



# The Reception of Pragmatism in France and the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism, 1890-1914

*Stephen Schloesser*

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This collection of essays provides a small revolution in the study of Roman Catholic Modernism, a movement that until now has been largely seen as an episode that underscored institutional Catholicism's isolation from the mainstream intellectual currents of the time. By recasting the provincial story within a transatlantic intellectual-cultural framework--that is, the French Catholic Modernists' reception of the pragmatism of William James, the towering giant of American intellectual life--the present volume turns a confessional "Catholic" episode into a broadly "catholic" one. It explains precisely why Modernism was a rather universal phenomenon, finding expression in non-Christian religions, Russian Orthodoxy, and mainline Protestant denominations as well as in Roman Catholicism.

According to the old provincial narrative crafted by Catholic conservative forces, Modernism was simply a recurrence of ancient heresies rekindled by the Enlightenment. Conservatives dug in their heels against Enlightenment thought, insisting on the timelessness of dogmas and on the truth of a "revelation" independent of human distortion. Against this official position arose a "fringe element" of Catholic scholars who applied historical-critical methods to the study of Scripture, church history, and dogma. Pius X condemned these Modernists and largely swept the Church clean of their influence.

This volume brings together distinguished church historians, philosophers, and theologians to examine the reception of William James's pragmatism by Roman Catholic thinkers in France. They show that the Modernist Crisis was not "a strictly circumscribed affair" but rather a wrenching subplot within a larger intellectual and cultural drama that puts the particular ecclesiastical crisis firmly in the center of the pressing issues of the day. The book concludes that Roman Catholic concerns were *catholic* concerns--perennial concerns shared with the major intellectual currents of that era.

In addition to David G. Schultenover, S.J., the contributors are: Clara Ginther, Harvey Hill, Michael J. Kerlin, John R. Shook, Stephen Schloesser, S.J., C. J. T. Talar, Donald Wayne Viney, and Frédéric Worms.

### ABOUT THE EDITOR:

David G. Schultenover, S.J., is professor of historical theology at Marquette University and editor-in-chief of *Theological Studies*. His books include *A View from Rome: On the Eve of the Modernist Crisis*.

### PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"Overall, the scope and quality of the essays included in the volume are of a high standard. All contributions are written by established professionals who cover their subjects with clarity and precision. The book will be of interest to students and scholars working in the areas of philosophy, theology, and 19th Century intellectual history, and should certainly be considered for libraries that support graduate and undergraduate programs in philosophy and religion."--Gary E. Aylesworth, *H-France Review*

"*The Reception of Pragmatism in France and the Rise of Roman Catholic Modernism* is a book for specialists in the fields of French Catholic history, American religious history, continental philosophy, and Catholic theology. Most readers will learn everything they ever wanted to know about the incorporation of Jamesian pragmatism into the philosophical debates of the Catholic Church in France." --Michael Pasquier, *Journal of Church History*

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