

most rudimentary imagination. "Civilization needs big projects, the kind that ignite the mind and inspire the soul," declared one space booster, apparently mindful of the volumes of splendid lunar poetry that have been published since 1969. "For all its material advantages, the sedentary life has left us edgy, unfulfilled," wrote Sagan. To take the edge off, the restless masses are urged to turn on the TV and watch the fortunate ones float weightlessly in their capsules. We can be vicarious explorers—contributors, too, every April 15!—to this magnificent venture, this grand expression of the human drive to explore. We gaze, starstruck, as billions and billions of dollars burn up upon re-entry.

This alleged American restlessness may define those who hold power but it does not explain the lives of the millions who, unedgily, stay put. Most scientists, unlike most blue-collar workers, are willing to sacrifice place for career: recall the incomprehension of Reaganites and neo-liberals when in the early 1980's laid-off Rust Belt workers didn't just move to Arizona and learn computer programming. In a centralized state and economy, the mobile rule the immobile. The grocery-bagger pays for the physics Ph.D.'s education, his federally funded research job, perhaps even the space colony on which he will one day frolic. We, the earthbound, can enjoy the stunning images sent back by the planetary probes, but we know our place: on the couch. City-dwellers can call up pictures of Mars on their computers, but they can't even see the red planet in the night sky, so bad the light pollution has become.

I write, by the way, as an astronomy buff who believes that there is, indeed, magic in the moon's mild ray. The greatest amateur astronomer of our century was a man named Leslie Peltier of Delphos, Ohio. From his native ground in western Ohio, Peltier commanded a view of the universe. He didn't need the aerospace industry for "fulfillment"; Mars was no farther than the telescope in his backyard. But then he had a backyard, unlike the intrepid heroes of TRW. Peltier was from Delphos, which was not an insignificant dot on a speck in the cosmos, as the mobile men of science so often tell the immobile payers of taxes, but the center of his universe.

In his beautiful memoir *Starlight Nights* (1965), Leslie Peltier wrote, "I know that someday man will reach the

moon but I sincerely hope this will not happen for a long, long time. . . . If [man] must conquer something let it be himself." The word "conquest" is a favorite of the spacemen. The conquest of space. The conquest of the moon. The conquest of Mars. The conquest of the universe. Leslie Peltier concluded his book by confessing, "The moon and I have been firm friends all these many years." Does one conquer a friend? Just what on earth are we doing up there?

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## New Blood

by John M. Vella

**Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome**

by Patrick Allitt

Ithaca: Cornell University Press;  
343 pp., \$35.00



The modern age has known many false prophets who have challenged the moral and spiritual beliefs of the Christian faith. Although churchmen have not always been vigilant in defense of traditional religion, one institution able to resist the secularizing trends of the 19th and 20th century has been the Catholic Church. But it has not done so, as Patrick Allitt suggests, because of an overabundance of intellectual creativity at its disposal. Indeed, the Church was slow to approve new developments in the natural and social sciences, historical research, and biblical exegesis for fear these new ideas might undermine religious faith. Yet, despite her resistance to innovation, from 1800 to 1960 the Roman Catholic Church in England and America attracted many gifted scholars and writers from diverse backgrounds who contributed enormously to the intellectual life of the Church and to the wider culture. Allitt, an Episcopalian who teaches history at Emory University, argues that these men and women dominated Catholic intellectual life and that their contributions to culture remain

worthy of study.

These converts, as Allitt shows, became Catholics in the belief that the Church preached spiritual truths often denied by other religious communions. Being Christians already, they were choosing the religious denomination most faithful to the Gospel as they understood it; many, observing the threats to religious orthodoxy posed by secular liberalism, concluded that the Catholic Church possessed the means to resist these challenges, while other religious bodies did not.

Given the preference for neoscholasticism among Catholic prelates, converts who were not attracted to this philosophical school contributed to other areas of study: literature, history, and the social sciences especially. A number of British converts—including G.K. Chesterton, Hugh Benson, and Ronald Knox—"tried to dazzle their readers with wit, erudition, and ostentatious orthodoxy." Their approach, as Allitt points out, was to criticize the premises of non-Catholic philosophy and science, to show its epistemological weaknesses, and to reveal its ties to a callow idealization of progress. They also used their Catholic insights to enlighten contemporary political debates, making the case that, without the guidance of faith, social chaos would engulf the world. World War I gave their critique of progress new credibility in the eyes of a skeptical public weary of Catholic claims. As Orestes Brownson took up the cause against the cult of progress in America in the 19th century, so other converts have done in the 20th. For many of them, "progress" meant the rise of materialism, militant nationalism, and total war, and they feared that by turning away from Christ and the Church He founded, humanity was on the path of self-destruction.

Living through World War II and the advent of the Cold War, many converts began to question whether the moral decay of Western society could ever be halted. Cradle Catholics saw the rise of communism and uniformly opposed it; so did the converts. Arnold Lunn, prominent Olympic gold medalist and author, wrote political commentary for *National Review* while Christopher Hollis (like Hugh Benson and Ronald Knox, an Anglican bishop's son) became a staunch Conservative member of Parliament. But they, and others, questioned whether any means could prevent the deterioration of religion and morality.

"We Catholics may be unable to arrest the world's progress to self-destruction," Arnold Lunn wrote to Ronald Knox in 1949, "but at least we understand what is destroying us. We have at least the melancholy satisfaction of not being simultaneously bewildered and annihilated."

