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Timothy Verhoeven, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism: France and the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. ix + 230 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$80.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-230-10287-5.

Review by David Allen Harvey, New College of Florida.

In this brief but informative monograph, Timothy Verhoeven examines trans-Atlantic communication and channels of mutual influence among critics of the Catholic Church in France and the United States during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, focusing roughly on the period of the Second Empire (1852-1870). This period not coincidentally also covers much of the papacy of Pius IX (1846-1878), the longest-serving and most politically reactionary of modern popes, perhaps best known for his "Syllabus of Errors" and for the proclamation of papal infallibility. During this era, a wide range of republicans, liberals, and secular reformers came to identify the Vatican as a primary obstacle to the advance of modernity and progress, actively publicized a series of scandals that darkened the Church's international reputation, and warned of the dangers of clericalism to modern democratic society. As the Catholic Church was itself an international organization with universal aspirations, Verhoeven demonstrates that its most determined opponents sought to organize internationally as well, sharing information and collaborating to sound the tocsin warning of the dangers presented by an intransigent Church establishment.

Verhoeven begins with a chapter outlining the multiple and multi-layered connections which united French and American opponents of Catholicism, discussing the international book and periodical market, the role of translators, international lecture tours, and travel writing in disseminating information back and forth. He convincingly argues that the substantial differences between nineteenth-century France and America encouraged, rather than hindered, such trans-Atlantic communication. In this regard, one can only note that national stereotypes have proven remarkably enduring on both sides of the ocean. The Americans perceived the French as more worldly and learned than themselves, but also as decadent and of questionable morals, while the French admired the youthful vitality and sense of unlimited possibilities represented by the New World, but also saw their American counterparts as somewhat naïve and unsophisticated, and therefore in need of French tutelage. More specifically, with regard to the common Catholic enemy, American Protestants valued the perspective of French republican anti-clericals operating within a predominantly Catholic nation as offering invaluable inside information, from within the belly of the beast, as it were, while their French correspondents looked enviously across the Atlantic to a new society with firmly established democratic institutions and religious toleration under predominantly Protestant auspices. Verhoeven offers a persuasive critique of purely national approaches to history, and demonstrates that important trans-Atlantic networks allowed French and American progressives to learn from and influence one another throughout this period.

Chapters two and five discuss two notorious *causes célèbres* that provoked nearly universal condemnation of the conduct of agents of the Church. The first of these was the case of Edgardo Mortara, a young Jewish boy who was secretly baptized as an infant by a Catholic servant and

was subsequently taken from his family and raised in a Catholic institution for the good of his soul. Verhoeven discusses how most contemporary discourse on the case, both in France and in the United States, emphasized the sanctity of the nuclear family, regardless of confessional lines, and denounced the conduct of the church based upon modern bourgeois norms of family life and the separation between the public and private spheres. Similarly, in the fifth chapter, Verhoeven examines reactions to the case of Barbara Ubryk, an Austrian nun who was found by state authorities to have been jailed under extremely inhumane conditions for two decades, whether as punishment for a sexual indiscretion (as critics of the Church alleged), or to protect her fellow nuns from her mental illness (as defenders of the Church claimed). Verhoeven demonstrates that the debate regarding Ubryk's treatment soon expanded beyond the case itself to address issues of domesticity and women's roles, the responsibility of the state to protect the less fortunate, and the anomalous existence of the Catholic Church as a state within a state, largely beyond the reach of secular justice. Verhoeven's discussion of both cases makes fascinating reading, and he ably weaves conflicting accounts of the events together to allow the reader to grasp the key events that occurred, the issues in dispute, and the broader debates which these specific cases inspired.

The middle chapters of the book deal, not with specific case studies, but with the broader thematic issue of the construction of gender in the nineteenth-century liberal imagination and the challenge which the Catholic Church posed to these new normative paradigms.

Verhoeven argues that bourgeois liberals in both countries articulated a vision of complementarity and separate spheres for men and women. While this has become something of a commonplace among historians of the period, Verhoeven breaks new ground by applying this gendered perspective to the study of liberal anticlericalism, arguing that critics of the Church in both countries condemned it for opposing the "natural" sex roles of both men and women. He examines a series of medical texts (most of them French in origin, but frequently translated into English and published in the United States) which argued that clerical celibacy was unnatural and that, by thwarting the normal and healthy expression of sexual desire, it led invariably to madness, perversion, and physical degeneracy. If priests and monks were driven to perversion, this narrative maintained, the nuns who abandoned their natural vocation as mothers to vegetate alone in convents became withered, defeminized crones. Verhoeven connects the critique of celibacy to the rise of pro-natalist discourse and concerns regarding birth rates and national decline in France.

If Verhoeven had carried his narrative forward into the early years of the Third Republic, he could have developed this theme further, given the post-1870 obsession with France's growing demographic inferiority to potential rivals, Germany in particular. He subsequently studies one particular variant of anti-Catholic discourse, conspiracy theories regarding the ubiquitous hidden influence and sinister power of the Jesuit order, and argues that liberal anticlericals condemned the Jesuits as moral (if not physical) hermaphrodites, whose vows of obedience and use of seduction and intrigue, rather than honest argumentation, signaled their abandonment of their own masculinity and their adoption of feminine wiles. These critics further warned that Jesuit confessors threatened to subvert patriarchal authority by insinuating themselves between sensible *pères de famille* and their impressionable wives and daughters, and in so doing, risked inculcating anti-modern, integral Catholic views among the new generation.

Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism is well-researched and well-written, and covers its somewhat narrowly defined topic admirably. The book is rather short (just 175 pages of text), and expanding it would have allowed Verhoeven to broaden his focus either geographically or temporally. Given that the two *causes célèbres* he examines in detail occurred in the Papal States of central Italy and in Habsburg Krakow, respectively, he might also have discussed reactions closer to the events in question, and thereby demonstrated how typical or atypical were French

and American anti-Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Additionally, Verhoeven closes the book with the First Vatican Council and the proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870. For the French case in particular, the reader feels that the story has been cut short, given the dramatic battles over secularization in the early Third Republic, culminating in the Ferry Laws of the 1880s and the eventual separation of church and state in 1905. There are also some thematic omissions. I was surprised not to find any reference to Freemasonry, which played a prominent role in anti-Catholicism and the rise of bourgeois liberalism, particularly in France, but also in the United States. Finally, Verhoeven's emphasis on commonalities and complementarity in French and American anti-Catholic discourses perhaps leads him to downplay the significance of the real differences between the two societies. While French anti-Catholicism was generally (if not always) politically on the left and associated with secularism, American anti-Catholicism had both secular leftist and conservative-nativist Protestant variants. Though Verhoeven does remark upon these differences in the first chapter, they largely disappear from the remainder of the book.

These concerns aside, *Transatlantic Anti-Catholicism* makes a valuable contribution to the religious history of nineteenth-century France and America, the history of trans-Atlantic travel, communication, and networks of information, and to the history of gender norms and ideologies in western society. It will be read with interest by specialists in a wide variety of fields, who will find in it a great many unexpected connections and fruitful directions for future inquiry.

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