

The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion, Julie Byrne, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016 (ISBN978-0-231-16676-8), xvii + 412 pp. hb. \$29.95

Around a million self-defined 'Catholics' in the United States practise their faith independently of the jurisdiction of Rome. Part archival study, part oral history, and part anthropological observation, Julie Byrne's book reconstructs their history and examines how their communities function. A case study sits at the core of Byrne's enterprise: the Church of Antioch, an independent Catholic Church founded in 1959 by the Dutch-born Californian Herman Spruit (1911-94) and led, during the time of Byrne's association with them, by one-time restaurant manager and Santa Fe resident Patriarch Richard Gundrey (b. 1934). Gundrey built up a new parish congregation in Santa Fe from a base of just twelve at its second Sunday mass in 1985 to nearly a hundred, twenty years later. Meanwhile, in 1990 Spruit's wife Meri (1929-2014), the then matriarch, consecrated Gundrey as a bishop; in 2005 she named him her own successor. As bishop and then patriarch, Gundrey spent his days proselytizing, responding to criticism from Santa Fe's Roman Catholic archbishop, and, lately, doing whatever he could to keep the different interest groups within his church together. Alas, this last one was a battle he was destined to lose: following his retirement as patriarch in 2009, his church split in two. The Church of Antioch still exists, but is a much smaller body based in Phoenix, Arizona. Most former Antiochians now form the Ascension Alliance, founded by former Antioch bishop Alan Kemp and based in Seattle, Washington. The schism has been a personal tragedy for Gundrey, who made the Church of Antioch his life's work. But in the context of 'independent' Catholicism it was hardly surprising. Indeed, as Byrne points out with only slight exaggeration, 'almost every month a new church is born. Almost every month a church splinters – a sign of dysfunction or a sign of vitality, depending on how you look at it' (p. 7).

The Other Catholics comes in three parts: the first 'Catholic' comprises a single lengthy chapter on Byrne's experience of observing the Church of Antioch at work and in prayer. Byrne spent ten years 'hanging-out' with Gundrey and his fellow Antiochians as they performed masses, weddings, healing services, meetings, and social events – primarily in Gundrey's parish centred on the Loretto Chapel in downtown Santa Fe, a deconsecrated building which the Church rents by the hour on Sunday mornings. Byrne describes a culture of sacraments, succession, saints co-opted and re-imagined there – though no incense, because the landlord prohibits it as a fire hazard. Byrne's ethnographic research clearly affected her deeply. 'Watching Antioch Catholics changed my sight lines. Altered sight lines shifted categories. New categories rebuilt an entire frame of reference' (p. 71). Byrne decided only then that she had to write a fuller history of independent Catholicism, which places it in its Catholic context and charts its history back to before it was even American. Parts Two 'Succession' and Three 'Sacraments and Saints' give us this account: Chapter Two begins the story with the Jansenist Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, which broke with Roman jurisdiction in 1724, and recounts such episodes as the 'Independent Catholic Church of the United States', founded in Charleston, South Carolina in 1819, and the pioneering ministry of Joseph René Vilatte (1854-1929), the first independent Catholic bishop in America. Chapter Three explains how Herman and Meri Spruit founded the Church of Antioch. Chapters Four to Six (which collectively comprise Part Three) then continue the Antiochian story as it has

unfolded under its present leadership. For Byrne, the Church of Antioch offers a remarkable example of how Catholic traditions and even the meaning of Catholicism itself can be fruitfully and endlessly reworked in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. We learn of a liberal Catholicism which can trace its origins back to well before Vatican II, which already then ordained women, permitted bishops to marry, and welcomed gay people. The Spruits' theology of the divine feminine and their 'conjugal episcopate' stand out as particular features of their particular church but the influences of mysticism, esotericism, and theosophy also pervade.

This is a remarkable book, written with extraordinary clarity and eloquence and which exhibits a heartfelt sympathy with the individuals who populate it. It is both a wonderful introduction to the phenomenon of 'independent' Catholicisms and an intriguing analysis of how one particular church of this kind has operated. And yet, there are fundamental questions here that Byrne's work raises. Byrne's core questions are 'what does it mean to be Catholic?' and 'who decides what Catholicism is?'. Byrne acknowledges that in accepting self-profession as a qualifying criterion she is already taking a position on the answer to that second question. But is it the most helpful answer? In some ways it fascinates that a man like Gundry has continued to assert his Catholicism in the face of hostility from the Roman hierarchy; it intrigues almost as much that so many lay Roman Catholics hire him to preside over weddings that Roman Catholic priests will not or cannot perform, caring little that the Roman Catholic hierarchy does not recognize him. (These weddings, which for many years were his parish's main source of income, cannot, of course, take place in diocesan buildings.) It may be tempting to see Gundry as a sort of Walter Mitty figure but Byrne makes a powerful case for why we should take him seriously: 'independent' Catholics like Gundry, she argues, show Catholicism's flows and fissures, reflecting positions and opinions that are often held by the mainstream but only rarely acted upon so starkly. But is the Church of Antioch anything more than a case of cultural appropriation made possible by the unique conditions of twentieth-century America? It exists because of Americans' insatiable demand for new forms of religion that perfectly satisfy their consumer wants and because the American government polices religious toleration rigorously and grants churches tax exempt status. Byrne may accept the Antiochians' claims to succession from the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, but others will see it somewhat differently. Moreover, answers to further questions Byrne raises will also vary: how exactly do the liberal, left-leaning 'independent' Catholic churches, which emerged before Vatican II (of which the Church of Antioch is a prime example), relate to those conservative churches full of former Roman Catholics who have rejected Vatican II's decrees and broken away from mainstream Roman Catholicism? Where does a third category of other Catholic non-conformists like the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) (a group who reject the label 'independent') stand? 'Independent' Catholicism is certainly a paradoxical, even oxymoronic, phenomenon. Byrne has achieved much in presenting it in such a lucid and compelling light.

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