

H-France Forum
Volume 15 (2020), Issue 1, #1

Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Planting the Cross: Catholic Reform and Renewal in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. x + 215 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$74.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-088702-5

Review Essay by Megan C. Armstrong, McMaster University

This is the fourth monograph produced by Barbara Diefendorf in a long and influential career. Like its predecessors, *Planting the Cross* shares the hallmarks of meticulous research, appealing prose and a provocative engagement with important lines of debate of interest to early modern historians. Another characteristic is the close attention she pays to the subtle interactions between the forces of continuity and change involved in shaping the distinctive religious and political culture emerging in early modern France by the end of the Wars of Religion. The title, *Planting the Cross*, speaks to Diefendorf's preference for building new research projects organically from questions raised in the earlier ones. *Beneath the Cross* drew upon her political and social study of Parisian elites in the sixteenth century to explore the religious mentalities and political events that led to the mass slaughter of Protestants in the city on St Bartholomew's day in 1572. *From Penitence to Charity* explored the afterlife of the Wars, revealing a Catholic France transformed under the leadership of a close network of devout female reformers, many of them drawn from the elite Parisian families first introduced in *Paris City Councillors*.^[1]

With *Planting of the Cross*, Diefendorf continues to investigate the long-term impact of the Wars of Religion and the changing character of French Catholicism. This time, however, she takes a closer look at monastic traditions, both as agents and subjects of change. That Diefendorf features six different religious orders in her study is one of the many welcome features of this contribution. As scholars who work on the regular orders know full well, it is challenging enough to grapple with the complexities of just one, because the orders were (and remain) quite different.^[2] This holds true whether one is discussing administrative structures, devotional practices, or communal life. Individual communities, as well, had important local ties (political, social, economic, religious) that informed their character and purpose. Moreover, there is the persistent problem of tracking relations between centre and periphery in orders like the mendicants, which recognized supreme heads in Rome. To take on six distinct traditions is, therefore, a heroic task. Diefendorf manages, however, to find a comfortable balance between presenting the unique character of each tradition and making broader, unifying observations.

It helps that Diefendorf has organized the book as a series of case studies, each featuring a particular monastic tradition (and community within it) confronted by reform. Sometimes, the challenge comes from within the same community or tradition, sometimes from another, newly arrived reformed tradition. The approach works well from the perspective of the reader, providing him/her with a privileged, even intimate, window into the community at a moment of change. Such change was, as we discover, sometimes devastating, sometimes transformative, and more often both. That Diefendorf chooses to explore both old and new religious communities seems wonderfully disruptive to traditional narratives of Catholic reform in France, which have tended to make the new orders, such as the Lazarists, Capuchins, discalced Carmelites and

Jesuits, central actors. For those who might be worried about their exclusion, the Jesuits do appear in the volume, as do the Ursulines, another influential new tradition in early modern France. The Capuchins, another stalwart of the traditional narrative, have their own chapter.[3] But it is so interesting to learn about the Trinitarians, the Feuillants and the reformed Dominicans, orders that have received much less attention.[4] Also wonderfully disruptive is Diefendorf's equitable coverage of male and female communities. Indeed, both the first and final chapters feature female communities, a structural orientation that conveys the importance of thinking about the legacy and impact of the Wars of Religion through established as well as new female orders.

Since *H-France Forum* offers a wonderful opportunity to engage with an important work from diverse perspectives, this review will concern itself principally with elements in each chapter that speak to broader questions about the French Catholic Reformation, Early Modern Catholicism more generally, and monastic reform. Chapter one confronts us with the material and fiscal devastations of the Wars of Religion upon the traditional orders to help answer a central question of the book: Why were the newer orders seemingly so successful at establishing themselves in France? To answer this question, Diefendorf focuses upon three female communities faced by serious challenges to re-establishing themselves in Montpellier, a city devastated by the Wars and still divided by faith in the wake of the Edict of Nantes. She discovers that only one of the three communities succeeded in doing so, despite serious, and certainly, heartbreaking, efforts. This chapter provides a critical frame for the remaining monograph for a number of reasons. Firstly, it brings to the fore the devastating impact of the Wars of Religion upon the traditional orders, materially, financially, and ultimately spiritually. Secondly, the chapter allows Diefendorf to ponder the gendered nature of this destruction, finding that female communities were more vulnerable than their male counterparts, because they relied upon a less diverse revenue base. The violent destruction of their properties, heavy taxation, and loss of rents hit them extremely hard. These two observations in tandem remind us from the start that Diefendorf rejects a traditional paradigm of decline and renewal to explain the spread of new and reformed religious traditions in France in the wake of the Wars. Their success may have owed as much to the fiscal and material destabilization of existing communities as it did to the allure of their religious ideals for local and royal patrons.

