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**James Kelly, English Convents in Catholic Europe, c. 1600–1800, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. viii + 226, £75, ISBN: 9781108479967**

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extreme elements even offering up the Jesuits as proof of their loyalism. In this, the authors capture the turmoil as Elizabeth's reign drew to a close without any official heir, when all parties saw the chance to publicly lobby for their position, not only Catholic but also Protestant. The questions at play touched on religious pluralism, relations between the state and religion, the authority of the monarch and from where it is drawn. On the Catholic side, it was not simply a question of survivalists versus new missionary zeal, but different visions of what the Catholic Reformation might look like in England. It became a tussle between episcopal authority, state power and papal jurisdiction.

Inevitably, the cast of players and the discussion could be head-spinning for those not at least a little familiar with the period. At the book's start, the authors provide a very helpful list of the main players, as well as a timeline that puts the controversy against wider national matters, such as treaty negotiations. The authors cleverly cover a lot of different angles on the controversy, though it might have been worth considering how the fanatical appellant William Watson and his more extreme colleagues tapped into wider European anti-Jesuit polemic. There is also one unexplained element of the book: why do the authors refer to Robert Parsons, rather than Persons? The former spelling has generally been discarded, including by the Persons correspondence project.

These, though, are minor quibbles. More important is that Lake and Questier convince with their thesis that the Archpriest Controversy offers a neglected window into the workings of the early modern public sphere. It is an attempt to recover what mattered to the protagonists, not just about the clerical matters at play or questions of the succession, but also wider ambitions and philosophies. Written in the authors' typically punchy style, *All Hail to the Archpriest* should be required corrective reading for those who still believe the story of post-Reformation England can be told as if Catholics had disappeared from the scene, only to emerge whenever a handy scapegoat was required.

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James Kelly, *English Convents in Catholic Europe, c. 1600–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. viii + 226, £75, ISBN: 9781108479967

Over the last decade, the growing interest in early modern English convents has helped to redress an historiographical imbalance and to give back their due place to so far understudied cloistered religious Englishwomen. Those studies usually focused on one single Order, or

on specific nuns' writing activities, or even on typical aspects of conventual life in exile. The communities' interactions with their local neighbours were broached upon, but no full-length volume had thus far tackled the subject of the English convents in their European context over the entire period of their exile. James Kelly's monograph endeavours to fill that gap, and offers a much-needed contextualisation of the English convents in their European contexts.

In the first chapter, Kelly questions the criteria that influenced a postulant's choice of convent. Through a close study of recruitment in Essex and in the wider geographical area covered by the Jesuit college of the Holy Apostles (which also encompassed Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk), he demonstrates that the religious and political convictions that inclined families toward a particular convent echoed not only the conflicting spiritualities that divided the recusant communities at home but also the wider European debate about the essence of Catholic reform and, crucially, the role of the Society of Jesus. English patterns of recruitment thus reflected the international controversies of the on-going Catholic Reformation.

This sets the tone for the book as a whole. As chapter 2 discusses conventual enclosure, it demonstrates that English communities used enclosure to their own ends, for instance to negotiate with secular authorities when the privacy or the safety of the convent was jeopardised by neighbouring building works. Yet the convents' dedication to *clausura* was not only pragmatic; it became recognised as the hallmark of English nuns' commitment to the reforms ordered by the Council of Trent, inscribing English communities within the wider movement of Catholic Reformation. Chapter 3 shows how conventual architecture and material culture were aimed at developing the nuns' spiritual lives in adherence with the Tridentine rules on behaviour and management. Material culture involved benefactors, and chapter 4 naturally turns to the study of conventual finances. This comprises a lovely passage on the role of music in some houses, both as an expression of their spiritual devotion and as a means of attracting patronage. Kelly then explores the crucial importance and the actual fragility of the convents' main revenue through dowries, investments and networks of benefaction. In that last part, the author demonstrates that nuns relied upon European—rather than merely English—Catholic benefaction; he argues that convents are to be viewed as part of the wider movement of Catholic renewal that followed the Council of Trent. Chapter 5 then turns to the study of liturgical life, paying particular attention to the topic of relics and the concept of martyrdom. It posits that the sufferings of Catholics at home led to a heightened sensitivity to the intercession of martyrs, and England became the 'new Rome' in terms of providing relics (p. 141). Kelly argues that the convents' drive to procure relics was proof both of their attachment to their native soil

