

laity did not necessarily accept these networks as representative of their interests; in fact, at times the laity viewed them as working against their own spiritual aspirations. Within the book, however, more attention could have been given to defining the “laity,” and determining if differences in socio-economic standing influenced the engagement of the laity with the pastoral endeavors of the clergy, especially as the diocese of Tver’ and Moscow contained a diverse collection of rural and urban, industrialized parishes.

Scarborough convincingly traces the engagement of the Orthodox clergy in the pastoral movement, shedding light on how clergymen in late imperial Russia met the changes of modernity and found their own “authorizing discourse” in the process (6). His book adds to the existing repertoire of scholarship on Orthodoxy during this period by illuminating the role of mutual aid networks among Orthodox clergy in creating the social and institutional connections that allowed the Orthodox Church to navigate, at least initially, political and social uncertainty.

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***The Sunday School Movement in Britain, 1900–1939.* By Catriona McCartney. Studies in Modern British Religious History. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2023. xv + 208pp. £80.00. Hardcover.**

Historians of religious education are undoubtedly well acquainted with the historiography on nineteenth-century British Sunday schools. E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* sparked a lively debate over the schools’ proponents and their purposes, and stimulated significant new research into the workings of this educational innovation. The schools’ twentieth-century history has received considerably less attention, a lacuna that Catriona McCartney seeks to fill in her study of the institution during the century’s first four decades.

In six diligently researched and plainly (and repetitively) written chapters, plus an Introduction and a Conclusion, McCartney summarizes the results of her deep archival dive into a wide range of source materials. These include local schools’ minute books; pamphlets and books produced by Sunday school advocates, critics, and reformers; denominational and interdenominational periodicals; local and national newspapers; teacher training materials; and individuals’ personal papers. In addition to Church of England (Anglican) and Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) sources, her research encompasses evidence from some dissenting sects, particularly Methodists and Baptists, and items produced by the interdenominational National Sunday School Union (founded in 1803), and the World Sunday School Association (founded in 1907).

Readers will find no sweeping historiographical claims in McCartney’s pages. Rather, her aim is to fill in “oversights in the historiography” and make the case for the Sunday school as “a significant agent of religious socialisation” (17) in twentieth-century Britain. To achieve that aim, she provides a largely internal perspective on the Sunday school as a vehicle for the religious education of youth in England, Scotland, and Wales, especially as the Great

War reshaped all aspects of British life. The author pays particular attention to ongoing discussions among contemporaries – and some later historians – about the schools’ effectiveness in training up youngsters in the ways they should go, as well as their value as sources of both religious knowledge for attendees and social cohesion for local communities. Participants’ and commentators’ remarks during the 1900–1914 era reveal a constant tension between appreciation for the schools’ work in fostering pupils’ and teachers’ religious growth and criticism for “failure to educate their scholars to a high enough standard” (73). That tension was expressly evident in debates over whether religious institutions had “failed” British soldiers who supposedly demonstrated a “remarkable ignorance” (14) and “no real grasp” (75) of Christianity as they headed off to fight and die in the Great War.

Devoting three of her six chapters to the schools’ history before and during the war, McCartney comes down on the side of the schools’ efficacy in providing spiritual succor to British Tommies and as a source of social glue to the communities they left behind. Not only had Sunday school attendance “produced scholars who had good biblical knowledge and understood their faith well” (78) but, mired in the trenches, fighting men could be comforted by singing or reciting familiar hymns and psalms, recalling Biblical figures, texts, and geographies, or corresponding with their Sunday school teachers. On the home front, friends, former teachers, and families worked to support their troops, labor that reflected the general “role the laity played in sustaining morale in local communities” (49) during wartime. As evidence for the argument, McCartney marshals documents from Sunday school workers, teachers, and pupils, the most interesting of which are from men who wrote back to their former schools. Interpretively, of course, it is virtually impossible to use such evidence to make a claim for the distinctive impact of Sunday schools alone on the fighting men – as opposed to the influence of their attendance at day school or at church services. Moreover, soldiers’ responses were often prompted by the letters, packages, and treats that they received from children attending their own former schools. In composing letters of thanks to such audiences, men were likely to call up memories of their Sunday school experience and give credit to the school for the piety they carried with them into battle.

