

la ville, on le voit, est en fait un organisme vivant, composé d'une multitude d'éléments interdépendants et fortement influencé par son milieu ambiant. D'ailleurs, comme le démontre finalement très bien cet ouvrage, les villes vieillissent, elles aussi.

Lucie Larochelle
Université de Provence

Elizabeth Rapley — *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. xxvii, 283.

This volume is a gem. Going far beyond trite rhetoric about women's initiative snuffed by ecclesiastical resistance, it explores the richly detailed texture of female enterprise and achievement in a world dominated by religious values. Elizabeth Rapley presents the women as protagonists, not mere puppets of the Church, their families, or social necessity, and makes a convincing argument.

If "nuns" form a category separate from "women", the title is misleading, for this work actually deals with the développement of new religious communities, specifically teaching communities, during the *grand siècle*. Rapley's organizing theme, however, is that congregations were "born in the secular world, out of the intense involvement of women of all kinds with the new reformed Catholicism" (p. 254). Behind the diverse forms of female activism in this era lay a common source: the immense religious energy of the French Counter-Reformation, fired by the ideal of a life of perfection in the world, as promoted by François de Sales in his hugely popular *Introduction à la vie dévote*.

Eager to participate in the "christianization" of society, women addressed the crises of the century, namely the need for catechesis in the face of Protestant challenge and the multiple demands of a troubled society. Although a surprising number, like Alix Le Clerc in 1597, felt inspired "to create a new community of women to do all the good that was possible" (p. 64), this was opposed both by Tridentine legislation requiring strict cloister for nuns and by social mores that frowned on women as actors in the public sphere. Le Clerc and her contemporaries were therefore pressed into the cloistered mould, and their orders evolved into prominent, generally upper-class teaching congregations. Toward mid-century, women engaging in a wide range of charitable relief relinquished official religious status rather than their works, knowing "full well that they were nuns in all but name" (p. 7). This, Rapley argues, amounted to a "revolution, though a hidden one" (p. 93) by which, through the unlikely aegis of the Counter-Reformation, women simultaneously moved into public service and reframed the structures of female religious life in the Catholic Church.

This shift, although pivotal for women's history, has been neglected or disdained by historians (p. 247). While scholarly monographs on individual communities are still badly needed (such as those of Marie-Cecile Gueudré on the Ursulines, Roger

Devos on the Annecy Visitandines, and recently *Des régulières dans le siècle* by Marguerite Vacher on the Sisters of St. Joseph), a comprehensive study comparable to Claude Langlois's magisterial work on the nineteenth century is yet to be done. Rapley selects representative groups as case studies, placing them within a chronological framework of three divisions, which she labels teaching congregations (1598–1640), *filles séculières* (1630–1660), and *maîtresses charitables* (1660–1700). Any such grouping for the seventeenth century is bound to be inexact, due to the tremendous fluidity of terms in the texts — itself an indication of their novelty — and the infinite variations of context. Rapley's approach does, however, cut a path through the maze of women's religious groups which grew up in a diverse profusion that later frustrated Napoleon and continues to challenge historians.

Rapley offers a scholarly yet accessible study in English of a little-known but significant subject. She places familiar material concerning Visitandines, Ursulines, and Daughters of Charity in the wider perspective of more than a half-dozen other French women's orders, including the colonial foundation by Marguerite Bourgeoys in Montreal. Her account draws from a wealth of archival and printed seventeenth-century sources and is well written, presenting a good interplay of religious, social, and economic conditions without indulging in reductionism. Issues of power, gender, and class are patent in the interaction of the women with ecclesiastical authority, but the most significant socio-religious development here is the access to religious life provided for lower-class women by the non-cloistered congregations. They became a vehicle for women not only to fulfil their personal aspirations to religious service but to achieve a measure of social mobility well into the twentieth century.

