

Sin in the sixties. Catholics and confession, 1955–1975. By Maria C. Morrow. Pp. xx + 265 incl. 3 ills. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016. £70.50. 978 0 8132 2898 3

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From the immigrant Church to the Hollywood screen, the image of the Catholic confessional has long gripped the American imagination. This intrigue extends to historians of US Catholicism. James O'Toole's work on American Catholic auricular confession has provided something of a foundation for a growing body of scholarship, and the Academy awaits Patrick Carey's forthcoming (and likely magisterial) history of US Catholics and the sacrament of penance. Maria Morrow expands this conversation to include the greater theological and social context that once enveloped the practice of confession in the United States. Instead of focusing on the sacrament itself, she examines the various penitential practices that complemented US Catholic recourse to the confessional in the first half of the twentieth century. Her study demonstrates that the precipitous decline in the number of confessions after the Second Vatican Council (1962–5) is only intelligible in light of concurrent shifts in Catholic culture, theology and catechesis regarding fasting, abstinence and sin. In other words, Morrow maintains that the sudden abandonment of meatless, pescatarian Fridays, once a hallmark of American Catholic identity, unwittingly led to the disappearance of long queues for the confessional on Saturdays. The two phenomena are inseparable.

As the reader examines this thesis, however, she immediately discovers a fair, professional assessment of a complex history rather than any nostalgic crusade for the past. The author finds flaws in pre-conciliar theologies of sin as much as she does in newer, more optimistic models that ultimately informed post-conciliar praxis. For instance, the fourth chapter's comparison of the moral theology of the Jesuits John Ford and Gerald Kelly with that of the Redemptorist Bernard Häring manifests a critical but fair reading of two competing models in the 1960s. The author lauds Ford and Kelly for their eye to practicality while objecting to a legalistic approach ostensibly obsessed with acts. On the other hand, Morrow applauds Häring's pursuit of a more authentic morality attuned to social responsibility while nevertheless concluding that his appeal to freedom and conscience failed to provide tangible guidance for Catholics in the pew. Häring's approach carried the day, and Morrow shows how his appeal to personal freedom, a 'law of love', and greater 'creativity' informed the US bishops' 1966 'Pastoral statement on penance and abstinence'. In doing so, the author highlights how the bishops worked in concert with gradual theological developments to rethink 'sin' in order to revitalise spiritual authenticity. The reader further learns that these developments stemmed from the 1950s rather than the Council itself, a salient point for scholars who cast Vatican II as a rupture with the past, either to celebrate the 1960s as liberation or to condemn the decade for decadence. Morrow does neither. Instead she charts the logic of Catholic developments in both penance and sacramental confession in the 1950s to make sense of their mutual collapse in the 1970s. While American Catholics focused more and more on the individual with respect to penitential practices, they simultaneously embraced a more communal model of sacramental penance. A tension ensued, and the author adeptly asserts

that the eventual divorce between fasting and confessing ultimately compromised both in US Catholicism.

Nevertheless, Morrow merely begins the conversation. The book invites future scholars to pursue additional archival discoveries, more focused regional studies and clearer interdisciplinary trajectories. Most of the book relies on secondary literature, although the author includes a few enlightening primary sources on pre-conciliar penitential practices (for example, the McManus papers). She also creatively incorporates catechetical comic strips (mostly from the 1950s) that the reader cannot help but find fascinating. The reader, however, finds himself searching for more commentary on these comics and, for that matter, a greater sense of the faithful's reception of change with respect to sin, fasting and penance. The book instead relies primarily on the archival findings of others and reserves its focus to theologians and bishops. Regional variation also eludes the text, leaving future scholars with the task of exploring and comparing archdiocesan collections for clues. Finally, Morrow's insights demand more interdisciplinary collaboration between historians, theologians, canon lawyers and liturgists in the study of the reception of Vatican II. The book's final chapter provides only a framework for the liturgical underpinnings of penitential shifts, yet the reader cannot help but conclude that the waning of lines for confession before mass had something to do with changes in the faithful's perception of the mass itself. Overall the book's story is a vivid testament to the 'unintended consequences' of Vatican II as articulated in the works of Mark Massa and John O'Malley. Consequently, any study of the Council that does not engage with Morrow's invaluable contribution remains woefully incomplete.

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Religion in secular archives. Soviet atheism and historical knowledge. By Sonja Luehrmann. Pp. xiv + 240 incl. 7 ills. \$74. New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 978 0 19 994362 3
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For anyone who has burrowed into the often scruffy and always unpredictable files in any of the state archives of the former Soviet Union to try to better understand religious life, Sonja Luehrmann's book will provoke flashes of recognition. Leafing through the often randomly assembled, sometimes barely decipherable texts and annotations, who has not wrestled with trying to glean the truth from pages of at times turgid, clichéd prose, amid isolated intriguing and even exciting discoveries? The more you read, the more conscious you become that what is recorded is not the truth, but a slice of the truth as conveyed by local officials (or religious believers submitting appeals) who recorded developments in pursuit of a particular goal. You also become painfully aware that the more you read, the more you see the glaring gaps which need to be filled from other sources. But material from other sources (records from other archives, memoirs, oral history, published accounts, contemporary journalism) is also required to cross-check the reports found in the Soviet archives.