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Transforming Post-Catholic Ireland: Religious Practice in Late Modernity, by Gladys Ganiel, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, 255 pp., ISBN 9780198745785, £50.99 (hardback).

Gladys Ganiel provides many insights in this monograph. In the first instance it offers the reader a comprehensive overview of the religious affiliation and attitudes of people on 'the island of Ireland', especially those from the Republic. This is useful for anyone with an interest in either the history or religion of this part of Europe from the late nineteenth century onward. Ganiel outlines the monolithic status of Roman Catholicism during this period. The book illustrates how, between 1850 and 1970 it established a 'monopoly' (25) not only of religious belief, affiliation and practice, but also extending into the social, educational, familial and political spheres of Eire. In Northern Ireland, in reaction to marginalisation from the state apparatus, the Roman Catholic Church created a 'state within a state' (30). However, Ganiel outlines how since the end of that period, there has been a substantial change. Whilst recent surveys show that nominal religiosity continues (for example, 93% of the Republic's parents still have their children baptised) regular attendance at Mass has declined dramatically from 91% in 1972 to just 35% in 2012 (16). This pattern of loss is similarly reflected in the drop in religious vocations to the Church. Alongside the fall in religious practice there has also been a period where the reputation of the Roman Catholic Church has been hit by the sexual abuse scandals and its apparent misogyny. This has led to a very different religious landscape which has left the author 'impressed by the long shadow' of failing Roman Catholicism (3).

As a consequence, Ganiel describes the island of Ireland (that is the political North and the South collectively) as 'Post Catholic' (4). This is not to say that it is secular or post Christian, but where the denomination is no longer dominant, but now only one (albeit still the major) player in a religious scene which is more diverse and individualistic than it ever was (42). The book then turns to its own exploration of the religiosity of the island of Ireland. Three different research programmes are detailed within the volume, each assisting in the examination of such diversity away from traditional religious practice. The earliest of these was a survey questionnaire in 2009 of 4,005 faith leaders, with a commendable 18 percent response rate (55). This revealed a widespread and disappointing lack of interest and commitment to ecumenism amongst a group of people whom it would be hoped would think otherwise. Next, a second questionnaire was made freely accessible to the whole population of Ireland, both North and South. This second questionnaire was entirely on-line and it was open to

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the whole population (over 6 million). A total of 910 responded, most of whom were evangelical and middle class with a lack of young Roman Catholics (58, 98). It should be noted that no claim is made about the survey being representative of the whole population. Notwithstanding, the volume provides a laudable attempt to investigate lay attitudes towards religious beliefs and practices and as such gives the basis from which further research could be undertaken (59).

The third and final trench of research details a number of in-depth face-to-face interviews of people who were outside the 'mainstream' of religious activity. These were of people who could be seen to belong to categories or organisations which Ganiel takes to be 'extra-institutional' in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. Three of these were people from religious congregations. Abundant Life is a multi-ethnic charismatic church in Limerick, whose members are drawn from the lower levels of socio-economic-classification (SEC). It has benefited from a growth in numbers since the mid-2000s as a result of immigration. Abundant Life is viewed as extra-institutional because of how congregants repeatedly understand their faith in contradistinction to Roman Catholicism (120, 136). St Patrick's United Church Waterford has also increased its numbers through those migrating to Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years. Although the majority are African by origin, the congregation is also composed of a number of other 'little groups' (152). Again, its extra-institutional status is assigned due to members' 'ambivalence' to the Roman Catholic Church (138). The final congregation is The Jesus Centre Dublin. Its denominational origins are reflected in its majority Nigerian migrant composition who are described as being middle class in their SEC. and once again, its 'extra-institutional' status is founded upon members' choice to contrast their beliefs and practices to that of Roman Catholicism (161).

A second trinity of members described as being 'extra-institutional' are those who, whilst relating directly to the people and structures of the R.C. church, are marginal or peripheral because of their location as sub-groups within it; lying as they do beyond historical parochial systems. The first members to be described in the book are those interviewed from Ballyboden Parish Council. This provides, explains Ganiel 'safe spaces within their own parish that provided opportunities for encouragement, solace, healing and spiritual growth' (94). It is not denied that members of this sub-group are enthusiastic parishioners and supporters of their local Parish Priest and the traditional church. What Ganiel suggests is that the newly formed body to which they belong provides a location within which alternative ideas and practices can be attempted, thus making it 'extra-institutional' (96). Similarly with the young persons' group Sli Eile. It too is closely aligned with the Roman Catholic Church, being run by Irish Jesuits, but its practices and beliefs go beyond that of those ordinarily seen within

a parish. This makes it, according to Ganiel, 'extra-institutional' (115-6). The third grouping considered is once again closely linked with the R.C. church, being a Benedictine Monastery. However, it again gives individuals, even those beyond R.C. church and into the Protestant community in Northern Ireland, a safe space to be critical of church and engage in what is for those people, new and positively challenging religious beliefs and practices. For this quality, the Holy Cross Monastery is deemed by the author to be extra-institutional (174).

The final tranche of interviews are more disparate. It includes the Fermanagh Churches Forum which is one of ten such organisations across Northern Ireland that gathers members from different churches to work towards closer understanding and co-operation. Because they are able to critique their own denominations (such as with regard to ecumenism) they too are regarded as extra-institutional (196-8). Also within this broad collection of individuals that Ganiel has interviewed from religions which are of a minority on the island, most of whom that were foreign-born are living out the religion of their birth (215). One of the common experiences these people relayed was that of rejection. One of these explained it thus:

> After 9/11 people started linking me to Osama Bin Laden because the images which were being continuously projected on our television screens and in newspapers shows the Taliban people wearing turbans…I used to travel in public transport to work and before 9/11 I never experienced any problem, but after 9/11 I would see people shouting at me (219).

> Agnostics and atheists relayed similar stories of rejection (221).

Ganiel's presentations of the faith and practices of those on the edge of established religion (albeit almost exclusively that of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland), offers an original approach to religious life. It gives the reader the concept of a religious market in which the historic churches on the island are in decline whilst interested persons seek new expressions. The latter are not simply isolated individuals, but instead have some loose connection with these failing institutions (236-8). By so doing, Ganiel sees hope for an island troubled by its sectarian past within the critiques of new, collective religious forms. Written in the spirit of 'action-research' to which Ganiel has dedicated her career, the book draws to a close with a look into the prospects for religion on the island. It does so by using the words from a fellow traveller in the field: 'it is also exciting for the future: the thrill of not knowing, of venturing into a new "God space"' (255).

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I commend this engaging, easily read and useful work to anyone (specialist or not), who is interested in Ireland and its contemporary religious scene.

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