

spelling and grammar occur to go unnoticed. Some very basic issues could have been caught by even a cursory glance of a seasoned and professional copyeditor (for example, the erroneous use of ‘peninsular’ for ‘peninsula’ on pp. 17, 19, 29 and 139; ‘Brünswick-Lüneberg’ for ‘Brunswick-Lüneburg’ on pp. 240, 287; and incomplete, incorrect, or entirely lacking places of publication in many footnotes). One would have hoped that OUP’s production would have matched the care and precision of Mortimer’s broad outline.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

DAVID GEHRING

*Irish women in religious orders, 1530–1700. Suppression, migration and reintegration.* By Bronagh Ann McShane. (Irish Historical Monograph Series.) Pp. xvi + 304 incl. 5 ills, 6 tables and 1 map. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2022. £75. 978 1 78327 730 8

*JEH* (74) 2023; doi:10.1017/S0022046923000337

This excellent book takes its place among a striking number of studies of the religious orders in medieval and early modern Ireland to have been published in recent years. Bronagh McShane reveals much about the Irish women who became nuns in the seventeenth century, and of how they confronted the challenges associated with pursuing a Catholic religious life against the backdrop of religious persecution. The first part of the book builds on the work of Brendan Bradshaw and Brendan Scott in surveying the Henrician dissolution of the religious houses. While generally very thorough, McShane overlooks the fascinating story of how one community of nuns managed to survive the dissolution: that at Grace Dieu, County Dublin. Its saviour, Sir Patrick Barnewall, was a remarkable man who declared openly in the Irish parliament that Henry VIII, as the supreme head of the Church, did not have ‘so large a power’ as the pope. He was audacious enough to meet the king in person in a vain attempt to persuade him not to dissolve the religious houses. After that initiative failed he accepted a royal grant of Grace Dieu but he conveyed its assets to six clergymen and a local gentleman in order to ensure that the nuns maintained their existence as a religious community, which they succeeded in doing for another four decades. McShane throws fascinating new light on a community of women established in Limerick in 1563 called *Mná Bochta*. They ministered to ‘poor women’ under the auspices of David Wolfe sj, a former dean of Limerick who was appointed as the papal commissary to Ireland after the enactment of the Elizabethan religious settlement in 1560. She reveals that the women encountered fierce hostility from an English Jesuit because they did not conform to the Council of Trent’s insistence that female religious be strictly enclosed. McShane opines that the *Mná Bochta* may have been forced to disband after 1566, though she shows that other informal communities of women existed elsewhere in Ireland into the early years of the seventeenth century. She makes a number of references to female Tertiaries, but there is a lack of clarity as to whether the women concerned were Third Order Regulars, who were akin to nuns, or Third Order Seculars who were lay women, often married, committed to a rigorous routine of prayer and fasting and attending mass frequently while living in society.

Religious persecution compelled a number of women to leave Ireland to pursue their vocation as nuns on mainland Europe. Gaining entry to a convent required a major investment from an aspirant nun's family; a dowry of £120 is specified in a letter from the first half of the seventeenth century, along with another £40 for expenses (p. 98). McShane used the 'Who Were The Nuns?' database to establish that thirty-two such women joined English convents in Catholic Europe in the seventeenth century, and a further forty-three did so in the eighteenth century. Though most of the Irish nuns were drawn from 'old English' backgrounds, and some had English parents who had migrated to Ireland, they were usually registered as being 'of the Irish nation' in the convent registers. Yet it seems that the Irish nuns became better integrated in the English convents over time and by the eighteenth century they were securing important offices within them. It was not until 1639 that an Irish convent was securely established on mainland Europe, a Dominican foundation at Lisbon. It drew women from Gaelic Irish as well as 'old English' backgrounds, and established such a reputation for holiness that it attracted many Portuguese novices also, so much so that there were concerns that the Irish would be outnumbered. In fact, the convent survived as an Irish female foundation into the twenty-first century.