The Paris Feuillants are the subject of chapter two, a community well-known to scholars of the League because of the political activism of their prior, Dom Bernard de Montgaillard. The Feuillants were products of recent reform in the Cistercian tradition initiated by Jean de la Barrière. It was only a year after the formal establishment of reformed communities under de la Barrière's direction that Montgaillard led his Parisian brothers in revolt against his authority. For scholars of the League, this context of internal reform provides another welcome dimension of a political association that was more politically and religiously heterodox than often understood. That the brothers were marching in League processions at the same that they were pushing Cistercian authorities in Rome to grant them autonomy from de la Barrière is intriguing, all the more so since they were calling for a more democratic style of internal governance. Their activism raises questions about the cross-fertilization of political and religious ideals that may have shaped their understanding of reform. Certainly, the Dominican brothers seemed to have chafed under de la Barrière's authority as well as his demand for rigorous austerity. An important observation that Diefendorf makes here, which is no less true for understanding Capuchin

reform, concerns the “precarious fragility of the ascetic impulse” (p. 61). It was one reason for the early popularity of the Feuillants among Catholics, but it quickly became unsustainable. As she points out, many brothers died, and just as importantly, the reforms fostered bitter internal division. It was only under new, more moderate leadership that the order was able to recover from these conflicts and the devastations of the Wars and eventually to prosper.

In chapter three, Diefendorf turns her attention to the Capuchin order, and more precisely, its success in spurring Catholic renewal in the region of Languedoc. The Capuchins have received quite a bit of attention from early modern historians of France, in particular Bernard Dompnier, and Robert Sauzet.[5] Here Diefendorf uses them to ponder one distinctive characteristic of a number of the reforming traditions that took root in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century France: namely, their militancy. As Diefendorf shows, the cross was a frequent locus of religious conflict throughout the Wars because it was one of the most visible symbols of the traditional church. The Capuchins used it to create a new ceremonial that publicly staked a place for the new brotherhood on the frontlines of local spiritual warfare as “soldiers of Christ,” in as much as it advertised their inclusion *in* the local community. Adding to the militant tone was the nature of the procession, which frequently involved soldiers as protection and passed through Protestant neighbourhoods.

In chapter four, Diefendorf explores Dominican reform as another dimension of a well-known case of demonic possession, known as the Gaufridy affair, which involved the Ursuline community in Aix-en-Provence. Sébastien Michaëlis, the presiding cleric associated with the case, was at the time the provincial minister (head) of the Dominican province of Occitanie. From his election in 1589 onwards, Michaelis used this administrative role to implement a strict observance of the Dominican ideal within his jurisdiction. Like de la Barrière, he also soon faced significant internal resistance at the same time that he was drawn into the controversial case. Michaelis treaded carefully, anxious to protect both the newly fledged Ursuline tradition and his own reform efforts from scandal. Diefendorf’s subtle, open-ended handling of Michaëlis’ interactions with the Ursulines is to my mind an especially interesting part of this chapter, providing tantalizing evidence of spiritual cross-fertilization and cooperation between local monastic communities.

Chapter five is a welcome study of the Trinitarians, a religious order that is remarkably understudied despite its long history in France and important role in ransoming captives and caring for traveling pilgrims. As in the previous chapters, Diefendorf is careful to highlight both the distinctive spiritual ideal of the order and the unique nature of its local circumstances, particularly in the region of Provence. Indeed, similar to the Capuchins and the Feuillants, the Trinitarians turned to internal reform to reinvent themselves in the context of a changing France. Core to the traditional ideal was the redemption of slaves, hospitality for pilgrims, and a life of austerity. The reforms that began penetrating the French communities in the late sixteenth century provoked questioning about the nature of the order, especially as a push for greater austerity threatened the capacity of these communities to support themselves. As Diefendorf shows, internal debates over administrative responsibilities reflected much deeper disagreements over the nature of the Trinitarian ideal. It is Diefendorf’s main point here that the Trinitarians, like the other orders, were seeking to adapt their ideal to the new realities of the seventeenth century. In particular, they came to consider the production of a highly educated body of

preachers as important to fighting Huguenot influence locally, a change that represented a significant innovation.

