

that await those who would frame constitutions, craft policies, or, more generally, seek the common good without a realistic appraisal of human nature.

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Birthing Revival: Women and Mission in Nineteenth-Century France.
 By Michèle Miller Sigg. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022.
 ix + 258 pp. \$54.99 cloth.

Studies of nineteenth-century French religious history have in the main focused on the emergence of laicity and secularism over and against an entrenched conservative Catholic opposition. Sigg's work in some ways challenges this traditional narrative. She sees more diversity of religious position than commonly supposed. Her survey, directed primarily toward an informed public audience, concentrates on the nineteenth-century Réveil (revival or awakening) in France and the role of Protestant women in "birthing" the movement. Close examination of the Revival and those who promoted it can do much in Sigg's view to inform us about the complex nature of French confessional position since the Revolution of 1789.

Scholars recognize that Evangelical Christianity, while Euro-American in its origins, has become increasingly global. Yet, the exploration of its earliest forms has for the most part been confined to Britain and colonial America. Developments in France have received far less attention. From its roots in the Protestant Reformation, evangelicalism exploded in the eighteenth century. Still, the Revival did not flourish in France until the nineteenth century. Sigg also cautions that while men were the public face of the French movement, women worked closely in traditional supportive as well as fresh independent ways. Their activities, unfortunately, went largely unrecognized in the official records and remain woefully underrepresented in recent historical accounts.

Sigg divides the study into four principal sections. The initial three chapters establish the historical context. What were the roles that women enjoyed in early Huguenot history beginning in the sixteenth century? What was their participation in the early missionary movements in France and in association with the French Prophets and later Moravians and Methodists? Finally, how ought we to understand women's contributions as early distributors and teachers of the bible? The next section of the book, chapters four through six, centers on Paris and women's accomplishments there. Sigg examines the work of two women—Émilie Mallet and Albertine de Broglie—in establishing so-called infant schools, organizing the distribution of bibles, and launching the Paris Evangelical International Mission Society's women's committee to raise funds for missionary activities. Chapter seven explores the growing self-awareness of female missionaries, while chapters eight and nine survey the work of "missionary wives" at the Lesotho Mission in South Africa. The closing chapter refocuses attention on France and the development of deaconess communities in Paris and Strasbourg, even as the enthusiasm of the Réveil declined.

Except for the initial introductory material, each chapter views the topic or theme through the lens of one or more prominent Protestant women. Sigg is not especially

interested in the evangelical belief of the need to be born again in a transformative conversion. Rather, she explores women's pragmatic contributions in the realm of literacy, education, female empowerment, poor relief, and the abolition of slavery. The book explores women's pioneering roles in nineteenth-century French Protestantism from their involvement in the early infant school movement at the start of the Réveil to their efforts to infuse new energy into the Revival with the establishment of deaconess communities in the 1840s. Altogether, Sigg makes a strong case for the importance of women in the French Revival. Less successful is her attempt to trace these developments to the character of French Protestantism from mid-sixteenth century through the end of the eighteenth century. Some of the perceived connections are tenuous at best.

This is by no means a dispassionate account. The interpretative framework clearly highlights heroism and moral purpose. These are virtues that Sigg views as long associated with early French Protestants, the Huguenots. Their struggle for survival amid unrelenting, frequently savage persecution lent them great strength. She argues that they become archetypically modern in their efforts to exercise their civil rights, secure freedom of worship, and become a protected religious minority. None of this is inaccurate, and the Huguenots are wholly deserving of our respect and admiration. Still, the story told here would have profited from greater nuance and a more balanced assessment of the complexities of the Huguenot situation. The prophetesses and prophets, for instance, who emerged in the Cévennes mountains during the early eighteenth century were an innovative element and not wholly appreciated by Huguenot traditionalists.

The book falls short in several other respects. Sigg's discussion of the historical context throughout the volume could be more critical in its assessment of people and events. Far too often, she relies on general surveys, many older and dated in their scholarship and interpretation. The result is a one-dimensional presentation, lacking depth of analysis and occasionally misleading. In addition, the sheer number of historical details overwhelms the reader and in more than a few instances the people and events under consideration are not satisfactorily identified. Their meaning and value can be easily lost. In this regard, the narrative occasionally seems disconnected. The author does not always bring the various vignettes and examples together and clarify their place in the overarching interpretative framework. The narrative tends toward a descriptive recounting of historical actors and actions with a noticeable neglect of their wider meaning.

Make no mistake, the topic is timely and rich. The role of women in French Reformed communities has drawn increasing attention from historians; the nineteenth-century French Protestant Réveil perhaps less so. Still, the two elements are vital to a proper appreciation of nineteenth-century French religious culture. Michèle Miller Sigg seeks to bring together and address both themes. In the end, she provides a comprehensive, if essentially conventional and highly sympathetic, account of the place and importance of the French Revival, its female proponents, and ultimately its broader goals in France and the colonial world.

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