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MASSA, Mark S. *Catholic fundamentalism in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. 226 p. ISBN 978-0-19-775999-8.

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In this book, Mark Massa, an American specialist in Church history, examines Catholic fundamentalism in the United States, building on his earlier work on Catholic experience in America since the Second World War. While academic scholarship often aims to maintain a degree of analytical distance from the author's ideological or religious positions in order to strengthen methodological clarity and credibility, such neutrality is not always fully achievable. In Massa's case, his interpretative stance becomes apparent relatively early and remains present throughout the study. Whatever the merits of his arguments, which lie beyond the scope of this review, the book is best approached with awareness of this underlying positioning, which at times shapes the analysis of the groups under discussion. For this reason, the work may be read less as a strictly neutral account and more as a clearly situated interpretation of a specific strand of Catholicism.

Massa begins the book by showing the roots of contemporary Catholic fundamentalism in America. In Chapter 1, Massa analyzes the emergence of fundamentalism in American culture after 1919, a movement grounded in *The Fundamentals*, a set of volumes against modernism and pluralism. Here, Massa sets out what is at stake: the choice of a paradigm. While mainstream believers adhere to the new paradigm, the fundamentalists live in the old paradigm. This is a central piece of his argumentation throughout the book. Then, he connects Protestant fundamentalism to its Catholic counterpart in America. Both are post-war products: the first, after the First World War; the second, after the Second World War. Both are reactions to a newly arrived paradigm. Taking Father Feeney, a former Jesuit like Massa, as the founder of Catholic fundamentalism, Massa argues that, since Feeney, fundamentalist Catholic groups have shared five traits inherited from the Protestant fundamentalists: a sectarian impulse, the defense of the old paradigm, the use of political monikers, a militant tone and an apocalyptic urgency.

In Chapter 2, in the first subchapter, Massa applies Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions to American Catholic fundamentalism, framing Feeney's position as a defense of an old paradigm, centered on the Tridentine *societas perfecta*, against the emerging post-Vatican II paradigm. In the second subchapter, he recounts Feeney's

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trajectoryat the St. Benedict Center, his escalating conflict with ecclesiastical authority, and the disciplinary measures culminating in his silencing in 1949, dismissal from the Jesuits, and excommunication in 1953. In the third subchapter, Massa briefly suggests that Feeney functioned as a prophetic figure for later fundamentalists, who continue to uphold the exclusivist ecclesiology of the Church as the sole ark of salvation despite the consolidation of a new paradigm.

In the second part, Massa examines three figures and movements that adopted the "Christ against Culture" model of Christianity, avoiding cultural influence to remain immaculate. In Chapter 3, in the first subchapter, Massa traces Father DePauw's liturgical activism, grounded in a defense of the Tridentine Missal, alongside debates on pre-1570 rites and later modifications to the Roman Missal. He follows the formation of the Catholic Traditionalist Movement in 1964, DePauw's ecclesiastical setbacks, and the movement's declining relevance with the rise of Lefebvre and the SSPX. In the second subchapter, DePauw is compared to Miss Havisham (from Dickens's *Great Expectations*) as a figure suspended in a lost liturgical world, before Massa revisits the 1570 Missal through Lonergan's distinction between classicist and historicist paradigms. Within this framework, Pius V's vision of unchanging liturgy is presented as coherent within its original paradigm but rendered obsolete once the shift to a historicist understanding of ecclesial development is adopted.

In Chapter 4, in the first subchapter, Massa presents Mother Angelica's biography and the rise of EWTN, situating it within networks of conservative bishops, politicians, and Catholic institutions. He highlights her media apostolate as a significant but ideologically positioned enterprise within American Catholicism. In the second subchapter, he focuses on EWTN's increasing conservatism in the 1990s and a series of conflicts with ecclesiastical authorities, interpreting Mother Angelica's public interventions on liturgy and doctrine as expressions of disobedience and self-authority over the hierarchy. In the third subchapter, Massa addresses the apostolic visitation, her later withdrawal after illness, and the continued ideological trajectory of EWTN through figures such as Raymond Arroyo, while emphasizing its controversial guests and tensions with Rome. In the fourth subchapter, he frames Mother Angelica's Catholicism as culturally American and ahistorical, arguing that it remains detached from Roman universality and tradition while being aligned with conservative political currents.

In Chapter 5, in the first subchapter, Massa engages Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* and its call for Christian withdrawal into resilient countercultural communities, relating it to the model of St. Benedict and to traditionalist Catholic experiments such as St. Mary's, Kansas, and the SSPX. He then reconstructs the historical trajectory of the SSPX under Lefebvre, including canonical tensions, episcopal rebukes, illicit ordinations, excommunication in 1988, and its partial rehabilitation in 2009. In the second subchapter, he examines SSPX resistance to key Vatican II documents alongside controversial cases involving alleged associations with anti-Semitic rhetoric and figures, which he presents as indicative of broader ideological patterns. In the third subchapter, Massa analyzes St. Mary's as a realization of Dreher's countercultural vision, describing its sociological profile and educational model while criticizing its traditionalist ethos and perceived lack of pluralism.

In the third part, Massa examines Catholic sectarian movements that seek to actively transform mainstream Catholic and American culture rather than just withdraw from it for the sake of group purity. In Chapter 6, in the first subchapter, Massa examines Warren Carroll's founding of Christendom College as an attempt to reconstruct a Christian society grounded in the ideal of Christendom, set against the modern American framework of church-state separation and denominational pluralism. In the second subchapter, he acknowledges Christendom College's academic success and vocational output, but emphasizes instead its curricular structure, perceived medievalism, and lack of universalistic outlook. He further introduces testimonies and accounts of sexual and relational difficulties within the institution to reinforce a critical reading of its internal culture. In the third subchapter, Massa draws parallels with Puritanism and Catholic integralism, framing Christendom's vision as primitivist and counter-revolutionary, before discussing its social alliances and ideal of masculine militancy.