Chapter six, the final one, takes us to an order that Diefendorf explored at length in *From Penitence to Charity*. Here, however, she concentrates not on the Paris community of the Incarnation, which was closely associated with Barbe Acarie, but on the less well studied one at Pontoise. For Diefendorf, Pontoise was not a “pale replica of the Parisian foundation” but rather “an alternative vision of the Teresian heritage,” to quote the chapter title. Diefendorf uses Pontoise to ponder yet another important facet of monastic traditions in early modern France. by the Early Modern Period, namely their penchant for embracing diverse “visions” of the founding ideal. Her description of the communities at Pontoise and Paris as Teresian “cultures” is to my mind an important one, because it challenges the more Manichean conceptions of decline and renewal that often plague understandings of monastic reform. The language of authenticity, more often than not, has historically proved to be an effective mechanism for increasing internal spiritual diversity, the Franciscan order being one especially well-known example. In the case of Pontoise, this community used its small, undecorated church to manifest its unique interpretation of the Teresian ideal. In its simplicity, the Pontoise church was similar the one built in Avila, and it also stood in stark contrast to the old, enormous, and highly decorated abbey which was granted to the nuns of the Incarnation in Paris. To be sure, the Pontoise community was less wealthy, its endowment much smaller than the community in Paris. But as Diefendorf shows, this does not mean it was any less influential than the Incarnation. Each had close ties with the Paris elite, and each believed that it held a truer claim to leading Teresian reform in France.

The case study approach in *Planting the Cross* means that each of the chapters discussed above stands on its own merit as an independent investigation of a particular conflict and community, while giving Diefendorf the flexibility to explore diverse historical themes of interest to early modern scholars. To begin with, *Planting the Cross* provides further support for emphasizing the indigenous nature of Catholic reform. As Diefendorf demonstrates quite effectively, seventeenth-century Catholicism had its roots in a multiplicity of forces, ones that were political, religious as well as economic in nature, and local as well as trans-regional. Indeed, as in her previous books, *Planting the Cross* challenges any easy separation of religion and politics, treating monastic communities as political as well as religious actors shaped by local and broader forces of change. Religious communities provide a unique lens for examining the Catholic Reformation from below because they were local institutions with local ties even while they belonged to international families. It was all very well to have a passionate reformer in one’s midst, but they had to have funding to buy land and build a new community or renovate an old one. Moreover, along with Eric Nelson’s study of shrines among other recent works, *Planting the Cross* makes it clear that one cannot underestimate the destructiveness of the religious conflicts of the late sixteenth century in undermining the fiscal stability of many established communities (destruction of buildings, loss of income) at a time when local patrons were increasingly enthusiastic about new reformed traditions.[6]

Rebuilding after the Wars, in other words, was often more challenging for the established communities than it was for the “shiny” new ones like the Capuchins or Ursulines, an observation that suggests that the changing character of Catholicism in the wake of the Wars was local, quixotic, dynamic, more than it was a coherent programmatic process of reform

within the broader ecclesiastical structures of France. Focusing upon the major reformers and reform initiatives is important, but transformation was taking place at all levels of the structure. Moreover, the changes taking place were, in many cases, distinctive to the French Catholicism that was emerging after the Wars, the militancy of the Trinitarians and Capuchins being two examples. Monastic communities were changing because they were adapting to a France that was changing.

In making a case for the indigenous nature of French Catholicism, Diefendorf's monograph fits neatly with the work of John O'Malley and others who have argued for thinking of Early Modern Catholicism as a distinctive era in the long history of the Catholic tradition, one that was marked by a creative interaction between the forces of continuity and change. It was also being defined on the ground and on the frontiers of Catholic engagement, as well as from the administrative leaders of the Church.[7] Where I suggest that Diefendorf's book makes a particularly interesting intervention in this larger discussion is in its questioning of the traditional framing of post-Reformation Catholicism in terms of "old" and "new" orders. The privileging of the Jesuits, Capuchins, Ursulines and discalced Carmelites continues to characterize most early modern textbooks. The new orders did operate on the frontiers of Catholic engagement and were enormously influential. But they were by no means the only ones. The mendicant orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Augustinians) were in the vanguard of the global expansion of the Catholic tradition into the Atlantic, operating in greater numbers in most regions than the Jesuits and Capuchins.[8] In the Mediterranean as well, many of the well-established communities remained vital and deserve more attention. Moreover, we should remember that many of the "newer" orders were in fact recent reform movements within much older traditions, the Capuchins, Feuillants and discalced Carmelites being three particularly important examples. As *Planting the Cross* shows, many traditional communities in France struggled during the early modern period and some did not survive. But a broader look at monastic traditions in the Church also shows the persistence, and even flourishing, of many Benedictine and other monastic communities (male and female). Another important distinguishing facet of Early Modern Catholicism, in other words, may be its embrace of a growing monastic diversity.

