

recherche. Put another way, the book tells a very Anglican story, for while provincial cities have often been seen as bastions of nonconformity, in London the Church of England was not just entrenched in archaic parishes and City institutions, but well-placed to appeal to new money too. Nonconformists, by contrast, built and filled ‘Mega-Chapels’ that could seat thousands, but by the end of the period were running out of steam as suburbanization, snobbishness and new forms of leisure sapped their numbers and finances; Catholics struggled to maintain the allegiance of Irish families. Chapter eight covers women’s activities, including domestic visiting, ‘Bible-Women’, nursing, nuns and the settlement movement. Chapters nine to eleven deal with philanthropy; elementary education; and secondary and adult education, underlining the sheer scale of religious endeavours in a period when the state largely stood aloof. Finance was often a worry: at St Mark’s, Kennington, needlework done by girls in the afternoon was sold to raise funds (p. 265), while Cardinal Wiseman obtained an indulgence from Pius IX for Catholics who contributed to their Poor Schools Committee (p. 269). Nevertheless, denominational teacher training colleges, girls’ schools and higher education institutions proliferated, thanks both to institutional funding and individual munificence, such as the £300,000 and art collection bequeathed by Thomas Holloway to the college that bears his name.

This book, then, offers both a conspectus and reams of detail: there are plenty of pointers here towards further research. In placing religion at the centre of metropolitan social and cultural life it advances a significant point that historians should note. And there are also subtler revisionist comments, too, some of which deserved more development: e.g. ‘in the period after 1870 children were better instructed in the Christian faith by Board schools, denominational schools and Sunday schools than they had ever been before’ (p. 282). Yet there is a nagging sense that it also emphasizes the limits of the vitality it explores. If this was never a hostile environment for Christians, it could often be indifferent: perhaps the working classes were just too tired to go to church regularly, or put off by the demands of bourgeois church-going and behaviour? Ultimately it seems that the problems the churches sought to solve were simply too big.

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Sarah Bartels, *The Devil and the Victorians: Supernatural Evil in Nineteenth-Century English Culture*, London: Routledge, 2021, pp. ix + 236, £120, ISBN: 978-0-367-44420-4.

The Devil haunts the margins of histories of the nineteenth century in many guises. So many guises, in fact, that his presence may seem

increasingly scattered and insignificant as the century wore on. Debates among theologians across confessional boundaries, for example, problematized the existence of Satan as well as his domain. At the end of the century, William Gladstone observed how hell was ‘relegated . . . to the far-off corners of the Christian mind . . . to sleep in deep shadow, as a thing needless in our enlightened and progressive age’.<sup>1</sup> The Devil’s fractured identity could then point at his diminished power, perhaps even a withdrawal from this world altogether. The two middle-class Catholic women from Bootle, in Lancashire, who in the 1880s claimed their local priest could subdue the Devil were far from alone in believing that the supernatural threat posed by the Devil was a manageable one.<sup>2</sup>

We should be careful to take this narrative of the Devil’s decline at face value, Sarah Bartels convincingly argues in *The Devil and the Victorians*, a cultural history that presents the nineteenth-century Satan as a many-faced presence. Bartels’ main argument is that the plurality and ambiguity of the Devil in Victorian England does not point at his disappearance, but rather the opposite. The Devil was, in some way or form, everywhere: in theological spats, in popular print, on stage, in song, in Satanism. Even in Lancashire bedrooms. In Bootle the priest may have kept the Devil in check: this implies, however, that his presence was felt to be acutely real. The two women just mentioned heard their housemate, the Catholic schoolteacher Teresa Higginson, being plagued by the Devil almost every night. Against rhetoric of the Devil’s decline such stories hint at a history that is more complex than persistent paradigms of decline, revival, and survival can capture.

*The Devil and the Victorians* is structured thematically in five chapters that each hone in on one face of the Devil: theological, folkloric, occult, popular, and literary and theatrical. Although this structure offers seemingly separate Devils, Bartels makes clear that they should be understood as overlapping and frequently conflicting registers of meaning. It would have further enriched the book and strengthened its argument if those registers were brought together more systematically in the conclusion. As it stands, it is clear that the Devil could exist at once as fearful and comical, and as personal and fictional, but how those different conceptions interacted and informed each other sometimes remains a little opaque.

Bartels shows the nineteenth-century Devil at his most versatile in the first chapter, ‘The Theological Devil’, which examines doctrinal

<sup>1</sup> William Gladstone, *Studies subsidiary to the works of Bishop Butler*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896, p. 206. Quoted in Bartels, *The Devil and the Victorians*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Heimann, ‘Mysticism in Bootle: Victorian supernaturalism as an historical problem’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 64:2 (2013), pp. 335–356.

ideas across the major denominations, especially in the Church of England and among Nonconformist groups. Bartels contends that nineteenth-century shifts of conceptions of hell and its master ran parallel with a diminishing theological emphasis on eternal punishment and with the growing availability of biblical criticism—which Bartels argues made the Devil a ‘site of a crisis of evidence’ (p. 29), although for whom exactly is not clear. The many examples throughout the book at least show that for many people, evidence of the Devil’s presence was manifold. The introduction, for example, opens with the famous cloven-footprints in the Devon snow in 1855, which people believed were diabolic even if the priest insisted—somewhat unconvincingly—they were made by a kangaroo. Strikingly given the continued prominence of the Devil in Roman Catholicism (as Bartels herself points out, the existence of Satan was part of official doctrine until the 1960s) and the Church’s growth in nineteenth-century England, Catholic attitudes to the Devil are relegated to the shortest section of this chapter. Vivid descriptions of hellish torment and supernatural evil reached England’s Catholics from the pulpit as well as via tradition and a wide range of cheap print. The chapter does not delve deeper into how this affected lay Catholics, nor how the prominence of Devil and hell imagery impacted outsider perceptions of the Church of Rome. Instead it touches upon a small selection of writings of prolific Catholic authors, most of them clerical, primarily as indicative of larger theological disagreement between denominations.

