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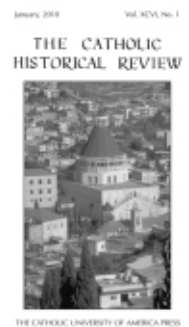
*The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the
Black Death* (review)

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a clear and accessible model of skillful gender analysis. *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England* will make an excellent textbook for college and university courses in the history of pastoral care, medieval church history, and medieval gender studies and women's studies. It will also be a welcome addition to the libraries of scholars in those fields.

York University, Toronto

BECKY R. LEE

The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death.

By Katherine L. French. [The Middle Ages Series.] (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2008. Pp. xii, 337. \$69.95. ISBN 978-0-812-24053-5.)

The history of the English parish has been studied for more than a century. Toulmin Smith published *The Parish* (London, 1857), and F.A. Gasquet issued *Parish Life in Medieval England* (London, 1906). But it became a fashionable subject only recently. S. J. Wright edited *Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750* (London, 1988). This was followed by a volume edited by Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs, and Beat A. Kümin, *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600* (Manchester, UK, 1997). Then came N. J. G. Pounds with his massive *A History of the English Parish* (New York, 2000), and Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy's edited collection of fine essays, *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donington, UK, 2006).

Katherine L. French established herself as a leading student of the medieval English parish with *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001). Her new publication *The Good Women of the Parish* looks at various aspects of women's parochial involvement in the light of the traumatic and dramatic social and economic changes of the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The book examines the meaning that women found in the communal activities of all-women's seating, all-women's guilds and stores, female saints, and the transformation of household goods into items of religious and liturgical significance. This kind of collective action undertaken within the context of the parish actively promoted submissive behavior among women. Yet at the same time, it created opportunities for their public visibility and action, giving some of them an official role in the parish's administration. An example of this form of collective action was Hocktide, a fund-raising activity on the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter that provided some women with leadership opportunities. On Monday, women tried to catch the men, tying them up and releasing them upon payment of a forfeit. On Tuesday, they reversed roles, and the men captured and tied up the women. Such activities did not bring about changes in the social order of the parishes. However, collective action created moments of solidarity among women, while raising and spending money for the church created a permanent physical demonstration of the power of this collective action.

In the epilogue French argues that the Reformation changed women's behavior and opportunities in the parish. They found their parish involvement

significantly altered. She gives the following example: in 1536, a group of women in Exeter went to the priory of St. Nicholas and assaulted the men hired to dismantle the rood screen. This was a reflection that much of women's activities and opportunities in the church were lost in the Reformation. The religious behavior of women was "no longer as collective, visible and active" (p. 230).

The analysis draws on a rich collection of archival records, which the author has mined very well. Churchwardens' accounts are most central to the book, but the author uses also wills, visitation reports, tax, and ecclesiastical court records. Much insight is taken from sermons, didactic literature, saints' lives, parish wall paintings, and stained-glass windows.

This meticulously researched and engaging publication—graced by photographs, maps, graphs, tables, and two appendices—is a good book indeed, which enhances French's reputation even further. The discussion is rich with new insights and information. This is certainly a book suitable not only for the specialist but also for the general reader. The author's mastery of the sources and her deep understanding of the subject make joyful reading and a significant contribution to our understanding of "the good women of the parish."

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FRANS CIAPPARA

The Tribunal of Zaragoza and Crypto-Judaism, 1484-1515. By Anna Ysabel D'Abrera. [Europa Sacra, Vol. 3.] (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers. 2008. Pp. x, 240. €60,00. ISBN 978-2-503-52472-6.)

The subject of this industrious monograph is *converso* life in the late-fifteenth century, as relayed by inquisition records originally compiled in the city of Zaragoza, in the kingdom of Aragón. An inquisition tribunal was established in Zaragoza in 1482 and began work two years later; D'Abrera's evidence comes predominantly from the tribunal's 142 extant trials conducted between 1484 and 1515, 131 of which occurred between 1484 and 1492. Modern scholars have long known that the Spanish Inquisition was created in 1478 to combat the heresy of judaizing, in which Christians of Jewish ancestry, called *conversos*, allegedly continued to follow aspects of Mosaic Law. Historians have used surviving inquisition trials to study the social history of *conversos* who attracted the inquisitors' attention. They have also turned these legal sources toward sweeping arguments about religion and race: on the one hand, scholars such as Haim Beinart view the *conversos* largely as practicing Jews, not Christians; on the other, Benzion Netanyahu insists that fifteenth-century *conversos* were fully assimilated into Christianity and maintains that the Inquisition deliberately falsified charges of judaizing to wipe out the Jewish race. Provocatively—and problematically, from a methodological perspective—both sides are debating evidence about sincerity and religious belief for actors who left no holograph writings and made no statements outside a courtroom. D'Abrera intends to enter this debate on Beinart's