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Elizabeth C. Tingle, *Purgatory and Piety in Brittany, c. 1480-1720*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Co. 308 pp. \$134.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN-13: 978-1409438236.

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In taking on the topic of Purgatory, Tingle is venturing into an area of research that has a rich scholarly tradition in its own right. Curiously, it has also long been a particular concern of French historians. One only has to think of the essential contributions of Jacques Le Goff, Jean Delumeau, Pierre Chaunu and Philippe Ariès to the field over the last fifty years.[1] Its attraction for these scholars no doubt lies in its close association with one of the most enduring of human structures—death. For Tingle, belief in Purgatory and its attendant devotional practices illuminates the essentially communal nature of death and salvation in the medieval and early modern Catholic tradition. As she notes in her introduction, the “obligation of the living to remember and honour the dead was one of the oldest of human beliefs.” John Bossy would agree, given his own description of the mass as “a cult of living friends in the service of dead ones.”[2]

*Purgatory and Piety in Brittany, 1480-1720* is also concerned, however, with the processes of religious change. The broad time span allows Tingle to study the impact of the Reformation and Catholic reform upon post-mortem belief and practices in one particularly important region of France. What intrigues her is the short term decline and then resurgence of interest in post-mortem intercessory practices among the Catholics of the region. This is a pattern that seems to support Chaunu’s perception of an intensification of the belief in Purgatory in the seventeenth century. What precisely defined belief in Purgatory in the wake of the Reformation is a central concern of this book. Another is the fundamental restructuring of the practices of the cult of the dead and its administration in response to both Protestant criticism and Counter-Reform ideology.

Brittany allows Tingle to explore one particular region to answer these questions, but this region, as she makes clear, cannot be said to characterize France. Alain Croix, Michel Vovelle, and the anthropologist Ellen Badone have each focused attention on the distinctively Celtic cast of Breton spirituality.[3] Here the cult of the dead was, from Vovelle’s perspective, something distinct from that practiced elsewhere in France. In Tingle’s words, Vovelle viewed it as an “archaic culture of the dead, where Hell and judgment continued to dominate discourses about death” (p. 4). Alain Croix commented on the macabre nature of the Breton rites, arguing that the traditional cult of death continued to define Breton post-mortem devotional practices even as the doctrine of Purgatory began to make inroads. The influence of Catholic doctrine as well as Protestant challenges was thus mitigated fundamentally by an existing cult that was too deep-rooted in local culture to be wholly subverted by either tradition.

For Tingle, however, the older studies of Croix and Vovelle, while still important, merit reconsideration in light of recent work. She argues that there still is no detailed history of Purgatory specifically for the early modern period even though it remained a critical facet of Catholic culture throughout this era. She quite rightly points out that while early modern scholars have explored the material manifestations of the cult of the dead, confraternities and testamentary masses, other critical vehicles of Catholic practice and teaching have received comparatively little attention: cathedrals, parish churches, indulgences and

chantries. Indeed, this study is much more about institutions and the administration of the cult of the dead than it is an in-depth cultural examination of particular practices. It is also an ambitious project, one that spotlights Tingle's intimate understanding of Breton religious life and meticulous archival research.

The seven chapters are organized to present a detailed picture of belief and the practice of Purgatory beginning in 1480, with an eye to changes in structures and practices over time. Chapter one, entitled "Setting the Scene," does just that, laying out in broad terms the organization of the Church in the southern and western regions of Brittany that is the main focus of this investigation. The picture of late medieval piety found here fits in with the work of Eamon Duffy among others—that is, a dense, diverse and complex network of religious institutions, and vibrant and distinctive local devotional cultures.[4] Tingle emphasizes the importance of the landscape in shaping this religious life, one defined by the sea, mountains, and countryside. Old and new sacred sites were abundant, and jostled against one another, knit together by innumerable procession routes. Parochial priests were perhaps not as educated as they would be after the Reformation, but as Tingle notes, the expectations of late medieval parishioners were very different. For the most part, Bretons were satisfied with their clergy. A few of the notable changes found by the end of the late fifteenth century included a dramatic increase in the number of confraternities, as well as the arrival of new orders of mendicant clergy. Both would be important for the dissemination of a counter-reformation reinterpretation of the cult of the dead.