A fine chapter on "Feminine Pedagogy" treats the transformation of education models borrowed from male teaching orders, particularly Jesuits, for use by women. Scholars in the history of education have already recognized that the method for simultaneous instruction was developed by female congregations. Rapley, in addition, delineates the process by which they refined classroom organization and discipline and hints at the feminine network in which such methods were disseminated. Despite limitations of a narrow curriculum dominated by catechism, handwork, and reading, as well as grievous impediments to intellectual development (imposed on cloistered nuns by isolation and uncloistered *filles* by overwork), women's religious communities made serious and enduring contributions to basic education in Old Regime France that far outlived that era.

Rapley's emphasis on teaching as the chief means of feminine promotion during the seventeenth century tends to slight the *hospitalières*. In this area, her work is complemented by studies of Colin Jones, Olwen Hufton, and Kathryn Norgren, to mention only English scholarship, and some inaccuracies concerning the Italian origins of the Ursulines in the sixteenth century are corrected in Teresa Ledochowska's *Angèle Merici*. One of the author's most provocative ideas, that attitudes and responses to poverty divided along gender lines (p. 77), needs further study in light of the fact that sisters were apparently engaged in the "social control" she ascribes to men — they were hired, for example, by (male) *dévots* to run prisons for prostitutes. For the most part, however, Rapley's treatment is balanced if frankly

sympathetic, and her judgments careful. The text is complemented by illustrations, maps, graphs, and a helpful glossary for the uninitiated.

Rapley's argument that women achieved a real if modest promotion through religious life in the seventeenth century can perhaps be evaluated properly only against the nineteenth-century professionalization of women in the fields of teaching and nursing. This is an area in which historians tend to give nuns little credit, in spite of the fact that their precedence is clear. Another touchstone for their success can be found in the preponderance of the French model for active women's religious communities in the immigrant Catholicism of both Canada and the United States. This book on French women is important for experts in the fields of women's, ecclesiastical, and educational history, as well as for the innumerable individuals in English-speaking countries who are the beneficiaries, directly or indirectly, of their initiative.

Patricia Byrne
Trinity College, Hartford

Jean-Marc Moriceau et Gilles Postel-Vinay — *Ferme, entreprise, famille : grande exploitation et changements agricoles : les Chartier XVII^e–XIX^e siècles*, Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes études en sciences sociales, 1992, 397 p.

Ce beau livre qui présente une étude magistrale constitue une importante contribution à la relance de l'histoire rurale en France. Les deux auteurs ont conjugué leurs compétences (l'un est spécialiste des temps modernes et l'autre du XIX^e siècle) pour aborder à nouveau un thème classique dans l'historiographie, soit celui des rapports entre la grande exploitation et les changements agricoles. Il apparaît dans le sous-titre de l'ouvrage et lui fournit sa toile de fond.

La genèse et la place des grandes fermes dans la vie rurale du coeur du Bassin parisien ont depuis longtemps retenu l'attention des géographes et des historiens. À la lumière du cas anglais, une première façon de voir leur a prêté un rôle historique décisif. Les grands fermiers qui les tenaient ont fait figure d'entrepreneurs de culture, d'adeptes de l'individualisme agraire et d'agents du progrès technique et économique, notamment comme pionniers de la révolution agricole dès le XVIII^e siècle. Mais, dans les années 60 et 70, les travaux d'histoire quantitative ont miné cette représentation et les visions trop linéaires de l'histoire rurale de longue durée. Loin de faire découvrir une croissance aux racines anciennes, l'approche macroscopique a plutôt révélé, du XV^e à la fin du XVIII^e siècle, un plafonnement persistant des rendements de la culture céréalière, sinon de la production elle-même. Or, les grandes fermes n'ont pas échappé à cette stagnation d'ensemble et elles n'ont nullement vécu une révolution précoce. Elles n'étaient donc pas, par nature, des foyers de changement et de transformation économique. Faut-il pour autant n'y voir qu'une des formes de la société rurale traditionnelle?

La question de la place des grandes fermes et des grands fermiers dans le développement agricole a donc suscité des réponses opposées allant d'un extrême