

Reformation. The convents' belonging to a universal Catholic ideal of renewal was, Kelly argues, 'a characteristic that trumped all others' (p. 10).

LERMA (UR 853), Aix Marseille Université

Laurence Lux-Sterritt

*Irish Jesuit Annual Letters 1604–1674*, ed. Vera Moynes, Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2019, pp. xxvii + 1013, €80, ISBN: 9781906865573

It was a surprise to me (perhaps to others) that the Jesuits were so much less active in seventeenth-century Ireland than in England. There were only two serving in 1598, 18 in 1608, 35 in 1621 and the number fluctuated around that figure until the mid-1640s, the high-point of the Confederation of Kilkenny, when it peaked at 67. Under the ensuing 'Cromwellian' persecution in the mid-1650s, the figure dropped down to 18 and never got back to anything like the 1640s peak—there were 37 in 1674. There was never, before the suppression of the Society in 1773, a Jesuit province, only a Jesuit mission. Still, the superior of that mission was expected to gather together reports from all colleges and residencies (eight of the former and six of the latter at its peak) and consolidate them into a single report to be sent to the Superior General in Rome. The volumes under review are an edition of the twenty-five surviving reports from the years 1604–74. There is an annual series from 1605–21 and then a large gap until we get to a single round-up letter for the whole of the 1640s, sent in 1650, two more for the following years and then another gap from 1653–62, when we get a letter summing up those nine years. There are substantial letters from 1663–5 and then another gap before a final *omnium gatherum* report for 1669–74. The originals of seventeen of these letters are in a single volume in the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* [ARSJ], the remaining eight, which are not quite of the same status, have been gathered from other archives.

These twenty five letters average more than 10,000 words in length (in Latin, about 12,000 in modern English) so they are substantial and significant documents and they are now handsomely presented to us by the Irish Manuscripts Commission, an organisation that puts its British counterparts to shame. Handsomely and spaciouly laid out, splendidly bound, very well-priced and outstandingly well proof-read, these volumes have been a pleasure to handle. The introduction and oversight of the work of twelve translators has been overseen by Vera Moynes, whose previous work includes the admirable calendar of correspondence in Rome relating to the Jesuit Irish Mission(s)

1566–1773, which this ensures that the slightly marginal nature of the eight letters not in the *ARSJ* is properly explained.

The letters are both more and less than the sum of their parts. They offer exceptional evidence of the physical courage and fearless resolve of individual Jesuits—no surprise but there is no substitute for vivid testimony. It is striking (this would not have been true of the English province) that there is so little evidence of internal dissent—although there are plenty of complaints about complaisant bishops and scandalous secular priests. By far the longest sections of the letters relate to pastoral practice and the overcoming of obstacles. Unsurprisingly, sacramental action is at the heart of everything, the most striking deviation from the norm being in the most desperate days of persecution in the early 1650s when priests hiding in caves or in tombs emerged with consecrated hosts to distribute—since gathering groups for Mass was too dangerous even for them—and they went round seeking out the most needy one by one. The consolidation of the mission over the early decades before the catastrophe of the 1640s and 1650s is chronicled not only in the growth in numbers but in the creation of an infrastructure not, of course, of churches, but of hospitals, schools, and even seminaries. The letters also chronicle the largescale failure of an under-resourced colonial government to convert its venomous language into effective persecution. But for the most part the Jesuits were seeking out vast crowds craving (the only word that makes sense of the letters' sense of it) confession, absolution, and communion.

To an extent not found in the English records, these Jesuits are confronted by widespread sexual sin—principally adultery or concubinage—by much falling away from the Faith under intense protestant intimidation, and by the need to bring reconciliation between, and more particularly within, Catholic families feuding over property or broken promises (or failed marriages). Again, to a greater extent than I have seen in the English records, these priests were resolving often quite secular disputes themselves, because of Catholic distrust of the English common law system.

There is a relentless emphasis across the whole period of persistence under constant threat of arrest and foul imprisonment and even death, and of the efficacy of powerful preaching (homilies of 3 to 4 hours are cited) that reduced congregations to tears and wailing with their heavy emphasis on the inevitability of Hell for those who fall away morally or spiritually and were unreconciled. The tears of strong men (and weak women) reclaimed are very much the stuff of these reports.

Most of the letters go systematically around the four provinces of Ireland and main Jesuit colleges, recording at once in intense detail

the *whats* and only fuzzily the *whos* of effective catechetics and evangelisation—time and again we are told of effective work with important (noble or urban-elite) leaders who are unnamed. They are meticulous in their accounts of martyrdoms.