The title of chapter three, "Purgatory and the Counter Reformation in France 1480-1720," directs us to the main focus of the rest of the book, the response of the Church to Reformation criticism. Martin Luther's attack on indulgences was only the beginning of a much more sustained assault on traditional conceptions of salvation, the afterlife, and the intercessory authority of the Catholic Church. For ordinary believers, this meant more specifically a denial of the existence of Purgatory and a sharper separation between this world and the next. Prayers at the burial site and masses given for dead family members were still pious acts, but in the new reformed traditions, they were no longer considered efficacious, at least with regards to those who passed. The decline in post-mortem practices in the mid-sixteenth century is one important indication that the criticisms of Luther and his fellow reformers did have an impact on Catholic practices, at least in the short term.

As Tingle shows quite effectively, Protestant challenges were taken seriously by Catholic authorities, who quickly rose to defend the entire system of beliefs, including that of post-mortem intercession. Their responses demonstrate that Protestant criticisms contributed to a redefining of Catholic belief in Purgatory after this time. As Tingle hastens to point out, however, more than one understanding of Purgatory already existed in the pre-Reformation Catholic tradition. One point of this chapter is to provide a more nuanced understanding of Catholic conceptions by looking at four very different types of printed sources: handbooks on the art of dying (or living well, depending upon the intent), polemical works on Purgatory from the Wars of Religion, catechisms, and popular literature (songs, poems, paintings).

This chapter provides an important ideological framework for the remaining chapters. What I find especially helpful and new here is its inclusion of the polemical literature on Purgatory that was produced during the Wars of Religion. This body of literature has received comparatively little attention even from scholars who work on polemics from this period (myself included) though it clearly speaks to the seriousness of the religious division.[5] Tingle is exploring Catholic belief rather than the polemic function of Purgatory in these treatises, but her discussion furthers my conviction that all religious texts should be understood as political acts in this era of religious controversy and political conflict. She shows convincingly that these treatises were influential. Indeed, by the sixteenth century, they were arguably a more important source on Purgatory for ordinary believers than the traditional *ars moriendi* handbooks.

As one might expect given the importance of Purgatory in Catholic thinking about repentance, many such treatises were produced by mendicants, including the Franciscans Noël Taillepied, Melchior Flavin and Francisco Suarez. These treatises reveal surprising but important differences in interpretation. Tingle also detects noticeable shifts in emphasis between the treatises produced at mid-century and those that appeared after 1600. The later treatises, for example, were more detailed in their depictions of Purgatory, a place that they intentionally made terrifying. They also emphasized the importance of suffrages for the dead and the institutional role of the Church as spiritual intercessor. Tingle correlates the change in tone in the polemics with a rising preoccupation with Counter-Reformation teaching and preaching about Hell (p. 70). Whether this represented a shift to a greater concern about morality has been an important strand of debate. Po-Hsia, for example, has described the seventeenth century as preoccupied with spiritual action rather than fear, notably in the form of good works.[6] Tingle does see this shift in her own treatises, though not until the 1620s when good works were emphasized as appropriate suffrages. Until then, the primary focus of polemics was a response to Protestantism. Beginning in the early seventeenth century, however, a more important venue for this discussion of suffrages and Purgatory came in the form of catechisms.

Chapter four essentially takes on Alain Croix's insistence that Purgatory as a belief arrived late to Brittany by correlating its arrival with existing post-mortem practices. Tingle is testing, in other words, notions of a Breton exceptionalism when it came to the cult of the dead. She looks particularly at the evolution of one specific post-mortem practice: perpetual mortuary foundations. Testaments form one of her most important sources for an investigation that she describes as qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. It is also ambitious, taking into consideration rural as well as urban areas. Based on this close analysis, Tingle argues that belief in Purgatory was in fact well established in Brittany much earlier than thought, certainly by the late fifteenth century. Her careful analysis also points to a correlation between clerical teaching on Purgatory and the flux in popular investment in perpetual masses and other forms of post-mortem intercession over the course of the sixteenth century. During the Wars it declined, but after 1600 it increased just as clerical teaching came to emphasize Purgatory once again.

Chapter five looks more closely at perpetual masses to understand the intentions of the individual. Again, the focus is on charting change in practice and belief, without losing track of important strands of continuity. To this end she confronts a number of important paradigms in early modern scholarship: Do these masses reveal a shift away from a more corporate understanding of community to one focused on vertical ties of kinship, as Bossy has suggested, or a move to more private forms of devotion? Or, rather, do we find an increased focus upon interior piety in response to Counter-Reformation teaching at the expense of public display and communal participation? Tingle argues that the evidence points to a multi-stranded response to post-mortem intercession that remained heavily communal and corporate in nature even as it also recognized heightened concern about family. Especially after the Wars of Religion, rural as well as urban parishes reveal an inflation of post-mortem devotional practices and these were found across social categories.