In 1629 a number of Irish Poor Clares returned from mainland Europe to establish a house in Dublin. However, their hopes for religious toleration were quickly dashed by the Protestant archbishop of Dublin, who led a posse of English soldiers who wrecked their convent, along with the houses of the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Capuchins and Jesuits in the capital. Public sympathy for the nuns forced the Protestant authorities to treat them leniently for fear of public disorder. The nuns were able to leave the city and move into a new convent which was built for them by Catholic patrons near Athlone, in the centre of Ireland. By 1639 its community numbered sixty women, and in 1641 a second house of Poor Clares was founded at Drogheda, fifty-five kilometres north of Dublin. McShane reveals that during the relative freedom that followed the creation of a Catholic Irish state after the 1641 rebellion no fewer than eight new convents were founded, half of them in Galway. However, that freedom was short-lived. By 1653 Oliver Cromwell's régime had reimposed British control over Ireland, annihilated at least 20 per cent of the Irish population, enslaved many thousands of Catholics, left Catholics with no more than 9 per cent of the land of Ireland and systematically dismantled their Church as an institution. With the Restoration, and the accession of the Catholic James II, five convents were established or re-established in Ireland, only to be shut down again in the aftermath of the 'Glorious Revolution'. Yet the Williamite act that banished the male religious from Ireland made no mention of female religious, and so the Irish nuns were able to emerge from hiding after a discreet interval.

McShane has demonstrated that the story of the Irish female religious in the calamitous seventeenth century was one of 'remarkable resilience' (p. 248). She has added fascinating, female dimensions to the history of the institutional Church in an extremely turbulent time. Yet the significance of her findings is problematic. The map of Irish convents shows that they were very few in number, only sixteen in all, invariably short-lived and remarkably localised in distribution: half of them were located in Galway city and county while none was located in Ulster and

only one very short-lived foundation was established in Munster (p. xv). A Catholic might consider each convent as a powerhouse of prayer that accrued inestimable divine blessings, but an atheist might well wonder if the enclosing of the female religious was simply a waste of scarce resources that could have been better deployed. The truly transformative ministry of nuns in Irish society dates from the late eighteenth century when new orders of unenclosed women were founded to provide education and a modicum of welfare to a Catholic community left impoverished by centuries of British colonialism.

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

HENRY A. JEFFERIES

*Italian reformation and religious dissent of the sixteenth century. A bibliography (1998–2020).* By Marco Albertoni (intro. Vincenzo Lavenia). (Forme e percorsi della storia, 9.) Pp. 559. Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2021. €50 (paper). 978 88 3613 234 8

*JEH* (74) 2023; doi:10.1017/S002204692300012X

This lively bibliography will draw readers into a hotly contested subject, largely because of its new ways of seeing and categorising. It is the fruit of sympathy for religion that was Italian, but not Catholic, but also for dissent, dissimulation and atheism. Italians learned from Europeans, especially from Erasmus, but rarely became deep-dyed ‘Lutherans’ or ‘Calvinists’. The range of scholarship reviewed here banishes the dusty, outdated assumptions that all Italian religious ideas came from somewhere else. In a book suffused with a spirit of scholarly cooperation and academic humility, Albertoni and Lavenia acknowledge their debt to the earlier classic, *The Italian Reformation of the sixteenth century and the diffusion of Renaissance culture*, compiled by John Tedeschi and James Lattis in 2000. They stress, however, that the new work is not intended as ‘an official sequel’, showing how approaches have altered in the intervening twenty-three years. Their new title reveals the changes: ‘Italian Reformation’ (no definite article and by implication much more inclusive), also ‘religious dissent’, an area of scholarship that has seen revolution in the last two decades. There is a cheering spirit of modernity, no outdated priorities, no wringing of hands about change, but instead an easy movement between printed and online works. Albertoni really makes the most of the internet, highlighting the work of younger scholars, and his approach is refreshingly polylingual. He also defends his inclusion of dictionary entries (‘some considerably more innovative than certain monographs’). The chosen categories differ in significant ways from those of Tedeschi and Lattis. ‘Counter-reformation’ appears within Inquisition studies and alongside the toleration controversy – choices which invite reflection. Albertoni notes that the process of gathering material for the greatly expanded section on ‘Men and Women’ has highlighted the bias in scholarship – twenty-two women and 570 men. This is ascribed either to a lack of contemporary sources or to ‘less interest on the part of researchers’. I think many of us would stress the latter – sometimes shamefacedly. Albertoni’s wide-ranging entries for many of that intrepid twenty-two will begin the process of correction. Doubters and unbelievers, too, find significant recognition in the work’s new categories, as do those who had unclear or purposely ambiguous religious convictions – all are part of this panorama.