

En conclusion, l'auteur avance que toute la spiritualité qui se dégage des textes analysés « nous rappelle le danger des visions réductrices : c'est pour affirmer l'âme que cette réduction s'exerçait contre le corps ». Elle ajoute : « Ne risque-t-on pas aujourd'hui une réduction inverse, et également préjudiciable à un équilibre véritable, en ramenant toute la vie humaine à sa réalité immédiate et lourde de toute sa pesanteur physique » (p. 324).

Ouvrage fascinant donc par son propos et son approche. Ouvrage nuancé également, l'auteur étant consciente d'« exposer souvent les extrêmes » (p. 34); « d'entamer à peine des archives inaccessibles » (p. 54) et « innombrables » (p. 165); d'utiliser les textes qui se « taisent sur tout ce qui n'est pas édifiant » (p. 116). Le reproche le plus sérieux qu'on puisse lui faire est de ne pas souligner suffisamment que ses sources proviennent de religieuses lettrées et qu'on est sans connaissance réelle des religieuses illettrées qui forment l'essentiel du personnel de nombreuses congrégations. C'est ce qui explique qu'elle soit si laconique sur les soeurs converses. Elle n'établit pas non plus de distinctions entre les ordres de moniales et les congrégations actives, distinctions qui seraient utiles pour établir des catégories parmi les règles et les prescriptions. On s'étonne également de son analyse d'une prière répandue chez les élèves des pensionnats : « Mon dieu je vous donne mon coeur; [...] qu'aucune créature ne le puisse posséder [...] » (p. 186). Elle semble ignorer que cette prière est une des plus répandues dans la chrétienté de langue française.

Mais ces vétilles ne sauraient diminuer l'intérêt d'un ouvrage qui complète adroitement les études canoniques ou sociales sur le vaste phénomène des congrégations et vocations religieuses au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'auteur montre bien que toute la spiritualité qui est proposée aux religieuses prend ses racines dans le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle plutôt qu'à la période des grandes fondations médiévales. Elle démontre aussi le phénomène de rigidité qui s'est instauré dès le milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, certains textes se maintenant anachroniquement jusqu'en 1954 sur des sujets comme l'hygiène et le soin des malades. Comme le note Jean-Pierre Peter dans une préface éclairante, tout ce climat coïncide remarquablement avec l'entreprise d'assujettissement des femmes à cette époque, que ce soit par le discours médical, par les codes civils ou par l'ensemble des pouvoirs. Dans cette perspective, « l'entrée en religion [pourrait être] une rupture décisive avec un statut humilié par la voie héroïque d'une annulation de soi » (p. 9).

Micheline DUMONT  
Université de Sherbrooke

\* \* \*

SUSAN GOAG BELL and KAREN OFFEN, eds. — *Women, the Family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents*. Volume I: 1750-1880. Volume II: 1880-1950. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983. Pp. vi, 561; vi, 474.

For professors intent on introducing students to contemporary debates on historical issues, the documentary collection is a valuable resource. Both teachers and students will welcome the recent two-volume collection, *Women, the Family and Freedom*. Editors Susan Goag Bell and Karen Offen, with researchers from the Center for Research on Women (Stanford), have amassed an impressive array of materials to document the debate on women's place and women's rights from the Enlightenment to the mid-twentieth century. Unlike earlier collections such as Barbara Ehrenreich's and Deirdre English's *For Her Own Good*, or Julia O'Faolin's and Laura Martines' *Not In God's Image*, these volumes present more than a static picture of women through prescriptive literature. Bell and Offen trace the changing tones of a dialogue in which women too took part as active participants.

The collection contains literary, legal, philosophical and political writings on women, not only from established thinkers, but also from writers who are less familiar, particularly to English readers. Each volume is divided into thematic units preceded by introductory essays that provide historical context for the documents. In addition, head-notes of biographical material on authors introduce

shorter chapters within each unit. While this format entails a certain amount of repetition, it is valuable for those unfamiliar with either the figures or the period.

The format and approach are both clear. The documents are arranged chronologically within each chapter, and the major divisions between units fall into traditional periodization that parallels the development of nation states and liberal democratic theory. The collection ends in 1950, an arbitrary cut-off point, but one stretching beyond the usual point of 1920. The editors' approach is legalistic and somewhat Whiggish: "...the 'woman question' still lies embedded in the heart of the Western debate about individual liberty; its resolution is central to the full realization of such liberty within the framework of the democratic state" (p. v).

One of the least-developed areas is the more intimate aspect of women's lives: sexual relations, marriage, mothering and sentiment. These are all addressed in this collection, though primarily from the perspective of legal codes and their impact on women. Sex is not addressed until the second volume and birth control receives a sketchy presentation. Another area treated briefly is suffrage (22 pp.) and nineteenth-century feminism (6 pp.). Perhaps the editors assumed that the large volume of secondary material on these subjects freed them to explore less well-documented issues such as women in Italian fascism. The result, however, is the emergence of the mid-twentieth century feminist movement apparently from nowhere. There is virtually no discussion of women in the Second World War (although the First is well-documented) so that we skip from the Depression to the late 1940s. Despite these weaknesses, evident more in the second volume than in the first, those looking at women's place in contemporary debates will find this collection worthwhile.

These volumes make a significant contribution in leading the researcher beyond the conventional U.S., Britain, France triangle; in addition, German, Scandinavian, Russian, and Italian selections are featured in each unit. In a section on women's rights in the nineteenth century, one chapter is headed, "The Debate Reaches Russia". Apparently it never hit Canada. Surely we could expect room in such a collection for Canadian material, particularly if the authors are committed to exposing less familiar sources. We still await a work on the Western tradition that considers the existence, let alone contribution, of Canadians.

This observation points to another underdeveloped area, that of transnational, comparative women's history. The documents appear from a number of countries with unique legal, social, political and economic systems: did women fare better under one regime than another? The editors leave this question to the reader, but the documents certainly suggest that there is no monolithic shape to women's "place" in Western countries.

The greatest potential contribution of *Women, the Family and Freedom* is towards the enrichment of survey courses in European or American history. The editors are adept at locating the debate on women squarely in the intellectual mainstream of each period. Thus, women and men discuss women's place in the context of Enlightenment philosophy on natural rights; in the 1830s and 1840s revolutionary uprisings and the development of socialism provide a stimulus to discussions on women's place; the rise of social sciences, particularly psychology, provides another framework for the understanding of women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These documents can thereby enable professors to integrate debates on women with larger contemporary issues. Students and teachers alike will find the rich, topically divided bibliographies valuable in their pursuit of more detailed research.

The documents and historical essays in these volumes convey a picture of women that is dynamic and not merely a flat portrayal of "the subordinate sex". Instead, we see a tradition of women's (and men's) resistance to those who sought to circumscribe women's place. *Women, the Family and Freedom* does a great deal to restore a voice to that tradition.

Carolyn STRANGE  
University of Ottawa