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'Friends,' 'communities,' 'circles,' 'social networks,' 'clusters,' 'conversations,' 'constellations': these terms have found their way into modern intellectual history of late, as more and more scholars investigate groups of thinkers who were connected in very particular ways across the twentieth century. Brenna Moore's *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism* is an excellent contribution to this emerging scholarship.¹ Her subject is "an often-overlooked global network of Catholic scholars, artists and activists" (2) loosely based in Paris from 1920-1950, who shared a concept of religiously meaningful friendship that served as a different and more "powerful corridor to the sacred" (2) than that offered by tradition-bound Rome. This Catholic spirituality in turn fueled resistance to some of modernity's signature ideologies and "traditional anchors" (174) – fascism and racism but also the nuclear family and the nation. Although centered in the City of Lights, the coordinates of this circle radiated outward across the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, making this very much a transnational study.

Kindred Spirits consists of an introduction, an epilogue, and five chapters each with a different spiritual friendship at its core. Among the spiritual *résistant* friendships that Moore examines, some participants are much better known than others. Her group includes the Chilean poet and Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral, the humanist philosopher Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa Maritain, the Islamicist Louis Massignon, the Egyptian philanthropist Mary Kahil, the medievalist Marie-Magdeleine Davy, the near-Catholic Simone Weil, and Jamaican-born Catholic-convert Claude McKay. The introduction sets out why the "religious sensorium" (6) of this particular Catholic international is worthy of investigation. It is well known that the 1920s-1950s were an incredibly creative period in the history of modern Catholicism. As the story goes, a small group of white male French-born theologians laid the foundations of Vatican II by rejecting an ossified Neo-Scholasticism and advocating instead a "return to the sources" of the Early Church (*ressourcement*). Moore challenges this narrow understanding of Catholic modernity by arguing that communities of far-flung spiritual friends were equally important to Catholicism's renewal in the twentieth century.² Spiritual friendship was an extraordinary mystical communion between like souls (living and dead, male and female) who recognized in each other "the flickers of something divine, a holiness that was contagious, spread between people" (2). Spiritual friends, moreover, shared not only an intense religious sensibility but also a political ideal that worked against the logic of the Far Right as well as the secularizing

¹ Among other new and noteworthy transnational intellectual histories focusing on 20th-century France see, Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021) and Aro Velmet, *Pasteur's Empire: Bacteriology and Politics in France, Its Colonies, and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² Here Moore joins the exciting recent work on Catholic modernity that is reshaping our understanding of the origins of Vatican II. For the Francophone world, see among others Sarah Shortall, *Soldiers of God in a Secular World: The Politics of Catholic Theology in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021) and Elizabeth Foster, *African Catholic: Decolonization and the Transformation of the Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

tendencies of most leftist movements. Such friendships were frequently erotically charged; studying them can thus shed new light on the place of desire and pleasure in the evolution of Catholicism in this period. Long neglected by historians because of its ostensibly emotional, private, and apolitical character, spiritual friendship constituted an alternative Catholic modernity from which we still have much to learn.

Moore's source base is principally the correspondence and private papers of the individuals whose friendships she studies; she is particularly attentive to lay female intellectuals, about whom historians of religion know so little. The author admits upfront that the archival material upon which she draws can be difficult to interpret, especially the passionate love that was often expressed in the correspondence. Here Moore attempts to examine the nature of intimate experiences while leaving her historical actors some privacy. Often these friends met first in Paris, a city that welcomed intellectuals from all points of the globe in the 1920s and 30s, many of whom were fleeing persecution in their own countries; it was also the beating heart of France's colonial empire and resistance movements towards it. Centuries, oceans, nationality, or the turbulent events of the middle decades of the twentieth century might separate spiritual friends but they would continue to communicate over their whole lives in a variety of ways. Part of the many pleasures of this richly layered and evocative study is the expansive meaning that Moore gives to the notion of spiritual bonds and the sheer variety of friendships and modern resistance that she examines.

Chapter one is devoted to the friendship between Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) and the Maritains. A lionized figure in her native Chile after receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1945, a humanitarian who fought for the rights of indigenous peoples, and an early participant in the antifascist and philosemitic movements that began right after World War I, Mistral was a critical link between Latin American and French Catholic intellectuals in Paris, and later in New York. Unlike Jacques Maritain, about whom the literature keeps growing, Mistral is known today in the Anglophone world only in literary circles as a somewhat eccentric mystic who doesn't easily fit into "the silos we often use to understand women in the twentieth century" (37).³ When Mistral moved to Paris in the mid-1930s to work for the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, she found in the Maritains's famous Meudon salon a "queer scene" where friendship was "explicitly rendered holy" (37).

In 1912 Jacques and Raïssa Maritain had become Benedictine oblates and taken a vow of celibacy which lasted the remaining forty-eight years of their marriage. Moore sees in this rejection of bourgeois reproductive matrimony a reaction to the Church's growing emphasis upon the latter. In defiance of Rome, the Maritains and others like them – including Mistral – adopted unorthodox domestic arrangements that privileged friendship with fellow religious seekers above all else. Such friendships offered a new kind of lived piety, "something transcendent" (47) that nourished their political work on behalf of the poor and the persecuted minorities as the fascist threat intensified. Thanks to Mistral's connections, the Maritains's home became a hub in the 1930s for progressive Spanish speakers from the global South, who then disseminated Jacques Maritain's Christian humanist philosophy in Latin America. When the Maritains fled to the United States in 1939 and Mistral to Brazil, their friendship continued through a dense correspondence that anchored their worlds in the midst of global war and genocide. While Maritain was close to the politically powerful in Europe in a way the poet Mistral never was, they recognized in each other a shared otherworldliness that each drew upon to fight for peace and justice in the world around them.