The introduction is short (nine pages) and so (this is a comment not a criticism) is essentially no more than an explanation of the provenance, status and form of the letters, and on the pattern of survival/non-survival. Each letter is given first in Latin and then in English—in series, not parallel—which does make going from the one to the other harder than it could have been. There is a commentary about the specific provenance and condition of each letter before the Latin text—again making checking by most readers who will be using the English translation awkward. The index on the other hand is to the English translation, not to the Latin text which is much more awkward for those working with the Latin. The translation aims ‘to impart the literal meaning and not to seek to replicate stylistic choices’ (p. xxv). It is thus rather flat, but I suppose if that was good enough for the translators of the Douai-Rheims Bible it should be good enough for the modern reader.

The Irish Jesuits are supremely indifferent about what is happening in England and the impact on Ireland of, say the Gunpowder Plot. They are never rude about British Kings, only Spanish ones. They have little good to say about any of the bishops, and are sharply critical of a minority of them—the exception being their praise (written ahead of his martyrdom) for Oliver Plunkett, such a divisive figure in Ulster and in the Church more widely. They completely ignore the 1641 rising and the catastrophic Nunciature of Rinuccini. They emphasise the devastating effects of plague as much as military violence in the account of the period 1646–52. And while the rhetoric is one of a mission constantly faced by unrelenting government pressure (with even more animus against Jesuits than against other orders or against seculars) there is also a *sotto-voce* sub-plot of collusion. As in England, the regime sought to differentiate the (political) radicals from the moderates. The latter, if caught, were more often released, after a nasty spell in chains, than executed even in the 1650s. More spectacularly, we keep hearing, *en passant*, of Jesuits engaged in dialogue—one of them going hunting with the Lord Deputy when he is staying with a ‘loyal’ Old English Catholic and discussing the greater number of Catholics who give up all their possessions to follow Christ (with rueful comments by the Lord Deputy). Or, to end on one story that gives a real flavour of the complexity of the rich material in these volumes, there is the story of Fr Richard Shelton SJ, which comes from the 1662 letter but about events in the mid-1650s. His exemplary ministry in Dublin as a plague

priest is explored, but this, along with his ability to restore people to the faith, came under threat when an ‘odious woman’ [*muliercula*] in pursuance of a feud with the man who was shielding him, told the authorities where to find him and ‘described the features of the his face’ [*eiusque lineamenta vultus descripsit*] so they could not mistake him. He was arrested and imprisoned in chains. But ‘certainly he did not eat his bread in prison as a man of leisure, for he was doing God’s work daily. Thus Catholics were allowed entrance on the pretext of a visit and he daily heard the confessions of many and offered Holy Mass’ (pp. 877–8). He even converted a Cambridge graduate (who had fallen on hard times and was in prison for debt). After several months in prison, Fr Shelton was transported to Barbados but ‘after completing his sentence he returned to Holland and to Ireland’ (p. 878). There is a lot more to these volumes than tales of extraordinary courage and witness.

*Selwyn College Cambridge*

John Morrill

Susan O’Brien, *Leaving God for God: The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent De Paul in Britain, 1847–2017*, London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 2017, pp. xiv + 448, £20, ISBN: 9780232532883

The Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul arrived in Britain from France in 1847—an ominous year for so many reasons. Typhus gripped the industrial centres, another cholera pandemic loomed, and Irish migration accelerated dramatically as the island was hit by the darkest year of the Famine. When the Daughters arrived in Salford, prompted by the Church’s growing panic over how to cope with the influx of Irish, they had no idea what they were walking into or of the intense anti-Catholic bigotry that awaited them. Too much to bear, they abandoned this first foundation after just two years and it was only in 1857 that they returned to Britain and re-established themselves in Sheffield. From that point in time, the movement and activity of the Daughters was rapid—so much so that by 1900 they had a global reach that was unrivalled.

As one of the leading researchers of women religious in Britain, Susan O’Brien is more than equipped to handle a study as extensive as this one. Given the time period covered in this book, from foundation until the present day, the prosopographic approach adopted enabled her to present a ‘collective profile’ showing how these women lived in community over time and space. O’Brien discusses five specific generations (foundation, expansion, conserving, renewal, and transforming) across the book’s four main sections. Instead of going through the specifics of each of them, this review offers some thoughts on what was found to be the most interesting and revealing.