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Review of *Reading and Rebellion in Catholic Germany, 1770-1914*

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argues that the “loss of the sense of sin in American culture,” and not the reforms of Vatican II, is the reason fewer and fewer American Catholics are seeking the sacrament of penance (229). Indeed, Carey suggests the “communal” approach to penance adopted by some theologians in recent years—an approach that “emphasize[s] penance as a form of community worship” and “reflect[s] continuity with the Second Vatican Council”—probably offers the best hope for renewing the sacrament of penance within the American Catholic Church (259, 257).

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***Reading and Rebellion in Catholic Germany, 1770–1914.* By Jeffrey T. Zalar. Publications of the German Historical Institute.**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. xiii + 386 pp. \$105.00 hardcover.

While studying for his First Communion in 1907, a twelve-year-old German boy carried with him to catechism a long pamphlet of “obscene illustrations” (318). His audacity contradicts an old story of the Catholic laity meekly deferring to authoritarian church limits on popular reading. In a new book, Jeffrey T. Zalar makes the case that real readers’ practices have been overlooked in that story. In so doing, he attacks stereotypes of Catholic backwardness (their “Bildungsdefizit”) produced over the long nineteenth century. Especially to be commended are the book’s temporal range (attending to roots in the late Enlightenment as well as better-known events during the Kulturkampf) and its sensitivity to Catholic experiences across categories of social difference (laity and clergy; peasant, working-class, and elite). But Zalar’s most important contribution is the model he establishes for the history of Catholic knowledge in not simply following prescriptive evidence, but rather pursuing all avenues of information about practices on the ground.

Zalar’s intervention helps us understand the overlooked epistemology of Catholic Germans, as well as the battle over creating a national culture as Germany unified. One of his bolder claims is that the nineteenth-century expansion of popular literacy was more revolutionary for German Catholicism than the effects of the Reformation or Vatican II (16, 366). The problem of popular reading mattered deeply to the church, Zalar argues, because its leaders “recalled how the hermeneutical pluralism of Reformation reading destroyed its monopoly on cultural judgment” (50). But they disagreed about how and what to censor, further evidence that top-down attitudes about Catholic reading were not all-powerful. Catholic readers themselves resisted authorities in a variety of ways. Martin Schrettinger, a monk, was forbidden in 1798 to read philosophy and physics on pain of mortal sin—he left the monastery and started the field of library science (74). Reading pamphlets condemning conscription to the National Guard set off rural rebellion in 1809; Napoleon’s investigators reported that “priests had lost all control over the behavior of their parishioners” in the face of print (68).

Zalar centers his analysis on the Rhineland and Westphalia, and his method is twofold. First, he has scoured the archive for evidence of book consumption—peasants hiding illicit print in their bedstraw or sewn into their clothes (76), Catholics exchanging texts with Jews and Protestants they met while in the hospital (168). Second, he reads prescriptive evidence against the grain, as with a pastor who in 1911 condemned a romance about a Moorish princess he had discovered in the Catholic library, noting at the end of his screed: “It appears to have been much read” (295). Zalar also offers a specific methodological intervention, using theology as part of his analysis. Although I was not always persuaded by the historical links he draws to early Christian writing, I suspect readers of *Church History* will find the approach intriguing.

The book proceeds chronologically, challenging the narrative of Catholic literary obedience at each step. By the end of the long nineteenth century, seismic shifts in the reading practices of Germans had produced new tastes and market demands, even in the face of intolerant authorities. Zalar begins with the “Reading Revolution” of the late eighteenth century, detailing how Protestant and Catholic reading cultures defined themselves and what genres circulated across different contexts. Zalar identifies a programmatic discrimination by Protestant authorities against schooling Catholics. Nevertheless, rectory libraries provided books to parishioners even in rural areas during the Vormärz and urban workers gained access to diverse texts in bookstores and reading rooms. The book then turns to the foundation of the Borromäusverein in 1845, an initiative to reincorporate private reading into the bounds of the church. Zalar tells us how this association failed to restrict the Catholic laity to religious books during the Kulturkampf and then revived by surrendering to popular tastes in the early twentieth century. He observes ironically that the Borromäusverein’s ultimate effect was to lead readers out of strict Catholic reading discipline (268). Thus, by the end of the century, a pastor in Trier wrote in 1904, “the time when a family was satisfied with . . . the lives of the saints is definitely over. Nowadays everyone reads to entertain themselves” (360).

