

difficulties of Catholic couples and tried to give practical advice to help couples reach mutual orgasm, it did little to alleviate the spiritual and bodily tensions associated with NFP. Geiringer illuminates the tactics devised by Catholic women to release these sexual and marital tensions, such as masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex. Ultimately, it was these physical and emotional struggles that brought about a change in contraceptive behaviours. At times, Geiringer's analysis could have been pushed further. Studies on reproductive behaviours have shown the plethora of factors that could influence birth control decision-making. For instance, the author does not consider the desire and necessity to limit family size for the well-being of children. Besides the well-analysed emotional and sexual strains posed by the NFP, interviewees' definition of good parenthood, as well as gendered notions of femininity and masculinity could also have played a role in the advent of a 'liberal self'.

The final chapter explores the acquisition of sexual knowledge in early life. Geiringer argues that early life and premarital sexuality was constitutive rather than determinative in women's understanding and experience of sexuality. The bigger rupture, this book suggests, could be seen between the interviewee's upbringing and the upbringing of their own children. Religious ideals and norms informed the interviewees' sexual development. When the time came to handle this issue with their own children, however, many considered religious codes an 'obstruction to young people's "natural" sexual development' (p. 180).

Despite the need to integrate a wider range of sources to situate these Catholic experiences within a broader social and cultural context, Geiringer offers a fascinating account that goes some ways to shed light on hitherto hidden experiences. By putting testimonies centre stage, Geiringer gives voices, for the first time, to the emotional struggles Catholic women experienced in post-war Britain.

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Carmen M. Mangion, *Catholic Nuns and Sisters in a Secular Age: Britain 1945–90*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. vii + 344, £80.00, ISBN: 9781526140463

'All Power to the Imagination' was one of the rallying cries of 1968, calling global citizens to question established political, economic, and gender systems. Yet, to the Catholic world this clamour may have seemed somewhat tardy, having been at the forefront of the Catholic imagination since 1965 and the Second Vatican Council's call for *aggiornamento* (updating) and *ressourcement* (going to the origins). Did the modern Church, too, give all power to the imagination of

its institutes? How were post-war calls to reorganise, reform, and perhaps even revolt welcomed by Catholic nuns and sisters? What do these women now have to say—in their own words—about the changes experienced between 1945 and 1990? These are the questions to which Mangion eloquently replies in her book. In seven chapters, Mangion moves from the post-World War Two context and changing conceptualisations of femininity, through Vatican II's impact on governance and its reception within the convent, to the influence of 1968 on Catholic institutions. In its final chapters, the book looks beyond the walls of the convent to nuns' work in the community and the world, including their engagement with new ideas of charity, mission, and feminism.

The study uses a rich and varied corpus to conduct a far-reaching and convincing exploration of the lives of women religious between 1945 and 1990. The lifeblood of this study is the collection of 100 oral histories which Mangion conducted with women religious from eight different institutes. Interviewees reflect a range of experiences from those in enclosed orders to others who engage in teaching or social welfare activities. As theologian Joseph Komonchak (2004) said of Vatican II, to study how modern Catholicism was experienced by religious 'the documents are inadequate'.¹ Mangion's work proves that, although inadequate when studied alone, when Catholic doctrine is put into dialogue with oral histories, convent records, memoirs, historiography, and cultural materials like television and print media, a vivid and rigorous picture of religious life is conjured.

Catholic Nuns and Sisters in a Secular Age is part of Manchester University Press's 'Gender in History' series, and this fact alone reflects an important step forward in framing women religious as worthy subjects in modern history and gender studies. As a cultural historian, Mangion is careful to trace evolving notions of femininity and how they are received in the convent. In its initial chapters, the book outlines the well-known drop in vocations which convents experienced in post-war Europe and the increasing secularisation taking place. This initial discussion leads cohesively into one key focus of the book regarding convents' internal conflict over whether to change—or bend—to what one nun memoir calls 'nasty modern methods' (p. 76) and accommodate modern versions of femininity, or not.² Mangion highlights convents' perhaps surprisingly incisive awareness of modern opinion of convents with a cutting illustration from *Catholic Pictorial* in 1962 of two women commenting of an acquaintance: 'I hear she's gone into a convent—what a waste!' (p. 56). This picture shows the

¹ Joseph Komonchak, 'Vatican II as Ecumenical Council: Yves Congar's Vision Realized', *Commonweal* (2004), <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/vatican-ii-ecumenical-council> (accessed 12 June, 2020).

