

complexity of the female Catholic mission and the ministry of women. Unsurprisingly, as she explains, ‘neither the practice of charity nor their relationship with Church and state have had identical or unambiguous meanings’. It is more accurate to describe their work as care than welfare because care was a primary component of the residential homes and training institutions they ran, the social support they provided, and the home visitations and the pastoral parish work they undertook. Providing clarity on this point enables O’Brien to integrate the Scottish dimension effectively and in this she stands apart from most works on Catholic women living in community in Britain and Ireland.

Finally, it is important to highlight the long-overdue correction that O’Brien makes to understandings of the term missionary. Contrary to popular opinion, particularly in clerical circles, being a missionary was not the preserve of priests and brothers. The work of female Catholic missionaries was transformative for the Catholic Church and in many respects it was the Daughters of Charity who led the charge. While O’Brien offers an invaluable foundation of information about their missionary work, she admits that this aspect of their work requires a separate history, one that can explore their influence in much more depth.

This weighty book is a tour de force and O’Brien deserves much congratulations for undertaking what can only be described as a truly mammoth task. In mapping out the complex history of a group of women who became a lynchpin in the infrastructure of Catholic care provision, she has made a much-needed contribution to the historiography of the Catholic Church in Britain and Ireland. If the historical experience of women religious is to be taken seriously, and it must be, then it is imperative that communities reach out to professional historians whose training prevents them from a hagiographic drift. This book is meticulously-researched and sound, and in approaching O’Brien to write their history, the Daughters selected one of the field’s most capable scholars. Thanks to this book, we are that bit closer to understanding just how foundational women, lay and religious, were to extending the mission of the Catholic Church.

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Bruno Duriez, Olivier Rota, and Catherine Vialle, eds., *Femmes catholiques, femmes engagées: France, Belgique, Angleterre, XXe siècle*, Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2019, pp. 205, €22, ISBN: 9782757428597

‘Votes for women!’ was shouted on 7 June 1914 in Westminster Cathedral where Bernard Vaughan, a conservative but popular Jesuit within the

Catholic society, was giving a sermon. He answered angrily that there was 'nothing ethically wrong' in letting women suffragists die from their hunger strike.<sup>1</sup> While not supporting violent and illegal actions, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society (hereafter CWSS)—here studied by Andrea Rota—was claiming the right to vote for women. As women and as lay Catholics, they were challenging both male and clerical hierarchy. At the same time, Father Vaughan was the chaplain of another major but more moderate Catholic movement, the Catholic Women's League (hereafter CWL), here studied by Olivier Rota. The Jesuit author of *The Sins of Society* (1906) appeared as a good choice as he guaranteed the orthodoxy of the league without hindering its initiatives.

This volume, edited by Bruno Duriez, Olivier Rota, and Catherine Vialle, brings together a collection of essays presented at a conference in Lille in 2014. It highlights the role of Catholic and lay women organising in massive movements to promote an agenda of reform. The beginning of the twentieth century appears as a time of leagues. The CWL was founded in 1907, the CWSS in 1911, participating in what appeared as a European trend: Belgium saw the foundation of the Flemish League for Catholic Action (*Vrouwenverbond voor Katholieke Actie*) studied here by Tine Van Osselaer; France gave rise to the League of French Women (*Ligue des femmes françaises*, 1901), and the Patriot League of French Women (*Ligue patriotique des Françaises*, 1902), both studied by Magali Della Sudda. These movements gathered thousands of women, alongside numerous former women religious who, in France, had to choose around 1901–1904 between exile and secularization. The latter became lay teachers or nurses and only with difficulty found their place between male cleric and civil authorities, as Chantal Paisant argues.

A paradox, now well documented in scholarly literature, is that women's agency in undermining gender roles and separate spheres was grounded in a conservative (Émile Poulat would have said 'intransigent') way of thinking, shared by Catholic women. The triangulation between Liberalism, Catholicism, and Socialism which characterizes modern society (once again notably studied by Poulat whose work is unfortunately not used here) seems to be relevant here, as the women's leagues tried to reconquer society against liberal and socialist influences. Their struggle was based on their faith; Alice Abadam, suffragist and convert to Catholicism, claimed at a meeting of the CWSS: 'in the face of these evils, women must be rebels, because rebellion against evil is fidelity to God.'<sup>2</sup> Catholicism's representations

<sup>1</sup> 'Disturbances by suffragettes in London Churches', *The Tablet*, 19 June 1914.

