Michael F. Lombardo

Founding Father: John J. Wynne, S.J. and the Inculturation of American

Catholicism in the Progressive Era. Leiden: Brill, 2017. Pp. xvi + 359. Hb, \$157.

John Wynne, S.J., is not particularly well known, even among scholars. Yet his contributions to Catholic intellectual life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were substantial. As founding editor of both the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1907) and Jesuit magazine, *America* (1909), he helped shape Catholic thought and expand access to knowledge about the faith. He played a key role in spreading Catholic ideas and ideals to an American Catholic population hungry for information about the faith and poised to assert itself on the American scene.

In this fascinating book, Michael Lombardo brings renewed attention to Wynne's life and career, situating him within the context of Progressive Era America and its tremendous transformations. He demonstrates how Wynne negotiated the social and intellectual currents of his time, embracing some and challenging others. He rejected pragmatic philosophy, for instance, in favor of Catholic neo-Scholasticism, whose certainties he saw as an antidote to skepticism and subjectivities of the age. Yet he embraced many elements of modern thought, including the social sciences. He likewise supported religious liberty and the separation of church and state at a time when those principles received renewed condemnations from the Vatican.

How does one make sense of Wynne's complexity? Lombardo does so by reading Wynne's life through the lens of "theological inculturation." He uses the term to refer to the "process of engagement between the Christian Gospel and a particular culture" (10). In this case, he sees in Wynne an attempt to promote a "rapprochement between Catholic theology and American culture" (14). More specifically, he shows how Wynne sought to accommodate Catholicism to Progressive methods and outlooks, while simultaneously upholding Catholicism as an agent of transformation that would correct the errors and deficiencies of American society. That this task of inculturation was undertaken by a Jesuit comes as no surprise to Lombardo, given the Society's history of missionary activity and cultural engagement.

Because of its analytical focus on inculturation, Lombardo's work is not a straightforward biography of Wynne. It does not trace the life of its subject from birth to death as might be expected. Rather, Lombardo spends his first two chapters laying out the context for Wynne's career with discussions of the Progressive Era and US Catholicism during the period, respectively. Only then does he turn to Wynne himself. Born in New York City in 1859, Wynne entered the Society in 1876. He received his education at Woodstock College and taught

at the high school and college level before his ordination in 1890. His career in publishing began the following year, when he was appointed to the editorial staff of *Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, a devotional journal that he would reshape to include more intellectual content. He would remain active in writing and publishing until his death in 1948, a Jesuit for seventy-six years.

Lombardo finds Wynne's commitment to theological inculturation exhibited most clearly in his work on the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and *America* magazine. The history of each publication is treated with its own chapter, which together stand out as some of the richest material in the book. Lombardo reveals how Wynne used these publications to engage with many of the most pressing social and intellectual issues of his day. At a time when Catholic intellectual life seemed to be on retreat in the wake of the Modernist Crisis and papal condemnation of "Americanism," Wynne sought out authors well-versed in the latest scholarship for the *Encyclopedia* and saw the magazine as a means of cultivating intellectual discussion among the nation's growing Catholic readership. Through these efforts, Wynne worked to advance Catholic theological literacy and served as a "key forerunner to the Catholic Revival of the mid-twentieth century" (17).

As a biography, the work has its limits. Readers gain a good sense of Wynne's activity, but hear little of his own voice and thought. Lombardo admits that Wynne was "a doer more than a thinker" (16). Since Wynne never published a major scholarly treatise of his own, one is left to distill his theological vision from speeches, articles, lectures, and other accounts, which Lombardo does admirably. But his decision to focus on Wynne as an agent of theological inculturation does lead him to leave other aspects of Wynne's life unexplored, most notably his work in promoting the cause of the North American martyrs. Attention to that part of his career might have provided insights about Wynne's spirituality, as well as his views on Native American culture. But those biographical limitations should not detract from Lombardo's fine study, which leads us to a renewed appreciation for Wynne's contributions to American Catholic intellectual life in the Progressive Era. The hefty price of the book may make it prohibitively expensive for many individuals and libraries, but it deserves attention from those interested in the history of Catholic thought and literary culture in the United States.

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