

‘posthumous reputations change and morph according to the needs of later periods’ (p. 578), and while it does indeed remain to be seen what our current period might take from Newman, we may at least say with grateful confidence that *The Oxford Handbook of John Henry Newman* will shape and inform his reputation for many years to come.

The University of Cambridge

Michael D. Hurley

Anne Power, *The Brigidine Sisters in Ireland, America, Australia and New Zealand, 1807–1922*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2018, pp. 464, €60.00, ISBN: 978-1-84682-739-6

Anne Power’s *The Brigidine Sisters in Ireland, America, Australia and New Zealand, 1807–1922* provides a comprehensive history of the order from their founding in Tullow, County Carlow in 1807, through to their overseas expansion, and finally culminating in the granting of formal papal approval in 1907. While this narrative is constructed around themes familiar to historians of women religious—including founding and funding, apostolic activity, expansion, and the internal structure of the institute—what Power ultimately achieves is a study which qualifies research concerning the rapid expansion of female religious orders during the nineteenth century. Through her examination of the Brigidines, Power provides new and unique insights into the history of a congregation that failed to expand at the same pace as other female religious communities of the time.

The Brigidines were established in line with the recent growth of congregations of women religious providing for the spiritual and secular education of young Catholics. The movement was initiated in 1775, when Nano Nagle founded the Presentation Sisters, the first modern, native religious congregation to be established in Ireland since the Reformation. In 1807, the Brigidines became part of that movement when Daniel Delany, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, established the community in Tullow, County Carlow. Delany decided that the Brigidines should be an enclosed order and ‘follow the Ursuline model of fee-paying day and boarding schooling’ (p. 62). In opting for enclosure, Delany had hoped to link his institute with the ‘higher status of older contemplative orders’ which he believed would attract vocations from wealthy families (p. 61). While Delany had clear aspirations for his institute, he died without having gained papal recognition, leaving the Brigidines without an approved rule and constitutions (p. 92). This failure, according to Power, was to have a serious impact on the future development of the order.

By the time of Delany’s death, the Brigidines had established two convents in Ireland; Tullow (1807) and Mountrath (1809). Two

subsequent foundations were made in Abbeyleix (1842) and Goresbridge (1858). In these four locations, the Brigidines laboured within the field of education. However, unlike the Presentations, who had a constitutional commitment to the education of the poor, the Brigidine apostolate was somewhat ambiguous because of the absence of an approved rule. As noted by Power, over time there had been a movement from the Brigidine commitment to the poor to the education of their middle-class. This deviation is most notable in Power's examination of the withdrawal of sisters from Paulstown school to help in the operation of the boarding school in Goresbridge. While boarding schools provided a necessary income for the Brigidines, the larger population of Catholic girls, who in time may have become beneficiaries or provided new vocations for the institute, were undoubtedly to be found in the poor, non-fee-paying schools. The impact which this oversight had on expansion of the Brigidines is not emphasised in Power's discussion, but it goes some way towards explaining why, by 1900, the Brigidines accounted for only one per cent of the 8,031 women religious in Ireland.

The Brigidines were first introduced to continental convent practices by Judith Browne, a wealthy Irish Catholic who had been educated by the Benedictines in Ypres. While not a religious herself, Browne was 'crucial in shaping the "practices and customs of the convent"' (pp. 80–1). In aligning themselves with the traditions and customs of continental orders, Brigidine educational views were shaped by traditions that 'lay outside Ireland' (p. 154). Although the Brigidines strived to deliver an elite education to the upper-middle classes of Irish society, unlike their continental counterparts, they did not have the experience, numbers, or financial stability to make it a national success: of the 'sixty-two convent boarding schools founded in the nineteenth century, only six were Irish and of the six, [only] four were Brigidine' (p. 154). While Power identifies the work of the Brigidines within the growing convent boarding school tradition of the nineteenth century, their inability to successfully compete with established continental orders of teaching sisters is not adequately addressed. Indeed, much of Power's analysis is derived from comparisons between the Brigidines and the Presentation and Mercy Sisters. However, as the Brigidines were clearly aligned to the traditions of continental orders that offered an elite education, the analysis may have benefited from a closer examination of Loreto or Ursuline foundations in Ireland.

In terms of transnational problems limiting expansion, Power cites the vulnerability and defencelessness of the Brigidines against the authority of local bishops, the hardships of poverty, and the lack of support from their mother house. These difficulties were particularly evident in the Brigidine missions in America where the sisters struggled to maintain their schools financially while also being cut-off from

support from their mother house owing to distance and the issue of local episcopal jurisdiction. These difficulties undoubtedly hampered Brigidine expansion in America but such trials and constraints are not unusual in the histories of other women religious. Raftery et al's recent examination of the Presentation Order provides numerous examples of financial struggles, difficult relationships, and failed foundations.¹ And yet the Presentations flourished during this period. While Power is clearly aware of the many difficulties experienced by women religious during the nineteenth century, these difficulties appear to have had more of a detrimental effect on Brigidine expansion particularly when coupled with internal issues within the order: among the major obstacles that hampered Brigidine ability to expand at the same pace as other religious congregations was the absence of formal papal approbation and approved rule which would have given greater stability to the order.

Power's examination of the Brigidines in Australia provides an alternative view of their missionary history and illustrates how the Brigidines successfully carved out a space in the Australian education system. What appears particularly progressive was the Brigidines' decision to introduce co-education into their schools, a decision which would have been highly contradictory to Catholic Church teachings of the time. Because there had been no provisions made for a state education system in Australia, the Brigidine high school offered one of the few possibilities for both girls and boys to gain second-level education. In Australia it seems that, because the Brigidines were far removed from their founding congregation, they had more opportunity to adapt, evolve, and develop in line with their own needs and the needs of society around them.

Power's exploration of the Brigidine Sisters is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on the history of women religious. The study provides new and unique insights into a specific group of women religious who have previously been neglected in academic research. In particular, Power's discussion of the Brigidines' failure to expand at the same pace as other congregations during the nineteenth century marks an important departure from existing discourse in the field. Power's study concerning a group of women religious who are less well-known for their contribution to education in Ireland and the world suggests that despite the growth in literature pertaining to female religious orders, there is ample opportunity for further research in the field.

University College Dublin

Catriona Delaney

¹ Deirdre Raftery, Catriona Delaney and Catherine Nowlan-Roebuck, *Nano Nagle: the life and the legacy* (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2019).