<sup>2</sup> *The Catholic Times*, 14 November 1913.

of women as mothers and care providers also inspired them. The Catholic hierarchy was therefore reassured and felt confident to let space to women organised in single-sex movements. If the relationship with the clergy is well-studied in this volume—support by cardinal Francis Bourne, for instance, in contrast with resistance from parish priests—we don't hear much about the reaction of lay male Catholics, often husbands of women militants—and sometimes militant themselves. Women's commitments gradually led to more progressive gender roles which abandoned or relativised the model of the 'angel of the household', defined by maternity, and inherited from the nineteenth century. While at the beginning of the twentieth century Catholic women had a bad opinion of feminists, they became closer over time, mainly after World War II and thanks to activists from lower social classes (as mapped in an overview by Geneviève Dermenjian and Dominique Loiseau, studying the *Mouvement populaire des familles* and its successors in France). Gradually growing closer to leftist political parties or trade unions, Catholic women broke away from the Catholic hierarchy. In the context of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and more generally the Sixties, birth control and abortion became an issue leading to a rupture, more or less discreet, after the encyclical *Humane Vitae* (July 1968).

As a source edition specifically created for the volume, the inclusion of three testimonies by Catholic women (Denise Cacheux, b. 1932; Françoise Maillard, b. 1944; Nathalie Willemetz, b. 1968) offers fascinating insights in those militant lives and helps to understand the more general concepts studied previously. Through the narratives, many profiles of women appeared. They all reveal how subversive—whether loudly or silently—women's action was for Church, society, and their personal lives. New leadership roles emerged for women, such as positions as theologian. How they reinterpreted the Bible, discussed the question of access to priesthood, and undertook the governance of the Catholic Church is analysed in two chapters by Catherine Vialle and Alphonse Borrás. They present the background that could help to understand how the theologian Anne Soupa (b. 1948) has recently dared to apply for the position of archbishop of Lyon, in France, after cardinal Barbarin resigned in the context of a sexual abuse scandal. In her proclamation, she insisted on both her roles as a lay Catholic and a woman: 'Is there only one type of bishop, that of a man, single, old, and all dressed in black? However, what possibilities offer themselves if other faces could exist for such a position!'<sup>3</sup> Has nothing changed, as some Catholic feminists might argue? This book offers more nuanced

<sup>3</sup> published on her Facebook page, 26 May 2020.

answers, and in its conclusion (by Bruno Dumons) proffers an invitation for more transnational scholarship of the ‘feminization thesis’ of Modern Catholicism.

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David Geiringer, *The Pope and the Pill, Sex, Catholicism and Women in Post-War England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, pp. XII + 213, £80.00, ISBN: 9781526138385

In the last decade, ego-documents, oral history interviews, and the Mass Observation Archive have increasingly been used to trace changes in intimacy and authenticity in twentieth-century Britain and Europe.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, demographic historians have used oral histories to better understand the ways religion impacted reproductive behaviours.<sup>2</sup> Research by Diane Gervais and Danielle Gauvreau has shown the emotional struggles Catholic women underwent when trying to comply with the Catholic position on contraception in Quebec.<sup>3</sup> The fiftieth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, the Catholic Encyclical that condemned the use of artificial methods of birth control, has further renewed interest in religion and sexuality.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this research, very little is known of the ways self-identified Catholic women lived their sexual lives in post-war Britain. David Geiringer’s book fills this gap. His clear prose challenges the ‘tale of sex destroying religion’ (p. 3) by closely exploring the discursive, material, and embodied sexual experiences of Catholic women. Based on 27 interviews with self-identified Catholic women, Geiringer takes women’s narratives seriously by recognising women’s agency in their daily life, and explores the relationship between religion and sexuality.

Geiringer’s commitment to privileging the voices and experiences of Catholic women is reflected in the methodology and structure of the book. The life-cycle, divided in three key stages in reverse chronology, namely sexuality in later marriage, sexuality in early marriage, and early life and premarital sex, provide the core structure of his

<sup>1</sup> Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the sexual revolution: Intimate life in England 1918–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: the Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Anne-Claire Rebreyend, *Intimités amoureuses: France, 1920–1975* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2008); Martine Sevegrand, *L’Amour en toutes lettres: Questions à l’abbé Viollet sur la sexualité (1924–1943)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Rusterholz, *Deux enfants c’est déjà pas mal, Famille et fécondité en Suisse (1955–1970)* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Diane Gervais and Danielle Gauvreau, ‘Women, priests, and physicians: Family limitation in Quebec, 1940–1970’ *Journal of interdisciplinary History* 34 (2003), 293–314.

<sup>4</sup> Alana Harris, ed, *The Schism of ‘68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945–1975* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).