

Yvonne Maria Werner (ed.), *Christian Masculinity: Men and Religion in Northern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Leuven: Leuven University Press 2011, 322 p., 38,99 €, ISBN: 978-9058678737

Christian Masculinity examines men in the Catholic and Protestant traditions in Northern European countries from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Based on a research project conducted by Swedish scholars (with assistance of and in collaboration with researchers from England, Germany, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and Belgium), the volume presents case studies of religious men in the contested terrain of the role of the churches and religious life during the rise of secular modernity.

As religion became increasingly a private matter, it seemed that men were leaving the church to seek success in the worldly public domain while women remained attracted to Christianity due to what was then considered women's "natural" inclination toward devotion and piety. Historians of religion and church historians have explained this nineteenth-century phenomenon with the theory of the feminization of Christianity. Evidence suggests that "religion was discursively feminized at least as early as the 1820s," writes David Tjeder, "and quantitative studies reveal that in the second half of the nineteenth century church attendance and communion were dominated by women . . . leaving clergymen facing churches filled with women" (p. 134-35). This feminization theory, according to the editor Yvonne Werner, has become "the master narrative within modern research on religion and gender" (p. 8). But does this theory capture the complexity of gender relations at the turn of the last century? Does it theorize the male gender adequately? Does it render religious men invisible? Can it explain the "large numbers of men who were committed to the church and the Christian faith" (p. 9) during these decades?

Christian Masculinity suggests that the relations between gender, the churches, and modernity are more dynamic and

contentious than the feminization theory allows for. If one were to restrict oneself to the master narrative of the feminization of Christianity, one would remain oblivious to the more nuanced ways that religious men claimed their roles and confessional identifications “between 1840 and 1940” (p. 10); one would also have to disregard the churches’ efforts at mobilizing counter-strategies to “the secularization of society and the feminization of religion,” which aimed at “restor[ing] and reinforce[ing] male domination in the religious sphere” (p. 13). The contributing researchers seem to agree that it is time to take a “critical attitude towards the feminization theory” (p. 10).

Such a shared starting point gives Christian Masculinity a cohesiveness that often is missing in other edited volumes on religion and gender. Assuming a common (albeit not monolithic) theoretical framework, the thirteen contributors pursue the hypothesis that Christianity responded to secularism with re-confessionalizing and re-masculinizing efforts, and they probe this hypothesis in locality-specific sites. Erik Sidenvall, in his biographical study of a Swedish Protestant missionary to China, articulates perhaps most succinctly the shared understanding:

It is one of the overarching hypotheses of the Lund-based research project . . . that a ‘masculinisation’ was an integral part of what the German historian Olaf Blaschke has termed a ‘second confessional age’. In this anthology we find examples of how the renewed Christian enthusiasm of the nineteenth century coincided with conscious attempts to make Christianity more manly, sometimes even muscular (p. 149).

Indeed, it is Blaschke’s research on the “second confessional age” that seemed to have spirited this project. According to Blaschke, the second confessional age (1830-1960) was marked by both church consolidation and conflicts between the denominations; the combative mood of both consolidation and denominational battles compensated “for the feminization of religion, since confessionalism was the arena in which

male virtues and powers, used in the service of religion, could let off steam in a legitimate way” (p. 38).

With a few exceptions, most of the volume’s chapters proceed historically, analyzing church documents, official correspondence, personal letters, biographies, or institutional developments. Only the last three chapters do not follow this disciplinary approach, with Inger Littberger Caisou-Rousseau’s literary analysis of male protagonists in three classical Swedish novels, Anders Jarlert’s biographical profile of Queen Victoria, Sweden’s “manliest man in the Royal family” (p. 257), and Gösta Hallin’s reflections on what he calls the “new Catholic feminism,” inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Edith Stein, and John Paul II). Hallin’s article, however, is disappointingly apologetic toward a normative theological anthropology that posits gender complementarity and presumes a “non-negotiable,” “bodily-grounded sex difference” (p. 292).

The other chapters visit specific local sites in which issues of masculinity (or re-masculinization) are constructed, debated, defended, rejected, or theologized. The objects of these historical case studies include Lutheran theologians from the Swedish High Lund group; a Belgian movement of male devotion to the Sacred Heart; Dutch Dominicans in the 1930s; an analysis of obituaries of Swedish priests regarding “clerical manliness” (p. 118); a portraiture of the Swedish bishop Eklund, who combined Christianity, nationalism, and muscular manliness in his polemics against “unmanly” secular men; Swedish male missionaries in China; Catholic missionaries in Scandinavia; evangelizing efforts among Swedish military conscripts by creating so-called “soldiers’ homes” (p. 192); and the charismatic masculinity embodied by the founder of the Danish “folk high schools” (213).

Readers with special interest in church history of Northern Europe will particularly profit from these chapters. People less interested in the details of local case studies within a predominantly Swedish context will still benefit from reading *Christian Masculinity* because the themes addressed can

easily be transferred to other locality-specific sites. Some of the issues that weave through this volume and are significant beyond the regions covered pertain to the intersectionality of nationalism, religion, and masculinity, to gender fluidity in the lives of individual religious men, and to homosocial bonding as a site of pleasure and masculinizing reaffirmation. Another recurring theme is the mutual polemics that seek to portray “other” men as unmanly (Christian men were unmanly according to secularists; Catholics were not men enough according to Protestants; only a virtuous defender of faith was truly manly, according to Catholics, etc.).

In addition to the need for broad theoretical work on masculinity, like Pierre Bourdieu’s and R. W. Connell’s influential theories (which are frequently referenced in *Christian Masculinity*), this volume demonstrates masterfully that we must also study men and religion at the micro-level. Anne-Marie Korte states in a different context that the field of religion and gender (and masculinity in particular) must pay attention to questions of “locality and loyalty, privilege and marginalization, and objectivity and embodiment” (*Religion and Gender* 1:1 [2011], p. 9; accessed January 30, 2013). *Christian Masculinity* models this kind of project.

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Wolf Gruner, *Gedenkort Rosenstraße 2-4. Internierung und Protest im NS-Staat*, Berlin 2013 (= *Topographie des Terrors. Notizen*, Bd. 6, hg. v. Andreas Nachama), 88 S., 9,80 €, ISBN 978-3-95565-001-8

Die Berliner Stiftung *Topographie des Terrors* versucht mit ihrer Publikationsreihe „Notizen“, „auf immer wieder gestellte Fragen zu diesen historischen Orten wie auch zu anderen Themen Antworten geben zu können, die der Einstiegsinformation aller Interessierten dienlich sind“ (Klappentext). Zu den 88 Seiten, die das Informationsbändchen umfasst, zählen daher auch illustrierende Abbildungen. Allein dreizehn