*Childhood, Youth and Religious Dissent in Post-Reformation England*, by Lucy Underwood (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; pp.xvi + 275. £60.)

In this monograph, Lucy Underwood makes a significant contribution towards answering the pertinent question of what it meant to be catholic, and to live as a member of the most ‘controversial minority’ in post-Reformation England. Specifically, Underwood is interested in ‘the experiences and self-representations of children and young people who came to identify themselves with Catholicism’ (p.1) and she fills a notable gap in the burgeoning field of the history of early modern youth and childhood.

Underwood’s chronological scope is ambitious, and reaches from the Henrician Reformation to 1685. The majority of her evidence, however, is from the mid-Elizabethan period onwards, the time when children and young people travelled to the Continent to newly established seminaries and convents for English men and women, for education and religious vocation. Underwood’s richest source material derives from the little studied ‘entrance’ questionnaires to the English Colleges at Rome (founded 1579) and Valladolid (founded 1589), the *Responsa Scholarum* and the *Liber Primi Examinis* respectively. Underwood’s other sources (persecution narratives, polemics, hagiography, and government records) tend, by their very nature, to reveal moments of confrontation, rather than to shine light on the more ‘ordinary’ experiences of the everyday. Nonetheless, as Underwood acknowledges, ‘the unusual is more likely than the typical to leave traces in the historical record’ (p.6).

The book’s nine chapters have been divided into three parts, as well as an introduction, a ‘coda’, and a conclusion. Part I interrogates the theme of ‘Making Catholics’, and in the first chapter Underwood asks what defined children as ‘Catholic’. She considers this question in relation to children’s own awareness of their confessional identity, as well as the opinions of those around them. Baptism, perhaps not surprisingly, does not seem to have been as important a confessional marker as that of recusancy (refusing to attend the established church). Interestingly, whilst the ‘recusant child’ was legally impossible (at least for those under the age of 16), Underwood highlights how the image of recusant children was extremely pervasive in catholic persecution narratives.

In the second chapter, Underwood asks how children and young people both ‘became’ and were ‘claimed’ as catholic. The most important site for ‘conversion’ was the household, and Underwood explores not only how religion was transferred vertically between parents to children, but how it might also be transferred horizontally between siblings. A young person’s conversion to catholicism was not always easy, and due to the nature of the evidence – the responses to the *LPE* and the *Responsa* - rebelliousness was inherent. As Underwood explains, their ‘appearance in Rome or Valladolid at all represented an escape – sometimes from parental control, always from English law – and hence subversion’ (p.49).

In the third chapter Underwood analyses the ways in which children and young people could ‘experience’ catholicism. The household is once more a crucial site, as children used catechisms, heard mass, observed the holy calendar of fasting and feasting, and were involved in prayer and other Catholic devotions such as the rosary. Persecution is a recurring feature, and even catechisms encouraged children to enter into an identity of resistance. For example, in Henry Turberville’s *Abridgement of Christian Doctrine,* after each article there is the question ‘How prove you that?’, followed by biblical citations. The catholic child was therefore armed against the common protestant criticisms that catholicism was unbiblical.

Persecution was fundamental to responses to the questionnaires at Rome and Valladolid, as young people were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences: at the English College, Rome, each entrant was asked ‘whether he had ever suffered anything for the faith’. Yet evidence for any systematic persecution involving children is patchy, and in the fourth and fifth chapters Underwood traces the relationship between the protestant state and catholic children. Protestant ideology was characterised by a desire to intervene in the education and upbringing of catholic children, but this was never fully implemented due to tensions with parental rights. This ideology, however, fed into catholic propaganda – where the fear and threat of child abduction loomed large.

In Part III, Underwood highlights the way that catholics exhorted and celebrated catholic youth – as Edmund Campion exclaimed in his lecture ‘The young scholar’: ‘Whereby you see, dearest and most learned youths, to suffer the loss of none of this precious time, so that out of this seminary you may gather a fruitful and plentiful harvest, which will succour the general distress’. (p.116). In Chapter Six, Underwood argues how appeals to youth like this consistently combined messages of piety and defence.

It is evident that young people did respond to such rallying cries, and in Chapter Seven and Eight Underwood explores how young catholics were not simply passive participants but active agents in the survival of the mission. Governmental reports of the involvement of young people in the catholic underground are frequent, and this zeal concerned protestant officials. In response, Underwood reveals how catholic youths were sometimes disciplined at the Bridewell ‘House of Correction’ for juvenile delinquents.

Underwood ends by exploring the way that catholic children were represented in literature. Strikingly, it is similarity, not difference, which characterises catholic and protestant literary approaches to childhood. Both sides of the confessional divide use youthful imagery to subvert their opponents, as much as to support their own argument, depending on their agenda. For example, in catholic exhortations to their parents, such as Robert Southwell’s *Epistle to his Father,* 1595, the protestant parents are made ‘children’ as objects of teaching. Whereas in the 1627 *Answere of a Mother Unto Hir Seduced Sonne’s Letter*, it is only by conversion to Protestantism that a son is made ‘adult’.

Underwood paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted experiences of early modern English Catholic children and young people, and has paved the way for future research. For example, on her last page, Underwood stresses how ‘post-Reformation English Catholicism was a cosmopolitan movement, formed by engagement with European culture, theology and politics’ (p.198). This pertinent observation should certainly be interrogated further, and calls for a comparison between English, and European catholic children more broadly.

EMILIE K. M. MURPHY

*National University of Ireland, Galway*