The Devil also played an important role in anti-Catholic culture. Bartels rightly points out how ‘much anti-Catholic rhetoric associated Catholicism with the diabolic’ (p. 59), and offers as an illustration a quote from *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* that calls the Church of Rome the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (p. 59). But there is little analysis of the extent to which diabolic imagery pervaded anti-Catholic popular discourse, not just among Wesleyans but across English culture. Nor do we learn how the Devil as anti-popery trope related to a perceived resurgence of Catholics in the public sphere, a resurgence that was seemingly bolstered by the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 and by Irish immigration later in the century. The ‘cloven foot’ was seen ‘peeping out’ during several Catholic controversies throughout the century.<sup>3</sup> Bartels does bring up the conflation of Catholicism and diabolism in popular culture in a later chapter, when mentioning the cartoon ‘The Priest in Absolution’ that criticises the use of the confessional (p. 167). Without any provenance (even the date of publication is unknown) it unfortunately remains unclear in what context it should be read or who its audience was.

<sup>3</sup> *Essex Standard*, 17 June 1842, p. 2.

These are not major stumbling blocks for a book that focuses on the larger cultural significance of the Devil, and indeed the book's main merit is that it brings together so many different aspects of the nineteenth-century Devil. Most of all, the chapter on the 'Theological Devil', and the section on Roman Catholicism in particular, makes one curious what a transnational history of the nineteenth-century Devil would look like. How did the influx of Irish Catholics into English cities, for example, weigh on existing religious meanings of Satan: could we speak of an 'Irish' and an 'English' Devil? Anti-popery conceptions of the Devil could, for example, also be situated within a broader European context and further illuminate a diabolic geography. A telling example of this is given by Owen Davies, who described the Protestant curate E. Gillson's mid-century attempts to locate the Devil's headquarters on earth by table-rapping: 'Are they in England? There was a slight movement. ... Are they at Rome? The table literally seemed frantic'.<sup>4</sup>

Together, the chapters ably and elegantly bring into dialogue a variety of published sources—from *Punch and Judy* to printed sermons, to court material and fiction, to Theosophical and spiritualist periodicals. Together they make this study a valuable contribution to the now well-established argument against nineteenth-century disenchantment: the Devil adapted to modernity, even flourished in it, precisely because of the flexibility of 'beliefs, practices, narratives, and entertainments' that got attached to him (p. 226). Chapter 2, 'The Folkloric Devil', connects the Devil to the material world people lived in: the landscape, animals, plants. It also shows how folklorists relegated beliefs and practices related to Satan to a superstitious past even as they continued to exist. That the Devil was not simply a creature that fuelled the imagination of the lower classes, chapter 3 shows by giving a briskly paced overview of 'The Occult Devil'. Not unlike Catholics, spiritualists and occult practitioners faced accusations of sympathy with the Devil in the second half of the century. The final two chapters further widen the diabolic perspective and consider the Devil in fiction and in popular culture more broadly. These chapters especially make for energetic and insightful reading, and draw from an impressive array of material that has not been examined together before, from popular broadsides and popular Christian allegories such as John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* to Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Across these very rich chapters, the Devil emerges as a lively presence in Victorian culture, moving freely—and, one imagines, with a sardonic smile—between belief, doubt, and unbelief, faith and laughter, fiction and reality, between class divides, and between different

<sup>4</sup> Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, magic and culture, 1736–1951*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999, p. 33.

cultural spheres. That the book aims to offer a contribution to cultural modern history more broadly is further made clear by its publication in the Routledge Studies in Modern British History series. Bartels's study thoroughly convinces historians of all aspects of nineteenth-century culture that Satan cannot be cast aside even if his presence is often ephemeral, and that there are other, perhaps more worthwhile questions to ask of supernatural phenomena than questions about belief and scepticism. *The Devil and the Victorians* is a welcome warning for historians of nineteenth-century religion that the supernatural should not be excluded or reduced to a footnote, but deserves scholarly attention in its own right and on its own terms.

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Crawford Gribben, *The rise and fall of Christian Ireland*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 352, £25.00, ISBN 9780198868187

Historians of Ireland in the past have been prone to declarative, all-encompassing, statements about their field. Irish history has been variously said to be primarily political, demographically unique, or inherently concerned with much more than just the island of Ireland. All these claims may have a ring of truth depending on one's own preferences and period of choice, but readers of Crawford Gribben's new book might come away thinking that the strongest case of all could well be made for Irish history, across the broad sweep of time, being mainly dominated, for good or ill, by the phenomenon of Christian religion.

Professor Gribben certainly situates religion, and Christianity in particular, at the centre of a matrix of many other stories: Christianity's vital interactions with myriad wars, constitutional developments and social transformations are never far from his purview. In a narrative that is a mere 220 pages long, and dealing with a span of about 1500 years, maintaining this balance between the political and personal significance of religion and religious change is an admirable feat.

The book is divided into five chapters, chronologically organised and each with a pleasingly symmetrical single-word plural as its title. Following an introduction in which the author speculates — for that is all we can really do — about the religious life of the island before Christianity arrived, and usefully establishes the enduring importance of place and materiality in religious expression, 'Conversions' tells the story of the early Christian missionaries, Patrick among them. This sets up another important thread in the book, namely how exchanges with people and places beyond the island shaped Irish Christianity. 'Foundations' follows the trials of medieval monastics as they mounted several fights: to preserve important relics and religious texts