In Chapter 7, in the first subchapter, Massa analyzes Michael Voris and the formation of Church Militant, tracing his conversion, the establishment of St. Michael's Media, and his subsequent evolution into a polemical critic of LGBT culture and perceived episcopal weakness in the American Church. He also highlights the organization's political framing of Catholicism, including references to Donald Trump, "Constantinian" politics, and militant rhetoric that, in Massa's reading, borders on calls for confrontation. In the second subchapter, he examines debates around papal fallibility, focusing on Pope Francis, criticisms of his political and moral positions, and the wider controversy surrounding Archbishop Viganò's accusations regarding clerical sexual abuse and alleged institutional cover-ups. In the third subchapter, Massa discusses Church Militant's rupture with the Archdiocese of Detroit and interprets the movement as part of a broader fusion of religion and politics centered on masculinity and militant identity. He concludes by noting Voris's resignation in 2023 and presenting his trajectory as ultimately marked by internal contradictions and institutional harm.

In Chapter 8, in the first subchapter, Massa examines Rome as a symbolic and institutional center attracting politically and religiously conservative converts, focusing on figures such as Eric Sammons and his role as editor-in-chief of *Crisis* magazine. He frames Sammons's Catholic identity as shaped by a continuity of Protestant fundamentalist assumptions reconfigured within a Catholic framework. In the second subchapter, he analyzes *Crisis* editorials on Pope Francis, particularly regarding the Latin Mass, episcopal appointments, and the pontificate's trajectory, interpreting Sammons's stance as primitivist and ahistorical. In the third subchapter, Massa discusses the influence of premillennialist interpretations within Sammons's media output and podcast collaborations, noting eschatological readings of Scripture that frame contemporary events in apocalyptic terms. In the fourth subchapter, he reasserts that Catholic tradition has not historically been premillennialist, criticizes such scriptural interpretations as methodologically problematic, and suggests that tensions with ecclesial authority may reflect underlying Protestant assumptions, while concluding with a defense of Vatican II against these readings.

This book offers an interesting and detailed analysis of several Catholic groups that Massa classifies as fundamentalist. It is undoubtedly a relevant contribution to

the study of American Catholicism, particularly of this strand of Catholicism. Massa provides a wealth of detail and writes in an engaging style that sustains the reader's interest throughout the volume. The research effort behind the work is evident, and the acknowledgments testify to the support and collaboration of numerous colleagues and interlocutors who contributed to its development.

Massa also draws on a number of influential scholars to support his argumentation. Among them, Thomas Kuhn's idea of paradigm shifts plays a particularly important role in interpreting the groups under study. The defense of the older paradigm of the *societas perfecta* against the newer paradigm associated with Vatican II is presented as one of the defining characteristics of Catholic fundamentalism, inherited from Protestant fundamentalism and exemplified by Leonard Feeney, whom Massa identifies as its foundational figure in the American Catholic context. This theme recurs throughout the book and arguably constitutes its central interpretive framework.

The remaining characteristics are likewise present across the case studies, although with varying degrees of prominence. The sectarian impulse is perhaps most evident in the discussion of the St. Mary's community in Chapter 5, where a deliberate distance from mainstream society is emphasized, a stance rooted in the SSPX, whose leaders were excommunicated in 1988. The use of political monikers appears particularly clear in Chapter 4 on Mother Angelica and EWTN, where Massa argues that her understanding of Catholicism reflected specifically American political and cultural commitments. The militant tone is most visible in Chapter 7 through the example of Michael Voris and Church Militant, especially in its rhetoric surrounding conflict and masculinity. Finally, apocalyptic urgency emerges most strongly in Chapter 8 through the work of Eric Sammons and *Crisis*, where discussions of premillennialism, the End Times, and the Great Apostasy occupy a significant place.

Nevertheless, the overall impression left by the book is predominantly critical of the individuals and movements examined. As noted above, Massa's interpretive perspective is consistently present and shapes the narrative throughout the volume. While this approach produces a coherent argument, it occasionally leaves less room for alternative readings of the figures and groups under discussion. The analysis tends to focus primarily on aspects that support the author's thesis, whereas other dimensions of their lives, motivations, and influence receive comparatively less attention. As a result, the reader is sometimes presented with portraits that appear more critical than fully rounded.

This observation may be illustrated by the first three major figures examined in the book: Feeney, DePauw, and Mother Angelica. Although Feeney was excommunicated in 1953, he was reconciled with the Catholic Church in 1972. Massa's treatment of him contrasts with the more nuanced portrait offered by Cardinal Avery Dulles, a fellow Jesuit, former disciple and hardly a partisan witness, in his 1978 obituary, republished in 2022 (Dulles, 2022). Similarly, the portrayal of DePauw may be seen as giving limited attention to aspects of his intellectual and personal profile that were evident to many (cf. Anthony, 2005). In the case of Mother Angelica, relatively little emphasis is placed on the positive impact that EWTN has had on many Catholics. This dimension of her legacy can be seen, for example, in the honors she received from Benedict XVI in 2009,

including the title of Abbess Emerita and the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice decoration, a distinction awarded only sparingly during his pontificate.

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