The examples of the Trinitarians, Capuchins and Feuillants, moreover, may give further support for thinking about the pursuit of purity as a distinctive facet of an early modern religious culture broadly construed. Nicholas Terpstra has made this argument most recently, but it is a perspective emerging from recent scholarship exploring involuntary migrations of peoples and individuals (Jews, Moriscos, Huguenots), the formation of "purified" communities (Puritans, Anabaptists) in the New World and Europe, as well as in the closer scrutiny of ecclesiastic and state authorities to the devotional life of ordinary believers.[9] In France, the Trinitarians of Provence altered their constitutions and introduced stripped down regulations on poverty, diet, and other facets of the lived Trinitarian ideal with purification as their objective. Rigorous mortification also enthused the Capuchins and Feuillants to a degree that ultimately proved deadly, at least in the case of the Feuillants. As Diefendorf's study suggests, the pursuit of extreme rigour was divisive, as were other efforts to "restore" a community to true observance of its original religious ideal. But studied in a much broader context of concerns about spiritual purity, the French communities also argue for an early modern Europe riven by concerns about spiritual authenticity and pollution.

As a final observation, *Planting the Cross* asks us to reflect in more complex terms about the nature of monastic reform, in particular as a mechanism of religious change. While reform was frequently divisive, it also provided an ideological umbrella that could embrace a multiplicity of “authentic” interpretations within a given religious tradition. Creating space for internal diversity was important, Diefendorf suggests, for adapting the tradition to local and other circumstances to enable its survival. Monastic reform, in other words, did not exist in a bubble, isolated from the world outside the doors of the institution. As *Planting the Cross* makes quite clear, the Wars of Religion were themselves a powerful catalyst of religious change, one that intersected with monastic reform, reshaping in the process the French Catholic tradition from the ground up.

NOTES

[1] *Paris City Councillors: The Politics of Patrimony* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[2] Scholarship on the religious orders in France is quite rich for the Medieval and Early Modern Periods. A small sampling of recent work not mentioned elsewhere includes Jean-Marie Le Gall, *Les moines au temps des réformes: France (1480-1560)* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2001); Megan C. Armstrong, *The Politics of Piety: Franciscan Preachers and the French Wars of Religion, 1560-1600* (Rochester, N.Y.: Rochester University Press, 2004); Frédéric Meyer, *Pauvreté et assistance spirituelle: Les Franciscains récollets de la Province de Lyon au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1997); Dominique Dinet, *Vocation et fidélité. Le recrutement des réguliers dans les diocèses d'Auxerre, Langres et Dijon (XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris: Economica, 1988).

[3] Some of the rich literature that features the political and spiritual contributions of the new religious orders includes Alison Forrestal, *Vincent de Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Eric Nelson, *The Jesuits and the Monarchy: Catholic Reform and Political Authority in France (1590-1615)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Bernard Dompnier, “Les missions des capucins et leur empreinte sur la réforme catholique en France,” *Revue d'histoire de l'église de France* 184 (1984): 127-147.

[4] The Feuillants also receive serious attention in Benoist Pierre's *La bure et le sceptre: la congrégation des Feuillants dans l'affirmation des États et des pouvoirs princiers (vers 1560-1660)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 2006).

[5] Some important examples include Benoist Pierre, *Le Père Joseph: L'Éminence grise de Richelieu* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2007); the extensive work of Bernard Dompnier, including *Enquête au pays des frères des anges. Les capucins de la province de Lyons au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècle* (Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 1993); and Jean Mauzaize, *Le rôle et l'action des capucins de Paris dans la France religieuse du XVII^e siècle* (Lille: Atelier des reproductions des thèses, 1978).

[6] Eric P. Nelson, *The Legacy of Iconoclasm: Religious War and the Relic landscape of Tours, Blois and Vendome 1550-1750* (St Andrews: Centre for French History and Culture, 2013). See

also Andrew Spicer's many articles and collections on the material devastation caused by religious conflict both in France and elsewhere.

[7] John O'Malley, *Trent and All That. Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Harvard, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[8] An extraordinarily rich literature exists on the mendicant orders in New Spain in particular. Important examples include Karen Melvin, *Building Colonial Cities of God: Mendicant Orders and Urban Culture in New Spain* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2012); Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery-earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

[9] A small sampling of the recent scholarship includes Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Geert H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

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Volume 15 (2020), Issue 1, #1