Journal of British Studies 55 (October 2016): 806–833.

Book Reviews

Pre-1800

Sarah Apetrei and Hannah Smith, eds. *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660–1760*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. 228. $124.95 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2016.111

Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660–1760 collects nine papers presented at a conference on women and religion at St. Hilda's, Oxford. Edited by Sarah Apetrei and Hannah Smith, the essays demonstrate sound scholarship and tight focus on their particular subjects. While the collection reflects the happenstance of conference participants' current research interests, Apetrei and Smith's introduction offers a wide-ranging account of recent work that challenges narratives of the triumph of secularization. They raise the question of whether the dramatic public appearances of religious women during the interregnum and the attendant changes "in women's self-understanding as participants in public religious debate and reform" (3) were subsequently squashed by patriarchal reassertions of control. While most of the essays are more interested in social history than in theology, Sarah Hutton on Damaris Masham and William Kolbrener on Mary Astell do engage ways in which these writers developed theological positions affected by Enlightenment rationality.

One recurrent theme of the volume is the willingness of women to claim authority to write about religious subjects and to have their words appear in print. Some contributors explicitly challenge the idea that the emerging public sphere newly relegated religion to a private, domestic sphere. Among the evidence they offer is this willingness of some women to pronounce upon religion in print. Alison Searle considers Anne Wentworth, who published both prophetic jeremiads and *A True Account of Anne Wentworth's Being Cruelly, Unjustly, and Unchristianly Dealt with by Some of Those People called Anabaptists* (1676). Noting Erica Longfellow's idea that radical Protestants of the seventeenth century developed an idea of mystical marriage that enabled some women to reject the gender hierarchies of the world, Searle finds Wentworth using her sense of her spiritual relationship with God to overcome demands for women's silence and to prophesy that God's wrath would fall upon the husband who abused her and on the Baptist leaders who sided with him. Kolbrener, in an essay on Astell that pays particular

attention to her *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705), understands Astell as having become more pessimistic than she was in earlier work that envisaged a community of pious women who could have some power to improve not only themselves but the world. *The Christian Religion* attacks a secular public sphere as poisoned by deceit, factionalism, and slander. Astell laments that women, having failed to heed her earlier advice, have themselves become "tools of Crafty and Designing Demagogues" (140). However, Kolbrener argues, far from rejecting the language of reason associated with the emerging public sphere, Astell uses it to develop her own formulation of an alternative utopian public sphere in which true religion could be practiced.

Not all of women's writing was so oppositional. Indeed, I have suggested that the preponderance of women's religious writing and writing about religious women was a form of apologetics: efforts by competing sects to demonstrate that their form of religion produced the best kind of Christian woman ("Church of England Clergy and Women Writers," *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 [2002]). Emma Major considers Catherine Talbot as the author of Anglican works offering guidance on "how to bring Christianity and politeness together in everyday life" (168) and as an exemplary Anglican woman whose private piety could have public significance. Major also adds to our understanding of the friendship and collaboration between Talbot and Thomas Secker, the archbishop of Canterbury. Claire Walker looks at English nuns in exile in European convents, including Lucy Herbert, an Augustinian prioress who published *Several Excellent Methods of Hearing Mass* (1722).

Several contributors to this volume offer their studies as interventions in more general historiographical issues. Walker, for instance, revisits the long-standing debates about the significance of Jacobitism, when it declined, and when English Catholics abandoned it. Her nuns remain staunch Jacobites through to 1745. She presents Mary Rose Howard, a niece of the Duke of Norfolk, using her convent as a clandestine mail drop for communications between the Old Pretender and his adherents, with help from a cardinal and a papal nuncio. Among the many ways in which these nuns helped maintain a Roman Catholic community and made efforts to support the Stuarts was by the exchange of relics. For example, after the death of James II, the prioress of the Paris Augustinian convent to which James and Mary had been especially close, "obtained 'a smale peece of our deceased Holly King's right Arme,' which she personally embalmed and placed in a lead casket for exposition in the convent church" (85).

Alasdair Raffe corrects a too-exclusive historiographical emphasis on male Scottish Presbyterian preachers by a fine account of lay prayer circles and women's activism. Much of this volume deals with upper-class women, but Raffe recovers some of the religious experience of ordinary people, laywomen willing to risk participation in illegal conventicals, who, he argues "were crucial to Presbyterianism's endurance in the face of government suppression" (63).

Apetrei and Smith acknowledge that the collections' attention to extraordinary women who published has a skewing effect; even so, the overall impression it leaves is of religious women generally under patriarchal control or, for the few who engaged in radical gender-based protest, protesting ineffectually. One woman we do see here as having the power to significantly shape her own faith community is Queen Mary, who, as Melinda Zook shows, was herself influenced by the Dutch Enlightenment and a pious and serious student of theology and church history. The queen worked effectively with clergy, including Gilbert Burnet, John Tillotson, and Thomas Tenison, to ensure that the men appointed to bishoprics were pious, learned, and, mostly, Latitudinarians. One feels the need of more attention to more ordinary versions of women's Latitudinarian Anglican piety expressed through charity to the poor, charity schools, care of the sick, support for missions, Bible study, Sunday observances, and family prayer. With respect to the more profound challenges to the understanding of religion posed by Britain's colonial experiences and by Enlightenment comparativism, to which Apetrei and Smith allude, we see no sign here of their having yet affected British women.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2016.111 Published online by Cambridge University Press