

Women and Religion in the Atlantic Age, 1550–1900. Emily Clark and Mary Laven, eds.

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The partial outcome of a conference devoted to studies of “Women of the Atlantic World in the Age of Religious Reform and Revival,” these essays examine the confessional conflicts that split communities across Europe during the age of religious wars, the intercolonial conflicts common to the Atlantic age, and various moments of regional importance during the nineteenth century. The volume has been divided into three rough chronological and geographical sections. The first, “Old World Reforms,” features essays on women’s roles in Europe’s sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformation struggles. Part 2, “European Encounters with Africa and the Americas,” broadens the lens with geographically broad essays on Havana, New Orleans, Philadelphia, and the Kingdom of Angola in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The final section, “Revival,” turns to the nineteenth century and the role that women played in revitalizing Catholicism in Victorian England and postrevolutionary France, as well as the ecumenical strides toward female benevolent societies in antebellum Savannah.

Editors Emily Clark and Mary Laven hoped to bridge both early modern and modern historiographies, as well as literatures situated primarily in mainland Europe or in the new colonial Atlantic spaces of Africa and the Americas, and to bring an end to confessional boundaries common to the study of religion. However, as is often the case in a conference devoted to building bridges, the tone of many essays is more explicative or exploratory than argumentative — given the sometimes brief historiographical engagement, most essays require specialists to draw out their import for their own fields. For this reviewer, the second section on the Atlantic World was particularly welcome, and the essays by Emily Clark and Annette Laing were especially strong. Clark’s work adds to transnational scholarship by

studying New Orleans's distinctive Ursuline order during the period of Spanish governance from 1779 to 1794. Her close reading of correspondence between Ursulines and religious authorities is situated in the extensive scholarship on female religious orders in France, Spain, and their American colonies. In chapter 5, Laing likewise meticulously compares the circumstances of life for two Anglo-American women — one a convert from Quakerism to Anglicanism, the other an Anglican who became a Quaker — that drew them across confessional divides, though not in a straight line. Her argument about the “wandering impulses among the laity” (92) during the eighteenth century seems most pathbreaking among those presented in this collection, and rings true for her characterization of British America's multid denominational Middle Colonies.

It was not always clear to this reader how the essays together serve to challenge assumptions across fields, although one hopes to see such innovations in later works by these fine scholars. Indeed, one conference participant may have shared with Susan O'Brien that the founding of an English Catholic female order named after Saint Rose of Lima was a rather pointed choice, given that saint's role in miraculously rebuffing a Protestant English pirate attack in sixteenth-century Peru. The memory of Reformation and renewal could have been another theme that truly bridged historians' stubborn geographical and chronological boundaries. Patrick Collinson's opening essay on one of the first memorials by English Reformers, John Foxe's 1583 *Acts and Monuments*, begins the process — one could see interesting points of comparison in terms of religious conversion and demonic excess between Michel de Certeau's possessed nun Mère Jeanne des Anges and Queen Njinga of Matamba as she appears in later European or African dramas, or with pilgrims' remembrances of Jeanne-Antide Thouret.

Several of the essays clearly read as though they were meant to be delivered orally, which is to say that they are full of colorful metaphors and wry asides suited to each scholar's personality. Many scholars in this volume focus on that perennial question in studies of women and religion: did participation in communities of faith provide opportunities for leadership or serve to curtail the threat of women's autonomy in patriarchal societies? In this, the volume's organizers surely meant to pay homage to Natalie Zemon Davis's classic work on confessional change and gender roles, and the contributors did more than their share of nuanced readings in an increasingly diverse historical field.

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