did the war evoke distinctively Christian (or more diffusively religious) belief that was not there before 1939? But the story is well told, the interview extracts are helpful and not too discursive and the tightrope between the national scene and the Birmingham-specific scene is well walked. This reviewer looks forward to the sequel.

Terence Copley
Oxford University


This book deals with religious women, both Catholic women religious and religiously committed laywomen. The first contributor, Phil Kilroy, in “The writing of religious women’s history: Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779–1865)” draws on her searching biography, Madeleine Sophie Barat 1779–1865: A Life. Here, she seeks to situate Barat, founder of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, in the context of her time and, in particular, within the burgeoning new female religious communities in France from the early nineteenth century. By the time of her death in 1865, her institute numbered 3,359 members with eighty-nine houses spread across the world. Kilroy explores the inner personal journey of this gifted leader of women as key to the stature she attained.

Rosemary Rauhert’s “Pious Occupations: Female Activism and the Catholic Revival in Eighteenth-Century Ireland” deals primarily with two notable women, Nano Nagle (1718–84) and Teresa Mulally (1728–1803), of Cork and Dublin respectively, who initiated education for poor children with accompanying social relief, when the penal laws were still on the statute books but were lapsing in practice. Where Nagle’s involvement led her to found the later international Presentation institute, Mulally remained a laywoman but was able to entrust the future of her work to the Presentation Sisters. Suellen Hoy, in her “Discovering Irish Nuns in the Nineteenth-Century United States: The Case of Chicago,” deals with the many works of social alleviation, as well as education, undertaken in Chicago by Irish Mercy Sisters who first arrived there in 1846. She focuses particularly on the capable leadership of Sister Agatha O’Brien who laid the foundation of Chicago’s Mercy Hospital and the academy which has become Saint Xavier’s University.

Janice Holmes’s “Gender, Public Disorder and the Salvation Army in Ireland, 1880–82” and Myrtle Hill’s “Women’s Work for Women: The Irish Presbyterian Zenana Mission, 1874–1914” retrieve the committed women who undertook these missions — the thirty-five Englishwomen who sought to introduce the Salvation Army into Ulster and encountered unforeseen opposition from the religious denominations entrenched there, and the 101 Irishwomen of the Zenana mission who went as teachers and medical workers to India and later China. Both raise issues of class, gender, and ethnicity, while revealing the women’s enterprise, given the restrictions, as well as advantages, their gender imposed. Maria Luddy, in “Convent Archives as Sources for Irish History,” lists aspects of Ireland’s social history on which convent records can throw fuller light, e.g., the network of families and their resources which produced the convent vocations, as well as detail on prevailing social conditions.

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It isn't that women aren't writing history books, then; it's that people don't seem to buy them as much as they do men's titles. It's possible that, because of our silly, yet entrenched, cultural belief that history is a man's subject, readers overlook history books written by women. Regardless of why female historians aren't showing up on the bestseller lists, this is a situation that needs correction. If you don't feel that you know enough about women's history, or if you just want to read a history book written by a woman, any of the titles here provides a great starting point. Many of these books were among those featured in the Slate study, and I have tried to keep my selections as contemporary as possible. History buffs, this one's for you.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (born 1936) is an American feminist scholar and Catholic theologian. Ruether is an advocate of women's ordination, a movement among Catholic religious persons who affirm women's capacity to serve as priests, despite official sanction. Since 1985 Ruether has served as a board member for the pro-choice group Catholics for Choice. Ruether was born on November 2, 1936, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, to a Roman Catholic mother and Episcopal father. She has reportedly described her