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Book Review

Reading and Rebellion in Catholic Germany, 1770-1914

by Jeffrey T. Zalar, Cambridge University Press, 2019. 386 pp. \$80.59

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The latest publication by Jeffrey T. Zalar, captivatingly recounts intellectual inquiry and literacy within the Catholic community of Germany between the years 1770 and 1914. From the beginning, Zalar fundamentally establishes that German Catholics were not uniformed disciples blindly following their spiritual leaders but rather cerebrally curious intellectuals who partook in reading more than just religious texts. The publication illuminates the lives of German Catholics of the Rhineland and Westphalia and features the reading cultures of those in all socio-economic classes, while paying close attention to underprivileged Catholics who might have been wrongfully assumed as illiterate. Zalar's extensive research in parish archives and libraries is showcased and brings to light the lives of some of history's more forgotten individuals.

Zalar's work is written in eight chapters. The first chapter "At the Origins of Germany's Book Wars, 1770-1815", elucidates the tensions between the Protestant intellectuals and the Catholic community. The protestant bourgeois society was concerned with sophistication. Reading was an opportunity for education and enlightenment, which would lead to an increase in social status and progress within society. Reading within the protestant community increased the secularization within society and at the very beginning of the 19th century, fundamentally contributed to the Protestants ruling over the Catholic community, as protestants thought less of Catholics who did not use reading to advance social status. This persecution forced the closure of important Catholic universities and allocated little resources that may have helped bring the Catholics out from under the rule of

the Protestants.

The second chapter “Gall and Honey in the Catholic Theology of Cultural Taste” attests to the culture created by the Catholics to attempt to circumvent their oppression. Catholic religious leaders were nervous about the increased literacy because they did not want protestant doctrine to convince Catholics. This concern slowed down the literacy of Catholics, in comparison to Protestants. Unlike in the Protestant community, the acquirement of knowledge was not used to further progress or enlightenment but rather a non-secularized way to get closer to Christ’s teachings and sacrifices. The ultimate goal of Catholics was to go to Heaven and the way to get there was dictated by religious leaders. With the spread of religious prints and the increased literacy of the readers, Catholics were no longer reliant on spiritual leaders for interpretation.

Chapter three, “Reading Run Amok in Prussia Triumphant, 1815-1845” outlines how reading progressed after the Congress of Vienna. Legally, Catholics were subjugated as they, unlike Protestants, were not considered contributors of the culture of the nation. Rampant stereotypes of Catholics being unmanageable and less than a Protestant was an image Catholics were attempting to fight. This resistance was built and spread through the use of reading which, like Protestants had done before, allowed them to develop a breadth of knowledge that brought their beliefs closer to that of Protestant society.

The fourth chapter “Book Mischief in the ‘Papal Monarchy,’ 1845-1880” highlights the further resistance of Catholic clerics to tame the “protestantization” of Catholic society. Most important was the development of book clubs that pushed books to counter ideas of enlightenment which were very prevalent in Protestant texts. The continued obstacle of the clergy led to a decrease in reading during this time but a zeitgeist of resistance to censorship grew tremendously. Chapter five “Catholics and Their ‘Deficit in Education” transitions into the industrial revolution and the implications that societal change had on the Catholic

communities' reading culture. At the end of the 1800s Catholic clergy was beginning to understand their discrimination was education based, so they assembled in Dortmund. What took place was a discussion on further modernization and an openness to secular teaching as well as additional funding for Catholic scholarship. With further education, more opportunities were open to Catholics of all socio-economic classes. This led to increased equality between Catholic and Protestants in Imperial Germany. But as chapter six "The Tail Wags the Dog: The Lady Rebellion against Catholic Libraries after 1880" documents, this did not lead to a complete secularization of Catholics. During this period Catholics were still very invested in their religious texts but they sought to education themselves religiously and secularly.

The final two chapters "Brave New World: Lay Reading in the Libraries They Want" and "An appetite for Pleasure: Private Reading in *Germania Profana*" address constant changes that took place in the Catholic community towards the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries. As the yearning for knowledge increased, German Catholics' desire for further educational advancement was not easily fulfilled by their limited libraries. As members of all classes were interested in learning, volunteer positions, even to Catholic women, were opened. As there was still some concern about clerical censorship, Catholics met outside of churches and universities to educate themselves and their communities. As World War I approached, Catholics, in terms of education, were equivalent to Protestants. The conclusion venerates that ordinary citizens of all classes were no longer dependent upon the clergy for their interpretations of religious texts and a freedom within religion had finally become what citizens not only demanded but also attained.

Zalar passionately portrays the nearly two century long struggle for Catholics to find equality in a Protest dominated region of Europe. He contextualizes this discussion through the ever-evolving interest Catholics had in reading books and obtaining secular knowledge in

conjunction with fulfillment in their religiosity. Zalar's English-language book masterfully documents a part of history that would have been inaccessible to a non-German speaking audience and is captivating until the very end.