and of their belonging to the budding martyrological enthusiasm characteristic of the European Catholic Reformation at the time. Moreover, the physical presence of relics in the convents' churches strengthened their prestige in their neighbouring localities, as exiled members of a suffering Catholic community. This chapter highlights the bonds between the English nuns and the endeavours of male colleges; the final chapter therefore moves on logically to an exploration of the networks between the convents and the wider world of Catholic exile. It argues that English convents and colleges did not work solely towards their own survival, but should rather be considered as female and male expressions of a transnational Catholic Reformation, which was of course impacted by national interest and circumstances. In this chapter, Kelly dwells a little more than elsewhere on issues of gender; interestingly, he downplays the role of gender in disputes between convents and colleges, to foreground 'the usual fallings out common in any relationship' (p. 172). This raises an important point, since the relationship between the convents and their male counterparts remains little studied as yet. The chapter also raises another key issue, explored in part by Marie-Louise Coolahan: that of archipelagic identities.<sup>1</sup> It reveals that despite a common history of exile and a shared zeal for Catholic renewal, there was only limited contact between English convents and Scottish or Irish clergy, and that even the nuns of the three nations did not nurture privileged bonds with each other. Kelly concludes that English Catholic identity was dual, both national and transnational, yet that in archipelagic terms, English Catholics did not hanker for a unified Britain. He argues that the convents in exile happened to be populated by women, who also happened to be English, but that neither the lens of gender nor that of nationality should obscure their main *raison d'être*.

This broad-ranging study testifies to its author's in-depth knowledge of conventual archives, a knowledge accumulated since Kelly first worked on the AHRC-funded *Who Were the Nuns?* project in 2008. Its treatment of complex issues allies nuance and clarity, and those qualities contribute to making this monograph a great read. Each chapter offers a blend of precise scrutiny of detail and an effort to take English convents out of their niche and inscribe them within the historiography of both British and European movements of reform. Through its scrupulous analysis of an impressive array of the convents' primary sources, across all orders and over nearly two centuries, the book unveils the many ways in which national circumstances and idiosyncrasies coexisted with a commitment to the wider Catholic

<sup>1</sup> Marie-Louise Coolahan, 'Archipelagic Identities in Europe: Irish Nuns in English Convents', in James Kelly, ed., *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 211–228.

Reformation. The convents' belonging to a universal Catholic ideal of renewal was, Kelly argues, 'a characteristic that trumped all others' (p. 10).

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*Irish Jesuit Annual Letters 1604–1674*, ed. Vera Moynes, Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2019, pp. xxvii + 1013, €80, ISBN: 9781906865573

It was a surprise to me (perhaps to others) that the Jesuits were so much less active in seventeenth-century Ireland than in England. There were only two serving in 1598, 18 in 1608, 35 in 1621 and the number fluctuated around that figure until the mid-1640s, the high-point of the Confederation of Kilkenny, when it peaked at 67. Under the ensuing 'Cromwellian' persecution in the mid-1650s, the figure dropped down to 18 and never got back to anything like the 1640s peak—there were 37 in 1674. There was never, before the suppression of the Society in 1773, a Jesuit province, only a Jesuit mission. Still, the superior of that mission was expected to gather together reports from all colleges and residencies (eight of the former and six of the latter at its peak) and consolidate them into a single report to be sent to the Superior General in Rome. The volumes under review are an edition of the twenty-five surviving reports from the years 1604–74. There is an annual series from 1605–21 and then a large gap until we get to a single round-up letter for the whole of the 1640s, sent in 1650, two more for the following years and then another gap from 1653–62, when we get a letter summing up those nine years. There are substantial letters from 1663–5 and then another gap before a final *omnium gatherum* report for 1669–74. The originals of seventeen of these letters are in a single volume in the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* [ARSJ], the remaining eight, which are not quite of the same status, have been gathered from other archives.

These twenty five letters average more than 10,000 words in length (in Latin, about 12,000 in modern English) so they are substantial and significant documents and they are now handsomely presented to us by the Irish Manuscripts Commission, an organisation that puts its British counterparts to shame. Handsomely and spaciouly laid out, splendidly bound, very well-priced and outstandingly well proof-read, these volumes have been a pleasure to handle. The introduction and oversight of the work of twelve translators has been overseen by Vera Moynes, whose previous work includes the admirable calendar of correspondence in Rome relating to the Jesuit Irish Mission(s)