



Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses: Anti-Catholicism and American Church Designs in the Nineteenth Century

By Ryan K. Smith

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Crosses, candles, choir vestments, sanctuary flowers, and stained glass are common church features found in nearly all mainline denominations of American Christianity today. Most Protestant churchgoers would be surprised to learn, however, that at one time these elements were viewed with suspicion as foreign implements associated strictly with the Roman Catholic Church. Blending history with the study of material culture, Ryan K. Smith sheds light on the ironic convergence of anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Revival movement in nineteenth-century America.

Smith finds the source for both movements in the sudden rise of Roman Catholicism after 1820, when it began to grow from a tiny minority into the country's largest single religious body. Its growth triggered a corresponding rise in anti-Catholic activities, as activists representing every major Protestant denomination attacked "popery" through the pulpit, the press, and politics. At the same time, Catholic worship increasingly attracted young, genteel observers around the country. Its art and its tangible access to the sacred meshed well with the era's romanticism and market-based materialism.

Smith argues that these tensions led Protestant churches to break with tradition and adopt recognizably Latin art. He shows how architectural and artistic features became tools through which Protestants adapted to America's new commercialization while simultaneously defusing the potent Catholic "threat." The results presented a colorful new religious landscape, but they also illustrated the durability of traditional religious boundaries.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Smith demonstrates significant connections between rising anti-Catholicism and Protestant appropriation of 'Catholic' design and decoration in nineteenth-century America. The links he shows are compelling and their articulation of signal importance." - Sally M. Promey, University of Maryland"

Review

A vehicle for interesting anecdotes and insights into the alterations and accommodations within the history of a massively influential force in American cultural life. . . . Fascinating.--*The Journal of American Studies*

A fresh perception that bridges architectural and intellectual histories, usually two distinct disciplines.--*American Catholic Studies*

A valuable addition to the literature on American church design. Smith brings together strands of research on the histories of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism, and architecture that too often have been viewed in isolation and convincingly demonstrates how they interlock as threads of a shared story.--*Catholic Historical Review*

[A] concise, well written book.--*Catholic Historical Review*

The most important contribution of this book . . . is its examination of the struggle for supremacy between two sects of Christianity that was manifested in physical form.--*Winterthur Portfolio*

A highly readable and painstaking attempt to unravel and understand a complex phenomenon: the 'Catholicization' of American Protestant worship in the mid-nineteenth century. . . . A diligent piece of historical work and certainly deserves attention from anyone seriously interested in understanding America's religious landscape.--*Religion and the Arts*

Smith demonstrates significant connections between rising anti-Catholicism and Protestant appropriation of 'Catholic' design and decoration in nineteenth-century America. The links he shows are compelling and their articulation of signal importance. *Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses* is a welcome addition to the new literature on religion and visual/material practice in the United States.--Sally M. Promey, University of Maryland

Well-researched and engagingly argued, this book is a welcome contribution to a subject that has not received the attention it deserves. . . . [An] incisive, though-provoking book.--*Books and Culture*

This wonderfully inventive book breaks new ground in the history of American religious experiences. It takes church architecture where it has never gone before: into the surprisingly intertwined pious practices of nineteenth-century Protestants and Catholics. The cross and crucifix emerge as dramatic players in a beautifully written study of cultural exchange. Smith delivers a rich blend of material culture, theology, and religious life.--Richard Wightman Fox, University of Southern California

Well-researched and engagingly argued, [*Gothic Arches, Latin Crosses*] is a welcome contribution to a subject that has not received the attention it deserves. . . . Drawing on ecclesiastical, architectural, and social history, Smith has put together an incisive, thought-provoking book.--*Books & Culture*

This fascinating study explores with subtlety and resourcefulness the complexities of American religious history--how Protestants simultaneously repudiated Catholicism and came to regard many of its features as worthy of emulation amidst the manifold rivalries of antebellum American and middle-class aspirations for refinement. Writing with clarity and erudition, Ryan Smith ably demonstrates the relevance of material culture for the historical understanding of American Christianity.--David Morgan, Valparaiso University

From the Inside Flap

Most Protestant churchgoers would be surprised to learn that at one time features such as crosses, candles, choir vestments, sanctuary flowers, and stained glass were viewed as suspicious, foreign implements associated strictly with the Roman Catholic Church. Blending history with the study of material culture, Smith sheds light on the ironic convergence of anti-Catholicism and the Gothic Revival movement in 19th-century America.

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