

Brian Titley

*Into Silence and Servitude: How American Girls Became Nuns, 1945–1965*

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017. 281 pp.

Brian Titley, known for his work on Catholic education in Ireland and on Indigenous education in Canada, contributes an important survey to conversations on history of education in the United States with *Into Silence and Servitude: How American Girls Became Nuns, 1945–1965*. Scholars will appreciate his exploration of this topic.

In his introduction Titley answers the first question readers might have, why did “a male secular historian” (3), educated in Ireland, write this book? Research on the Catholic nuns who staffed Canada’s Indian Residential Schools led Titley to academic publications on Irish, French and Canadian women religious. Later he read American works but they focused on “institution-building” and “achievements” (5) of the era up to 1920. When Titley found a reference to aspirancies— institutions to encourage young girls to enter a novitiate of a religious congregation—he decided to study the recruitment and formation of American girls as nuns from 1945 to 1965, “the era of the baby boom” (5). At that time enrolment in Catholic schools and the “number of nuns in the country reached a mutual pinnacle” (6).

*Into Silence and Servitude* outlines the concern of the American Catholic hierarchy to encourage vocations to the religious life among young women so as to have low-cost teachers for parochial schools. Administrators commissioned sociological studies of vocations to aid recruiting campaigns. Clerics and superiors of women’s congregations advised teaching sisters on how to encourage young girls to enter the convent, and on how to get families’ support. Titley’s chapters discuss each of the stages of a girl’s formation as a member of a religious congregation: the aspirancy or pre-novitiate school for teenagers established by some congregations; postulancy, a nine month trial of the convent way of life, emphasizing prayers and religious education; then the novitiate comprising a canonical year of further studies of religion and the rules and the way of life of the convent leading to first vows. Some attention might be paid to teaching or other congregational work in that year, but by the mid-twentieth century most congregations of women arranged an apostolic year (or two years) of post-secondary education and/or teaching or training before final vows and assignments. Nuns attended summer sessions to complete degrees and meet requirements for state teaching certificates. Titley frames the formation programs as ‘monastic,’ even though most American teaching congregations were active congregations that had been constrained by rules of cloister imposed by Canon Law in 1917. Nuns and former nuns remembered their novitiate years as a strenuous ‘boot camp.’ Yet women continued to enter them and to proceed to vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as ‘Brides of Christ’. The number of nuns in the United States reached its highest point ever, in 1965, “almost 180,000 nuns in total” (7).

In his postscript Titley discusses the decline in the number of nuns in the years after 1965. The decline was unexpected. Many vowed women left religious life and recruitment collapsed. He sees the changes wrought by the Church leaders at

the Second Vatican Council 1962–5 and secularization of American society as the causes.

The postscript gives short shrift to the Sister Formation Conference. Beginning in the late 1940s as a grassroots movement and given official sanction in 1954, the conference sought to give novices “appropriate training before taking up teaching or other professions” (178). Titley does not credit the Sisters of Providence Seattle for their support of the conference college program. He does say increasing numbers of nuns acquired university degrees. The university experience led them to question “the constraints on their lives” (179).

In his Note on Sources, Titley explains that he was able to access material from four congregations of women regarding their religious formation programs. These congregations were, if not “representative . . . fairly typical” (210). Two from Indiana had aspirancies as well as novitiates: the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, originally from Germany, and the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, originally from France. The Canadian Sisters of Charity of Providence in Seattle, Washington, and the Maryknoll Sisters headquartered in Ossining, New York did not have aspirancies. Although Titley makes good use of congregational statistics on entrants, vows and departures, he overlooks the four congregations’ records on the colleges they had all established by the 1920s and their training of teachers and nurses.

Titley deserves credit for the range of sources he consulted: religious archives, priests’ advice books, recruitment campaign literature, Catholic journals and secondary works. Although he uses published oral histories and memoirs of nuns and former nuns throughout his chapters in order to give insights on their experiences, Titley avoids most congregational histories as he finds them long and boring.

But what of the members of those four congregations, those who stayed as well as those who departed? Reviewing *Into Silence and Servitude*, I was struck by the theme of women’s agency that came up on those congregations, such as nuns laying the groundwork for the changes of the Vatican II era in missions and education. For example the Maryknoll Sisters focused on field missions abroad, not classroom teaching at home. They recruited high school or college graduates, believing that education in the world would aid nuns in mission ventures. Sister Maureen Abbott SP, *New Lights from Old Truths: Living the Signs of the Times*, on the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods from 1926 to 1966, gives context for their participation in Sister Formation.<sup>3</sup>

I attended the presentation of Sister Maureen Abbott’s paper “Sixties Seedbed” in the session “The Legacy of Sister Formation and Renewal,” at the Conference on the History of Women Religious, June 24, 2019, where she analyzed statistics and oral history on two cohorts of entrants to the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1955–9 and 1960–5, and found that members of the second group experienced a more individualized and varied education and a wider choice of ministries than the first. A mission sister home for further studies assisted members,

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3 Sister Maureen Abbott SP, *New Lights from Old Truths: Living the Signs of the Times* (Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, IN: Sisters of Providence, 2013).

conveying her enthusiasm for study of theology and social justice. This inspires me to invite Brian Titley to continue the conversation about his *Into Silence and Servitude* at the next conference in 2022.

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Randall Curren and Charles Dorn

*Patriotic Education in a Global Age*

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Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 192 pp.

Sam Wineburg

*Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*

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Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 240 pp.

Since Donald Trump's election in 2016 liberal democratic values, norms, and institutions have been under attack by Trump and his gaggle of "alternative fact" touting supporters. In an attempt to understand who and what is responsible for the current state of affairs, pundits have repeatedly laid blame on the US public education system for its lacklustre approach to civics education that has "turned generations of Americans into dopes who don't vote or pay much attention to the civic life of the country."<sup>4</sup>

In response to these existential threats to democracy, education scholars have proposed approaches to civics and citizenship education that aim to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and understandings essential for increasing civic engagement and restoring faith in liberal democratic institutions and norms. Both books discussed in this review share the commitment to improving civic education, although their specific purposes, foci, and methods differ. In *Patriotic Education in a Global Age*, the fifth book in the History and Philosophy of Education Series from the University of Chicago Press, educational philosopher Randall Curren and educational historian Charles Dorn present a history of patriotic education in US public schools and a general philosophy and theory of education centered on civic virtue and virtuous patriotism. In *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)* Sam Wineburg focuses exclusively on history education, and argues that studying history is essential for helping students separate fact from fiction in the online information they encounter in their daily lives. Given the different foci of the two books, this review focuses on them separately.

The central questions that guided Curren and Dorn's book are: Should schools attempt to cultivate patriotism? If yes, why, how, and with what conception of

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<sup>4</sup> Valerie Strauss, "Donald Trump Went to Private Schools. Should We Blame Them for the Mess America's In?" *The Washington Post*, 19 July 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/07/19/donald-trump-went-to-private-schools-should-we-blame-them-for-the-mess-americas-in/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.05ce3bd1e280](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2018/07/19/donald-trump-went-to-private-schools-should-we-blame-them-for-the-mess-americas-in/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.05ce3bd1e280).