

umbrella body consisting of several houses of monks and nuns founded in mainland Europe. Alban Hood's study of this conglomerate starts with the flight to England from France of the English Benedictine Congregation's houses in the teeth of the French Revolution: St Gregory's at Douai eventually became Downside, St Laurence's at Dieulouard became Ampleforth, St Edmund's in Paris returned to France, only to finally relocate to Woolhampton as Douai Abbey in 1903 following a further bout of French anticlericalism, and the Cambrai convent eventually became known as Stanbrook Abbey. Hood examines the English Benedictine Congregation's first fifty-five years in their new surroundings: despite the majority of individual members being born in England, the monasteries had never existed anywhere but in exile. Always conscious of placing the communities in a wider setting, Hood details the challenges facing them, including a religious revival gaining momentum in their homeland, developments in European Catholicism which were building towards the ultramontane movement, a revival of English Catholicism post-emancipation and the booming of new religious orders, not to mention a European monastic revival. In this context, Hood finds the English Benedictine Congregation somewhat out of place, not necessarily stagnant but clinging to continuities from its exiled past, as it attempted to ensure its survival having lost so much at the French Revolution. One of the main challenges was that, unusually, monks of the English Benedictine Congregation had been far more likely to work on the mission than live in their monasteries; the novel presence of these monasteries on home soil required new thinking, particularly with the vicars apostolic fast gaining the authority that would lead to the return of a Catholic hierarchy in 1850. In the face of this, the Congregation frequently seemed reluctant to accept that times had changed. In a very interesting final chapter that considers the English Benedictine Congregation's role in the Empire, Hood judges the monks to have made the same mistakes, the tensions between monastery and mission still not resolved. Nevertheless, in Mauritius and Australia, they did bring organisation and a sense of stability; but old habits die hard and they remained reluctant to adapt to the situation, steadfastly resisting innovation. In Hood's opinion, continuity rather than change was the overwhelming ethos of the English Benedictine Congregation in this period. *From repatriation to revival* focuses more on the experience of the admittedly larger male English Benedictine Congregation contingent than the female, but it is a highly readable overview that points the way towards future research, not least, as Hood himself suggests, the need for more research into the contribution of English Catholicism to the wider story of nineteenth-century national missionary fervour.

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*The pious sex. Catholic constructions of masculinity and femininity in Belgium, c. 1800–1940.* By Tine Van Osselaer. Pp. 272 incl. 5 ills. Leuven: Leuven University Press/Presses Universitaires de Louvain/Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2013. €49.50 (paper). 978 90 5867 950 5

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Did changes in religious practice, content and discourse amount to a 'feminisation' of religion in nineteenth-century Europe? Tine Van Osselaer's insightful

monograph addresses this question by examining Belgian Catholicism from the late eighteenth century until the Second World War. Rather than seeking to confirm the ‘feminisation thesis’, the author also investigates efforts to appeal to male audiences, driven by concerns about ‘men’s negligence of Christian practices and lack of church loyalty’ (p. 68). In doing so, she sheds light on gender roles within the church, the household and lay movements. Van Osselaer focuses on a country where a variety of Catholic movements and tendencies – from Ultramontanism to Social Catholicism – displayed considerable vigour. Although the Catholic Party dominated Belgian politics from 1884 until the Great War, liberals and socialists actively challenged church power. This was a period of major conflict between secular and ecclesiastical forces and, within this context, Belgian Catholics developed a rich associational life. It therefore seems apt that Van Osselaer dedicates considerable space to Catholic lay organisations. Some of these bodies were linked to the Cult of the Sacred Heart. As early as 1868 the Belgian bishops consecrated their country to the Sacred Heart of Christ – more than three decades before Leo XIII’s encyclical *Annum Sacrum* did the same for humanity as a whole. The Sacred Heart was celebrated publicly through the construction of dedicated churches but also privately via ‘enthronement’ ceremonies in Belgian households. With its emphasis on emotional expression, Sacred Heart devotion was often deemed ‘feminine’; yet, as Van Osselaer points out, it could also be cast as ‘martial’ (p. 129). This ambiguity manifested itself in the associational field. Initially, the Apostleship of Prayer played a leading role in promoting the devotion; whilst not gender-exclusive, it was largely led by women. Soon enough, however, broader anxieties regarding male religiosity triggered all-male ventures which, by the early twentieth century, were known as the ‘Leagues of the Sacred Heart’. In 1929 Pius XI praised the ‘masculine character’ (p. 138) of the Leagues. At the same time, he championed a hierarchical model of lay activism as exemplified by Catholic Action. With its ‘emphasis on authority, the idealisation of Christ as a leader and mass activities’ (p. 202), Catholic Action resonated with the politics of the period. As Van Osselaer notes, the Leagues’ response to this development ‘cannot really be called enthusiastic’ (p. 180). None the less, there was cooperation on specific issues, for instance in the campaign for a ‘return to Sunday Mass’. Furthermore, Catholic Action was hardly a homogenous phenomenon: while a discourse of heroic masculinity prevailed in its male sections, Van Osselaer identifies different features in women’s Catholic Action groups. As a whole, *The pious sex* draws a nuanced and multi-layered picture that helps to question terms such as ‘feminisation’ and ‘masculinisation’. The density of the prose requires some concentration – as does the author’s tendency to deploy examples from different time periods in rapid succession. Yet, the book readily repays the reader’s investment. It is a well-researched work; its considerable substance should speak to historians of both gender and religion.

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