far from the full story, as both writers demonstrate.

What Millies and Chappel demonstrate most strongly is the gap between church officials and laypeople. Did the USCCB's campaign persuade Catholics about the "foundational evil" of abortion? While 52 percent of Catholics voted for Trump in 2016, a 2017 Pew poll indicated that 53 percent of American Catholics believe abortion should be legal in all or some cases. And Chappel's excellent account of Catholic lay intellectuals seeking to accommodate democracy only emphasizes the gap between their efforts and Rome.

Vatican II did, however, affirm fraternal Catholicism. Why? The secret of this striking turn seems to be rooted in the unofficial sessions at the council where bishops received a crash course in modern theology, biblical studies, and ecclesiology from an array of intellectuals like Yves Congar and John Courtney Murray who had been silenced during the prior pontificate of Pius XII.

The underlying moral of these two books might be summed up in Pope Francis's repeated attacks on clericalism as the besetting vice of the church. Clericalism isolates officials from the reaction to official teaching by the laity, from the ongoing work of scholars, and from history itself. Thus, Francis wisely admonishes bishops to "smell the sheep."