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Brenna Moore, *Sacred Dread: Raïssa Maritain, the Allure of Suffering, and the French Catholic Revival (1905-1944)*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. xiii + 293 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-268-03529-7.

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Women have figured prominently in the lively historical literature on modern French Catholicism that has been produced in the last twenty-five years. They have been depicted faithfully attending mass and joining religious orders as men turned elsewhere during the long nineteenth century; lending their energies to the countless works and organizations that made up the infrastructure of parish life; having visions that gave rise to the sites and practices of modern mass pilgrimage and participating in the pilgrimages that resulted; suffering to expiate the sins of France and of the men and women around them; and braving untold challenges to bring Catholicism to the farthest reaches of the French Empire. Rarely, though, have women been singled out for their role as intellectuals. Brenna Moore's stimulating and fluidly written book shines an interdisciplinary light on one of modern French Catholicism's rare female intellectuals, Raïssa Maritain.

Maritain's life had an unusual trajectory for a French Catholic intellectual, one whose contours suggest the historical interest of an analysis of her thought and belief. Born Raïssa Oumançoff to Jewish parents in Russia in 1883, she immigrated with her family to France in 1893. Once in Paris, she quickly mastered French, became a top student, and enrolled at the overwhelmingly male Sorbonne in 1900. During her first semester, she met her future husband Jacques Maritain, who became one of the twentieth century's most prominent Catholic intellectuals. In 1906, Raïssa and Jacques shocked his prominent Republican family and her left-leaning Jewish parents by converting to Catholicism. During the interwar period, they together pursued their wide-ranging intellectual and theological work and hosted a noted salon (whose participants included such cultural luminaries as Marc Chagall and Jean Cocteau) from their home in Meudon, before seeking refuge from Nazi racial laws in New York City in 1940. While in exile, Raïssa Maritain wrote searing poems about France and the suffering of European Jews that her husband sometimes inserted into his Voice of America radio broadcasts to Resistance fighters in France. She also wrote a two-part memoir of her life, *Les grandes amitiés*, which brought her a certain renown, especially in the international Catholic community.[1] Throughout her life, Raïssa Maritain struggled with ill health and wrote extensively about suffering in both her journals and in her published works of poetry, theology, and philosophical aesthetics.

It was her frail health and embrace of suffering that has most captured the attention of scholars of modern French Catholicism. In the chapter devoted to the Maritains, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970*, the British literary scholar Richard D. E. Burton viewed Raïssa through the lens of the religiously inspired suffering described in her posthumously published journal, saying little about her broader intellectual life.[2] Moore positions *Sacred Dread* in response to this kind of one-dimensional approach to Maritain's suffering and thought. Her book is not a biography of Raïssa Maritain, although it offers much information about her intellectual and religious life; in fact, a 1990 scholarly biography already exists.[3] Instead, the book, which began life as a dissertation at the Harvard Divinity School, has a twofold aim: to provide a close

theologically-driven, yet historically rigorous analysis of Maritain's varied body of work and to use her writings on and experiences with suffering as an avenue into the role and attraction of suffering in French Catholicism more broadly between 1905 and 1944.

The first chapter examines how Raïssa moved from what Moore describes as "committed atheism on the left" to conversion to Catholicism in 1906 (p. 17), doing so in a way that seeks to shed light on the attractions of early twentieth-century Catholicism to people from diverse walks of life. Maritain's experiences are set against the backdrop of a broader generational revolt by young intellectuals against the dominance of secular positivism at the Sorbonne. Moore describes how Maritain gravitated initially to the study of science, believing that it was science that would help lead her to truth. She quickly became distressed by what she perceived as the narrowness of the scientific approach to truth, which rejected investigations of death, God, or the soul as unscientific and, therefore, unknowable. Maritain was not alone in her unease, and Moore shows how early twentieth-century thinkers such as Charles Péguy, who owned a bookshop across from the Sorbonne and moved from socialism to the Catholic Church before the war, and the Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson made possible a new approach to religion on the part of young intellectuals like Maritain.

What became especially important for Maritain's conversion, however, was how both Péguy and the writer Léon Bloy focused on the affinities between suffering Jews and Catholics in their writings. Bloy, who became close to Maritain and ultimately served as her godfather, wrote about suffering Jews in ways that affected her deeply on an emotional level. Moreover, it was, Moore writes, "her intense friendship with Léon Bloy that brought her to the doorstep of the church" (p. 57) Moore's analysis of Bloy's impact on Maritain introduces two thematic threads that are woven intriguingly throughout the remainder of the book. Drawing on the work of historians of religion Frédéric Gugelot and Constance Furey, Moore highlights the important roles that emotion and personal relationships play in intellectual development and life, noting that "fascination and love" and "the pressures and breakdowns in communication typical of any intimate relationship" affected Maritain's route to conversion (p. 57).

The second chapter ranges over time to probe the meanings and symbolic uses of feminized suffering in the writings of Bloy, Jacques Maritain, and especially Raïssa Maritain. Moore takes direct aim at historical approaches that have viewed female suffering through the interpretive lens of vicarious suffering and have thus rendered women passive victims, arguing instead that images of suffering women are considerably more complex than such an approach has acknowledged. Of particular interest here is the portrait Moore paints of the very different manner in which Raïssa Maritain and the men in her life approached the religious meanings and significance of her suffering. Jacques and the male religious closest to them attributed far more importance to her suffering than she did and they understood it differently. For Jacques, his wife's physical trials enabled her spiritual power; her suffering body transformed her into a site of divine power that he simply could not access. In Raïssa's writings, however, *souffrance* was less of a constant focus and often involved the interior will, more than the physical body. It also brought her, like so many Catholic women before her, closer to the suffering Christ. In the end, Moore argues convincingly that the long-established emphasis on feminized suffering within French Catholic thought was something that Raïssa Maritain both embraced--perhaps strategically as it gave her an exalted religious status that provided her with a larger platform for her ideas--and sought to complicate.