When McCartney turns to describing the schools’ history between the two World Wars (chapter 4) and the move to improve teaching methods (chapter 5), she is on more solid evidentiary footing. In those chapters, she presents specific evidence on several topics. A series of graphs (115–121), for instance, illustrate conclusively that, with the notable exception of Church of Scotland schools, the number of children attending Sunday school declined consistently between 1900 and 1939. Even taking into account the demographic disaster that accompanied the war, the trend was evident. (Statistics on the gender ratio among pupils, if available, might have helped clarify some of the decline’s causes.) Moreover, regardless of whether representing established or dissenting churches, British religious leaders’ attitudes ranged from holding the institutions at arm’s length (some charged rent for the use of church facilities) to embracing them as valuable adjuncts to their pastoral missions.

Still, during the 1920s and 1930s there was widespread enthusiasm for improving Sunday school teaching methods and elevating the training of teachers. Here, McCartney’s evidence is concrete and specific. If the schools were to fulfill their promise for denominations and congregations, then all “amateurish and unsystematic” (113) methods had to be banished, children needed to move through grades just as they did in (increasingly compulsory) day schools, and teachers would have to have opportunities to participate in formal training programs with model lessons and demonstrations. The extent to which most teachers seized such opportunities is unclear, as are the characteristics of most teachers. McCartney’s use of obituaries to characterize teachers’

qualities is a worthy effort, but surely any teacher whose obituary mentioned her or his long-term commitment to Sunday school teaching would be exceptional, not typical.

A final chapter on “British Sunday Schools and the World” misses the opportunity to position the Sunday school within the rich historiography on empire. In this chapter, the “world” is that of Great Britain, its missionaries, and the Sunday school workers whose home ties provided comfort when they migrated to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, or the United States. “The world” that Sunday school students encountered unfolded through the blinkered lens of British missionaries who journeyed to exotic lands. Here, as elsewhere in the book, a narrow focus on the schools’ internal operations limits the broader interpretive possibilities that McCartney’s research might have produced.

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***Visions of Salvation: Chinese Christian Posters in an Age of Revolution.* By Daryl Ireland. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. xxvii + 277 pp. \$69.99.**

Between 1919 and 1949, Christian groups papered public spaces in China with propaganda posters. Like the nationalists and communists, political parties that also engaged in mass-printing campaigns, the Christians deployed posters to promulgate “a vision for how to build China into a modern nation-state” (3). These posters, which have heretofore received only scant attention, are the subject of this volume of essays. Daryl Ireland, the editor, argues in his introduction that the posters, taken collectively, suggest that Christianity’s cultural authority did not wane after 1930 as much as scholars have supposed.

Each of the ten essays approaches the posters from a different angle. Peter Zarrow reveals that Christian groups, intent upon helping China achieve national salvation, pushed social reform more than religion in their posters. Connie Shemo shows how the posters emphasized the important role played by women in advancing public health. Margaret Mih Tillman investigates the posters’ ambiguous depictions of children; childhood comes across both as an “idealized” time of “happiness” and, more darkly, as a precarious life stage in which decisions carry “important, even eternal, consequences” (108). Other essays examine the religious dimensions of the posters. Dana Robert shows how the posters advanced the evangelical goals of the China Inland Mission. Daryl Ireland and David Li, who focus on iconography, explain the problem presented by Jesus, whose mutilated body offended “Confucian sensibilities” (136). Groups solved the problem by de-emphasizing Christ and promoting the cross as Christianity’s primary symbol. Finally, Joseph Ho stresses the “in-betweenness” (244) of the posters. They emanated out of “foreign and indigenous imaginations,” existed in public as well as private spaces, and borrowed both from Chinese media and from traditions of Western art.

Ireland insists that the book represents only the start of a scholarly inquiry. I disagree. These superb essays majorly advance our knowledge on these fascinating yet