Reading and Rebellion is written in a distinctive voice, sometimes effectively and sometimes less so. Zalar is occasionally too fond of an extended metaphor for this reader’s taste, as in his use of Homer’s *Odyssey* to illustrate the point that consumption carries moral values (29–35). I will also note that readers seeking an explanation of gender and sexuality as part of the story of battles over Catholic reading may be disappointed. Although sexuality often colors moral panic over “bad” books—as with the clergy-dismaying 1843 arrival of the railroad in Freiburg, which allowed villagers to travel there to buy fairy tales and fornicate (131)—it is not one of Zalar’s primary concerns. In terms of gender, he does rightly point out that no cohort was subject to higher expectations with regard to reading than girls (339), but oddly does not engage any scholarship on German girls’ reading, instead citing histories of girl readers in the United States. Gender appears more as an afterthought than a central issue.

Overall, this book makes two critically important contributions. First, it brings insights from the history of reading into confessional history in order to challenge mistaken assumptions about the compliance and backwardness of Catholic Germans. Zalar is a strong advocate for the field as one that studies of modernity should center, and he persuasively connects conflicts over reading to profound political debates. Second, the book is insightful and creative in uncovering the agency of Catholic lay readers. Zalar pays due attention to confessional book cultures and the

goals of the church. Yet in the end, he shows us faithful Catholic readers pursuing their own pleasures and aims.

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Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions.
By Christopher G. White. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University
Press, 2018. 384 pp. \$35.00 hardcover.

The multiverse is upon us. Sci-fi and superhero franchises such as *Star Trek* and *The Avengers* have made the notion of multiple or alternative dimensions in time and space a commonplace. (Witness the forthcoming Marvel film *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*.) As Christopher White shows in his new book, *Other Worlds*, in addition to shaping popular culture, modern scientific and mathematical ideas of alternative, higher dimensions have played an increasing role in theological reflection and religious imagination since the late nineteenth century.

White tracks the appearance of modern appeals to “higher, invisible dimensions” to the Victorian “crisis of faith.” His book opens with a discussion of the lives and legacies of two early apostles of the fourth dimension: Edwin A. Abbott and C. Howard Hinton. Abbott’s novella *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (Seeley, 1884) described the journey of “Square,” a character in a two-dimensional universe whose world is turned upside down by his experiences of a higher (i.e., third) dimension. The story proved immensely influential among writers, artists, social reformers, and intellectuals. A mathematician and science-fiction writer, Hinton went beyond the allegories of Abbott, developing a set of visualization exercises based on a tesseract (a four-dimensional cube) that promised to deliver spiritual knowledge, supernatural powers, and profound feelings of peace. White identifies three categories of people attracted to ideas of a fourth dimension: “Liberal Christians who reimagined the Resurrection and Christ’s miracles in fourth-dimensional terms, . . . mystics and radicals . . . [who] saw in them seeds of a new metaphysical worldview or social order. And . . . still others who treated Hinton’s cubes as objects of spiritual power, as tools that bestowed visionary capacities when used in private meditations, public meetings, or séances” (69).

In this way, the true subject of *Other Worlds* is the afterlife of mysticism in the modern West and the ancient Christian tradition of the spiritual senses—modes of disciplined perception trained on higher spiritual realities invisible to the naked eye. Like the practices of mesmerists, Spiritualist mediums, and Theosophists, fourth-dimension approaches promised to connect material and spiritual realities without entirely collapsing or dissolving one into the other. As White writes, talk of “higher dimensions” offered “new ways of thinking about transcendence, new methods of cultivating spiritual practices, and new traditions that might replace older religious ones that now seemed unpalatable” (69). Science was enlisted to recalibrate (rather than reject) traditional religious ideas of “heaven” and “spirit,” couching the

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