The final three chapters, which offer a textual analysis of the varied body of work produced by Maritain between 1923 and 1944, lay a vivid mapping of her complex life and thought onto broader developments taking place within French Catholic thought, as well as in France and Europe more broadly during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Chapter three takes as its starting point the salon the Maritains hosted at their home in Meudon, forty-five minutes from Paris, and uses it as a stepping-off point from which to explore the potential and pitfalls of interwar Catholic philo-Semitism and to highlight the importance of Raïssa Maritain's efforts to promote new relations between Christians and Jews during the interwar

period. The Maritains' Sunday salon attracted intellectuals and artists of multiple nationalities, divergent sexual practices, and varied religious backgrounds and beliefs, including many who moved at one point or another from Judaism to Catholicism. Central to those who gathered, according to Moore, was the hope that Catholicism and Judaism could be brought together in new and profitable ways. The rise of anti-Semitism in France and Europe during the 1930s put an end to these hopes for both Raïssa Maritain and her fellow Jewish-Christians. She was not alone in responding to the altered climate by delving into the study of Judaism. Her 1935 book, *Histoire d'Abraham*, ranged widely to demonstrate the affinities between Judaism and Christianity and emphasize the "living bond" between the Old Testament and the New Testament.^[4] The historical moment for these kinds of arguments had passed, however, and by the late 1930s what philo-Semitism received little support from Catholics. More devastatingly, some attacked Raïssa for being, in Moore's words, a spiritual pollutant and racial poison, and precious few rallied to her defense.

At the same time that Raïssa Maritain explored Judaism in her theological work during the 1930s, she also branched out to become a theorist of art and poet. Dismayed that twentieth-century Catholics seemed to have so little that was interesting to say about art, Maritain took on the task of creating what Moore refers to as an informed doctrine of art, first with her husband (who admitted in his journal after her death that he should have given her more credit for her contribution to his early works on art) and then on her own. It was through her poetry, which was often intensely religious, that Raïssa began to respond more directly to the rising tide of violence in Europe. Moore argues convincingly in chapter four that Maritain's experience with suffering-centered Christianity gave her a heightened ability to see and express what was happening in the late interwar period. Her poetry also allowed her to make her intensely personal suffering public, to access the political realm in a way different from that of her more publicly active husband.

Poetry remained at the heart of how Maritain expressed her anguish over events occurring in Europe during the Second World War. In the book's final chapter, which is set against the backdrop of the Maritains' miserable wartime exile in New York City, Moore analyzes how Maritain used poetry to express her despair. As more became known about the Holocaust, she wrote long lamentation poems (which Moore quotes at length to considerable effect) that decried what had happened to France and, especially, to the Jews, and accused God of abandoning his people. Her husband read the longest of these, the 1943 poem "Deus excelsus terribilis," over the radio to the French Resistance community. As was the case with other European intellectuals, Raïssa also responded to the horrors of the present by thinking intensely about the past, and more specifically about memory and memorialization. Moore subjects Maritain's *Les grandes amitiés*, to close analysis, arguing convincingly that the book functions not as a straightforward narrative of her past, as some have seen it, but rather as a complicated dialogue between past, present, and future. According to Moore, Maritain was retrieving from the past to endure the present, creating a nostalgic view of her Russian Jewish childhood that humanized Judaism for her largely Catholic readership.

In conclusion, *Sacred Dread* is an ambitious and learned book written by a theologian steeped in the most recent historical scholarship on French Catholicism and France in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as in the current feminist historical scholarship on religion and gender. Moore provides an illuminating portrait of the thought and work of a French Catholic intellectual whose sex, religion of birth, constant suffering, and familial living arrangements made her highly unusual. As Moore points out in the chapter on Meudon, Maritain was an uncommon Catholic woman in that she was married but childless, intellectual while also contemplative. She was, moreover, able to host a dynamic and significant salon without concerning herself with any of the preparatory work usually assigned to women because her sister, who lived with the Maritains throughout their marriage, and her mother saw to it. These kinds of observations, which would have been mined more extensively by an historian of women, are offered more as an aside than a focus, for this is a book that pivots around close readings of the writings of Maritain and her fellow Catholic intellectuals. Although there are points in the book

when the extended textual analysis will no doubt be more than all but the most serious scholar of Catholic thought might wish for, Moore's historical sensitivity and her ability to evoke and illuminate key moments in twentieth-century French Catholic (and Jewish) history ought to make the book of considerable interest to historians of modern French Catholicism and twentieth-century France.

NOTES

[1] Raïssa Maritain, *Les grandes amitiés* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965).

[2] Richard D.E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), see chapter four, especially pp. 100-105.

[3] Judith D. Suther, *Raïssa Maritain: Pilgrim, Poet, Exile* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990).

[4] *Lien vivant*, in the original. Raïssa Maritain, "Histoire d'Abraham ou La sainteté dans l'état de nature," *OCJRM* 14(1935): 568-617, quoted by Moore on p. 112.

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