

*Churches* is a poignant one, which cannot help but be affecting for those with an interest in heritage. The photograph, taken by Kelly in 2015, shows the famous Smol'nyi Cathedral being all but crowded out of the urban landscape by high-rise offices and apartment blocks which press in on it from every side. This is the story of how the religious structures of the Russian imperial capital have managed to endure despite the twin assaults of communism and capitalism over the past century.

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**Síle de Cléir**, *Popular Catholicism in 20th-Century Ireland: Locality, Identity and Culture*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017. xiv + 249pp. 14 plates. 5 maps. Bibliography. £85.00 hbk.  
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Despite its title, *Popular Catholicism in 20th-Century Ireland* is an ethnographic study of popular Catholicism in Limerick, rather than Ireland, between 1925 and 1960, a period in which the city's population was growing steadily and the life of the citizens was being transformed by the development of public housing. Employment was mainly to be found in factory work and retailing, and in the workplace, as well as in the home and neighbourhood, religion was integral to the lives of the overwhelmingly Catholic population. Drawing on an extensive and imaginatively used range of sources and on an in-depth series of interviews, Síle de Cléir successfully marries top-down and bottom-up perspectives on religious belief and practices before the Second Vatican Council to create a convincing portrait of Catholicism as lived experience. In doing so, it makes a significant contribution to Irish twentieth-century social, cultural and urban history as well as a complementary study to the literature on religion in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British urban environments by J.N. Morris, Hugh McLeod, Sarah Williams and Charlotte Wildman.

As de Cléir points out, studies in twentieth-century Irish Catholicism have tended to assume a 'seemingly homogenous adherence to the practices and precepts of official Catholicism' (p. 186) in the decades following independence, based on the size of the religious majority, the levels of formal religious practice and the strength of the Catholic church in society and, particularly, in education. Her analysis reveals, however, that while there was considerable homogeneity of religious *belief*, reflecting the 'official' catechisms through which religion was taught, religious *practice* reflected a vibrant local culture which adapted to meet the development of the city, the modernization of transport and changing work and leisure practices. The study explores two interlocking themes: the 'vernacular culture' of religious expression and the ways in which 'official religion, at the popular level, acquired communal aspects in practice' (p. 19). What emerges is a sophisticated analysis of beliefs and practices that were informed by local, familial and individual traditions and preferences as much as by formal instruction. This is most evident in the local custom of building fires on city streets on May Eve which adapted (to the concern of the civil authorities) as it moved from the centre of the city into the local authority housing estates but retained its distinctive features,

combining supernatural beliefs with communal, cross-generational entertainment and adolescent display. However, the presence of the supernatural in the routine and the interaction between individual belief and communal ritual were striking aspects of Limerick life, from the enjoyment of a pilgrimage to the preparations made for wakes and funerals.

De Cléir notes that, coming from a later generation than her interviewees, she was surprised by the role played by fear in their religious lives (p. 23). Readers familiar with the religious history of twentieth-century Ireland may be more intrigued by the pleasure and agency apparent in their accounts of religious culture. This culture was deeply ingrained; joining a confraternity or sodality, taking part in processions, fasting at the designated times, was simply what was done. There was certainly fear of sin and of the spiritual and temporal penalties for sin (most evident in one account of adolescent girls' terror and rush to confession on discovering that they had inadvertently witnessed a Protestant funeral (pp. 124–6)) but there was also a communal pride in participation in religious practice. One interviewee described the 'team spirit' of membership of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Family as similar to playing for the national or local rugby team (p. 31).

Limerick was a city which not only prided itself on its religiosity but in which, as Judith Hill has shown, the architecture of the city was particularly conducive to regular and informal church visiting. De Cléir makes ingenious use of 'lost and found' advertisements in the local press which frequently not only described treasured and mislaid rosary beads but also indicated the timing and route of the visit to a church during which they were lost. She also uses her interviews as a means of addressing a dimension that is under-represented in studies of twentieth-century Irish Catholicism: personal belief and spirituality. There are, as she acknowledges, difficulties in attempting to do so through oral history but it is done well here. In general, the author's decision to develop a meaningful relationship with 12 interviewees from different areas of the city and social backgrounds over time rather than to engage more superficially and formally with a larger number works well, though it does limit the analysis of class, occupation or parish. It would also have been helpful to learn more about the selection of witnesses. That said, this is an engaging and important study which should, and hopefully will, inspire further micro-histories of twentieth-century Irish faith communities.

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**Thomas J. Main**, *Homelessness in New York City: Policymaking from Koch to De Blasio*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. xx + 288pp. Appendix. \$50.00 hbk.  
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Thomas J. Main has written an important history of how the idea of the right to shelter became embedded in New York City law, and the decades-long battle between the courts, the city and activists over what it meant for homelessness policy. As Main shows, shelter as a right originated in a consent decree issued on 26 August 1981 in response to the court case *Callahan v. Carey*. At the same time,