Making and remaking saints in nineteenth-century Britain. Edited by Gareth Atkins. Pp. xii + 283 incl. 10 figs. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. £75. 978 9 7190 9686 0

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As Gareth Atkins indicates with the subtitle to his introduction to this thought-provoking book, the subject at hand is 'thinking with saints'. This is not a discussion, therefore, of those now held to be saints who lived in nineteenth-century Britain, but of saints in the wider Christian tradition as debated and discussed by believers and disbelievers at the time. There is something refreshing about an approach that eschews both devotional obsession and flippant dismissal. On first sight the latter might seem to underlie the decadent sentiments of Ronald Firbank in his novella *Concerning the eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926):

> The forsaken splendour of the vast closed cloisters seemed almost to augur the waning of a cult … It looked as though Mother Church, like Venus or Diana, was making way in due turn for the beliefs that should follow: 'and we shall begin again with intolerance, martyrdom and converts,' the Cardinal ruminated, passing before an ancient fresco depicting the eleven thousand virgins, or as many as there was room for.

Yet, as this volume suggests, we need to look again: Firbank was thinking with saints. After all, his decadent anti-hero Cardinal Pirelli suffers a sort of perverse martyrdom through the manner of his death as a result of having chased a boy around his cathedral.

The image of the 'eleven thousand virgins' might imply that saints were either everywhere or neither here nor there, a suggestion that might appear to be backed up by the extraordinary figures given us by Alana Harris. She records that between 1897 and 1925 around 37,500,000 relics and 30,500,000 pictures of Thérèse of Lisieux were distributed (p. 269). This volume resists the temptation either to celebrate such phenomena as the astonishing evidence of devotion or to parody them as trashy mass-marketing. Rather what is being promoted here is the idea that many saints were individually significant in the nineteenth century and that the conceptual category of sainthood was even more so. There is a fervent tone to the introduction about the hitherto unrecognised ubiquity of the saints during the period in question which reminds this reviewer of a more recent scholarly presence. Bearing in mind that Atkins has been working on the Bible and Antiquity Research Project at Cambridge it is not too far-fetched, I think, to posit the importance of Peter Brown, notably in the form of his *The cult of the saints: its rise and function in Latin Christianity* (1981), which was republished in an enlarged edition in 2014.

One key aspect of Brown's book was to situate saints in relation to worldly life, since they were treated by many at the time as actors in contemporary society. Things did not work quite like that in the nineteenth century, since Protestants were widely sceptical about post-apostolic miracles and on the evidence of most of the chapters of this volume even British Catholics often wrote about saints more as exemplary role models than as contemporary power-brokers. Much of the content of this volume is devoted to elaboration of contestation over the sanctity and meaning of figures who were more or less formally referred to as saints. There are chapters on Paul, the Virgin Mary, Claudia Rufina, Patrick, Thomas Becket, Thomas More, Ignatius Loyola, the 'English Catholic Martyrs', Richard

Baxter, 'the Scottish Covenanters', John and Mary Fletcher, William Wilberforce, Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin, John Henry Newman and his *Lives of the English saints*, and, finally, Thérèse of Lisieux. As will be clear some of these are people whom one might not immediately think of as saints because they were Protestants. This volume suggests, however, that sainthood could take what might be termed a 'full-fat' form including formal canonisation by the papacy or could appear in various watered-down versions that ultimately derived from the Protestant notion of the devout populace as the community of the saints. At the very minimum Protestants could not ignore formal instituted saints because their Catholic opponents took them very seriously. However, many Anglicans and nonconformists retained the notion that sainthood should also be used as a model for thinking about exemplary figures of particular significance and holiness such as Richard Baxter and John Wesley. Furthermore, the claim of Roman Catholicism to Christian antiquity was hotly contested. The Apostles could be claimed as proto-Protestants, although the assimilation of other figures, such St Patrick, was much more troublesome. But, as Nicholas Vincent shows us in his chapter on Thomas Becket, popular medievalism and romanticism could act as remarkable solvents even in cases of apparently intractable denominational division.

This book does an excellent job of exploring the ways in which hagiography was rewritten and ecclesiastical history was contested. It does very valuable work in drawing attention to the interaction of Protestant and Catholic traditions and even occasionally gets into some daring and interesting territory in the course of discussions of the use of saints by freethinkers, atheists and spiritualists. There remains much work to be done, of course, and not simply in relation to those many saints who failed to appear on the extensive guest list for the volume. It will be good to see some more work on how sainthood operated in relation to other categories of personal excellence such as heroism and celebrity. Imperial contexts could also have been highlighted, particularly in relation to the development of British culture in the later nineteenth century. Finally, with the notable exception of Harris's chapter on Thérèse of Lisieux (whose cultus is, however, post-Victorian), this volume is weak on the visual arts and devotional practice of saints cults. This volume feels in places like a resumption of intellectual debates amongst the thinking classes that had dropped off in the course of the secular twentieth century. More appreciation of the lives and passions of ordinary believers and the role that they played in the making and re-making of saints would help further to situate this detailed and intriguing set of case studies within the wider cultural context of its times.

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This book's editors assembled its essays to honour the University of Notre Dame historian, Mark A. Noll, at his retirement. Few would doubt that Noll, one of the