Just as intriguing, Tingle finds growing popular interest in funding perpetual masses and other devotions outside of the parish church at new monastic institutions as well as cathedrals, and a preference for funding masses linked to Christ and Mary rather than local saints. Tingle argues that these two changes may reflect Counter-Reformation influence, especially the movement to orders associated with Counter-Reformation piety and a growing preoccupation with the Holy Family. Local saints were still recognized with donations in individual wills, however, one indication that they retained their importance. More to the point of this chapter, even elite practices of constructing private chapels and crypts in local churches occurred to ensure participation in local devotional life. Private services were still visible and audible to worshippers in the other parts of the church, and these often highly decorated spaces contributed to the beautification of a building shared by others.

Chapter six looks specifically at confraternities as vehicles for the dissemination of belief in Purgatory and post mortem practices. Tingle argues that confraternities grew in number from the late sixteenth century onwards, and one important function for most became increasingly the care of the dead. There were even a few that concentrated specifically upon the cult of the dead, notably the confraternity of the Trépassés (p. 191). Tingle suggests that one reason for the resurgent importance of confraternities from the middle of the sixteenth century was the desire of the non-elite to multiply their post-mortem practices. The cost of perpetual masses, for example, let alone private crypts, was much more possible for artisans when shared the costs with others. Tingle shows that these institutions also played a crucial role in shaping the cult of the dead over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Confraternities were especially important for the establishment of communal chantries. Many had their own chapels as well, but at the very least, confraternities were funding masses in honor of their own dead members, and participated in their ceremonies.

The final chapter of the book turns its attention to local priests and in particular those involved in chantries. I found this to be a particularly important and useful contribution of the book for its attention to clerics who haven't received systematic attention for the early modern period—parochial clergy below the level of *curé*. Here Tingle shows that the number of local priests ebbed and flowed with popular interest in post-mortem practices, falling during the Wars of Religion and rising significantly after 1600. This chapter gives Tingle an opportunity to discuss the training of these clerics over time, and the particular impact of Church reform. Her evidence suggests that these priests were not as badly educated as once assumed, and certainly not as badly educated as Protestant Reformers insisted. Even before the Council of Trent, most priests spent some time in church schools in each diocese, even if they never made it to university. After the Council of Trent and especially after the Wars, Latin became a broader concern as well. Just as importantly, this part of the book illuminates the growth of the church structure and its personnel in surprising ways. Even small parishes grew dramatically in size of their priesthood because of the establishment of chantries. The priesthood also grew increasingly specialized, with many dedicated to service to the chantries alone.

This image of a large, complex clerical network busily engaged in the constant performance of private and public masses drives home what Jacques Le Goff, Peter Marshall and many others have long argued, that the Church itself was in many respects built upon the cult of the dead.[7] Indeed, if Tingle's book is any indication, we must also look to the Church's response to these same practices and their underlying beliefs to understand its ability to reinvent itself in the wake of the Reformation. As John O'Malley has argued, there was something different about early modern Catholicism.[8] At the very least, Tingle shows that death was a growing business in seventeenth-century Brittany, and more than that, it remained an astonishingly creative force within the devotional culture of the Church.

## NOTES

[1] Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance de Purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et le peur: La culpabilisation En Occident, XIII-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), Pierre Chaunu, *Le mort à Paris XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1979), Philippe Ariès, *L'homme devant le Mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

[2] John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution 1200-1700" *Past and Present* 100 (1983): 29-61.

[3] Alain Croix, *La Bretagne aux 16<sup>e</sup> et 17<sup>e</sup> siècles: la vie, la mort, la foi*, (Paris: Editions Maloine, 1980), Michel Vovelle, *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983) and Ellen Badone, *The Appointed Hour: Death, Worldview and Social Change in Brittany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

[4] Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-1580* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

[5] On the importance of religious texts as polemic, see among others, Luc Racaut, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), Larissa Taylor, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth Century Paris: François Le Picart and the Beginnings of the Catholic Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), and Megan Armstrong, *The Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers and the French Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2004).

[6] R.P. Po-Hsia, "Civic Wills as Sources for the Study of Piety in Münster, 1530-168," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XIV (1983): 347.

[7] Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[8] John O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

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