² This quotation is from a Carmelite Nun, *The Nun's Answer* (London: Burns, Oates, 1957), p. 54.

convent and the secular world divided by a thick brick wall, but in reality, communities were actively 'breaking down' the border between the convent and the world. Taking an extraordinarily commercial turn, institutes began 'vocation exhibitions' in the 1950s; large conference-style events to 'showcase their ministries to a larger public' (p. 63). The influence of these exhibitions is made all the more vivid by Mangion's inclusion of oral testimonies. Through the combination of archival and oral sources, we learn not only of the 200,000 attendees to the exhibition in 1952, but that these events were veritable hives of youth and activity which led one interviewee to describe an 'extraordinary sense I'd been hit on the side of the head' (p. 64). Testimonies add embodied and emotional texture to our knowledge of historical events.

Professional opportunities grew both for religious and secular women after the post-war, and women's work is a key feature of Mangion's book. Chapter 2 nuances the clichés around women's supposed professional liberation during the post-war period by drawing our attention to the convergence of religious and secular women's work. Although seemingly different, consecrated and secular women alike were encouraged to find 'meaningful work: to teach, to nurse, to engage in social work' (p. 70). In other words, religious or not, women were frequently still held up to professional models revolving around care and community. Secular professional vocabulary such as 'training' also permeated the convent (p. 89). Mangion traces the evolution of church doctrine like *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) and *Gaudium et Spes* (1972) and how these tracts were interpreted in religious communities as calls to transform nuns' work.

Perhaps one of the most touching aspects of Mangion's study are some sisters' testimonies of objection, struggle, and alienation from evolutions in convent life. In 1968, Parisian students cried out for greater input into institutions from street barricades and occupied lecture theatres. In the convent, the picture somewhat differed. Consultation within convents burgeoned: not only were sisters asked 'where do you see yourselves in five years' (p. 204), but they began to respond to and challenge received notions of nuns as servants in middle-class institutions. Mangion represents divisions which appeared often along generational lines. In these passages, we are presented with a microcosm of '68 being played out in the cloister.

Although the book may not have been one Mangion wanted to write (p. xi), it is one that many will be delighted to read. It is an important document in observing the interplay of both religious and cultural history and religious and secular female experiences in the modern era. At certain points, readers may find themselves thirsting for more information; early on, for example, Mangion notes that some institutes she approached 'were unable to participate' (footnote, p. 15),

underlining how many sources in modern religious history we are yet to access. As is often the case with studies of women religious, readers may finish Mangion's book with an appetite for a comparative study on male religious experiences in the same era. Similarly, the depth of Mangion's research into English experiences is a rallying cry for complementary works to be realised in other national contexts. An inspiration in its originality and rigour, and a pleasure to read, *Catholic Nuns and Sisters in a Secular Age* is a major and progressive contribution to academic work on modern women religious.

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Thomas Paul Burgess, ed., *The Contested Identities of Ulster Catholics*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. xiii + 263, £110, ISBN: 9783319788036

The contributors to this volume are from assorted professional backgrounds, academics, journalists, and former terrorists. The situation in Northern Ireland has moved on since the essays were written and some of pieces are therefore slightly outdated. Thomas Paul Burgess's own essay expressed skepticism about the re-establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland (p. 9), but in fact it came into being again in January 2020. His strictures of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) are reminiscent of Connor Cruise O'Brien and Ruth Dudley Edwards who predicted that the agreement would not last. It has, however, given relative peace to the province for twenty-two years. His cynical assessment that the GFA has 'exhausted its usefulness' (p. 19) is not mirrored by the actual realities of life in Northern Ireland.

In many instances the authors exhibit little or no sympathy for the Catholic community in Ulster and at times can barely rise beyond their own prejudices. Abortion is seen as the principle right of women and it is to be linked to 'progressive notions of womanhood' (p. 40) in Irish nationalism, according to Claire Pierson, in an oddly repetitive chapter. She is, however, simply wrong in her assertion that Pope Gregory XIV (1590–91) permitted abortion before 'ensoulment' (p. 51). The matter is too complex to detail here. It is true that in his *Sedis Apostolicae* (1591), which she does not cite, he removed the excommunication from those who procured abortion before 'ensoulment', but he nevertheless regarded early abortion as a serious sin. This sort of laziness is exhibited time and again. Malachi O'Doherty asserts that the Church teaches that homosexuals are 'intrinsically' disordered (p. 87), rather than homosexual acts. Furthermore, he gives no evidence for his assertion that Eamon de