Most of these writers were critical of scientism, the application of Darwinism to history, philosophy, and the social sciences in particular. They attacked Darwinism's extreme claims while defending what could be salvaged from its general theory in the understanding that science and Christianity are allies, not enemies. They frequently voiced opposition to eugenics, the Hitlerian byproduct of evolutionary theory, and they uniformly condemned Marx and his intellectual offspring. Here Allitt offers a reserved acknowledgment that, despite being seen as unfashionably narrow-minded and reactionary by their critics, these articulate defenders of Catholicism turned out to have understood Marxism correctly.

Relying heavily on secondary sources, Allitt is sometimes taken in by liberal Catholic historians with an ax to grind. Knowing that a scholar's contribution may be worthy of attention whether or not his work is recognized by his contemporaries, Allitt has discovered forgotten Catholic converts to make his case. Yet he neglects neoscholastic cradle Catholic philosophers and theologians whose intellectual achievements were equal to those of their better-known convert colleagues. John Courtney Murray and his intellectual nemesis, Msgr. Joseph Fenton of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*, were cradle Catholics, as were Anton Pegis and Vernon Bourke.

Is it fair to imply, as Allitt does, that Walter Ong, S.J., would not have become a gifted and well-respected scholar had he never studied under Marshall McLuhan, a convert? If an oppressive papacy is the cause of the Church's intellectual backwardness, why so many gifted French cradle Catholic writers such as Etienne Gilson, Paul Claudel, Leon Bloy, Charles Peguy, and George Bernanos? What are we to make of scholastic philosopher Yves Simon, who attended French Catholic universities in the 1930's, then fled the Nazi occupation to teach in South Bend at the University of Notre Dame?

Despite its failings, *Catholic Converts* is the best survey of English and Ameri-

can Catholic converts in print. It is reasonable to argue that, by comparison with cradle Catholics, converts in England and America, especially in the last century, did have a greater influence among the laity and a wider hearing from the non-Catholic world. These converts engaged a culture hostile to morality and religion, in circumstances not dissimilar to our own. We would do well to learn from the successes and failures of these veterans of the early culture wars.

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## Cultured Pearl

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

### I, Pearl Hart: A Western Story

by Jane Candia Coleman  
*Unity, Maine: Five Star;*  
222 pp., \$18.95



Late in October 1899, in the town of Deming, New Mexico Territory, the commander of Scarborough's Rangers recognized a face familiar to him from the pages of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, one of many publications then devoting considerable media attention to the Bandit Queen, a youngish woman from Chicago. In the company of another small-time crook, she had held up a stagecoach near Globe over in Arizona the previous May and robbed the passengers of \$400. George Scarborough traced Pearl Hart and her companion, one Ed Sherwood in whose company she broke jail in Tucson, to a sordid hotel room where, surprising them in the altogether, he arrested the couple. Pearl's clothes being out to the Chinese laundry, Scarborough returned her to Tucson in men's dress—the disguise in which she had robbed the stagecoach as well as, in Miss Coleman's treatment of the story, ridden West from Chicago in a boxcar with a rail hobo named Joe Boot, later her accomplice in the Globe stage incident.

The story of Pearl Hart offers wonderful material for the competent writer, and Miss Coleman has turned it to full advantage in *I, Pearl Hart*, a Western Sis-

ter *Carrie* of sorts. Stage robbery aside, Pearl is probably best known for Scarborough's later assessment of her: she was, he said, one of the foulest-mouthed persons (not "women"! ) he had ever listened to. Yet Pearl's vocabulary was by no means restricted to blasphemies and four-letter words. As the daughter of a respectable civil engineer, raised in a Catholic family and educated by nuns at a Catholic school in Chicago, she was a highly literate and—when necessary—articulate woman of no inconsiderable resources, as well as of cunning.

While the "memoirs" on which the novel is based are scanty to the point of nonexistence, Coleman has carefully researched what is known, and knowable, of her subject's life. Pearl Hart, who died in 1957 in her middle 80's, was notoriously reticent about her history; people acquainted with her in the years following her second marriage to a mining engineer, when the couple was living first in Cananea, Mexico, and later in Arizona, recalled a quiet woman rocking silently on her front porch while she smoked cigarettes. Her descendants, though agreeing to be interviewed by Miss Coleman, requested that she employ a pseudonym in place of her second husband's family name. No one knows how Pearl escaped from the Yuma Penitentiary in Arizona Territory, where she served time as the prison's first woman prisoner, and so the author has felt compelled to offer a fictional scenario of her own devising.

*I, Pearl Hart* is to some extent the story of a legend rather than of an historical figure, and yet the legend, in Miss Coleman's hands, is as much or more a novelistic creation as it is an historical one, a period piece. Yet the period is substantially recreated, and so is the place. Partly because Arizona, in its natural as opposed to its human aspect, has not changed that much in the last century, and partly because Miss Coleman (an Easterner from Pennsylvania, now resident in the lovely southeastern corner of the Grand Canyon State) has deep sympathy and an observing eye for the Southwestern landscape, the setting of her book is made present for the reader.

Pearl Hart came West from Chicago in flight from her first husband, Frank Hart, a professional gambler and compulsive wife-beater. Today the Old West is admired by conservative-minded people appreciative of a time and place in which men were men and women were