Moore turns next to the extraordinary friendships that nurtured another famous and equally charismatic male in the canon of modern French Catholic intellectuals: the pioneering philologist and student of mystical Islam, Louis Massignon, who swam against Europe's ambient Orientalism just as it was hardening into anti-Muslim hatred. Massignon was the first European to argue that the mystical tradition (Sufism) in Islam had Arabic Qur'anic roots, rather than representing a Greek

³ Recent works include Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015) and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, *What is Christian Democracy? Politics, Religion, and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Raïssa Maritain, a Jewish convert to Catholicism and one of the few women intellectuals to participate in the Catholic Revival, has received much less attention. For more on her importance, see Brenna Moore, *Sacred Dread: Raïssa Maritain, The Allure of Suffering and the French Catholic Revival (1905-1944)* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2012).

or Christian import. A devout Catholic his entire adult life, “when it came to his inner life Massignon was never alone” (75). He nevertheless left behind few written sources about his private life, making a history of the complex spiritual intimacies that stimulated his innovative research much more difficult to write.

And complex they were, including sacred connections with both dead Sufi and Catholic saints, and sexually charged friendships very much of this world. Moore sensitively explores Massignon’s relationship with his godson Jean Mohammed Abd-el-Jalil, a Moroccan convert from Islam, and especially the intense and secret love he shared with the Cairo-based activist Mary Kahil, who in 1934 “reignited in him a more radical vision as an Islamicist” (76). He and Abd-el-Jalil forged a kind of Islamic-infused Christianity, praying for Muslims on Fridays and feasting during Ramadan as gestures of peace between Muslims and Christians. Kahil could not have been more different, a wealthy single Eastern Christian woman of Syrian and German parentage living in Cairo, who promoted Catholic and Muslim entente in the city by funding schools and hospitals for the city’s neediest. When Kahil and Massignon met up in 1934, something spiritually electric and transformative happened to them *together*; she found through him a mystical way of understanding her own work; he – married, the father of four, a professor at the Collège de France – rediscovered through her his earlier “promises to belong to God alone” (95).

The two made a point of visiting each other at least once a year, and exchanged passionate letters until his death in 1962. Moore is at her best in navigating the many possible meanings of the mystical and sensual “overabundance” (100) of Kahil and Massignon’s feelings for one another. It is possible that their earthly relationship, charged as it was with both pain and pleasure, mimicked “the affective range of the longing for a transcendent God who is always just out of reach” (101). One thing is clear: this relationship translated into a new political commitment to work for justice for Muslims as the violence in Algeria and the Middle East escalated. By the end of their lives Massignon and Kahil had come to understand how great an impediment Christian racism remained to the solidarity between Muslims and Christians to which they had dedicated their lives.

Chapters three and four pivot to Marie-Magdeleine Davy, a gifted expert on medieval mystical writings of Carthusian and Cistercian monks who joined the French Resistance in Paris as early as 1940. Despite her astounding number of scholarly publications, her academic achievements and personal courage remain to this day largely unknown outside a circle of specialists.⁴ As with Maritain and Massignon, Moore finds that friendship was integral to Davy’s scholarship, devoutness, and political activism. But mystical intimacy in this case was forged with beloved dead monks rather than with the living. While a student of history and philosophy at the Sorbonne, Davy’s erudite research into newly discovered premodern Christian materials made her a rising star in Catholic intellectual circles in the 1930s. As a result, she was the first and only woman in 1936 to enroll in the very conservative Institut Catholique in Paris; there she received rigorous theological training but was not allowed to take a degree. Ironically, as a woman she was also excluded from the intimate circle of innovative male clerical scholars working like herself within the break-away *ressourcement* movement.

Over the course of her studies, Davy developed “a particular hermeneutic of affective scriptural reading” (121) that brought the words of the medieval monks -- and the writers themselves -- to life in the present. Immersion in these early monastic sources also made clear to her the plural roots of Latin Christendom (these roots included the Hebrew Bible), at a time when the conservative Right was cultivating a myth of a pure medieval Church later corrupted by “oriental,” e.g. Jewish and Muslim, influences. Moore sees Davy’s spiritual investment in medieval mysticism as a source of both consolation and strength that helps account for her decision to actively resist the German occupier. After the war, Davy’s scholarship drew

⁴ Moore sees Davy’s biography of *Bernard of Clairvaux*, published in 1945 as particularly important since it contained a rare critique of medieval anti-Semitism. This work laid the foundations for one of Davy’s most widely read later articles: “Le thème de la vengeance au Moyen Age,” in *La Vengeance: Etudes d’ethnologie, d’histoire, et de philosophie*, ed. R. Verdier (Paris: Cujas, 1991). According to Moore, Anglophone scholarship has tended to miscategorize Davy as a comparativist precursor of New Age spirituality. See for example Steven W. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade and Henri Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

on even wider range of sources, from mystic Jewish texts, Sufism, Taoism and Eastern Christendom.⁵ In sum, as with Massignon whom she knew, early mystical texts “were galvanizing sources of personal transformation... and harbingers of ethical, theological and political renewal” (115).

Davy, of course, also communed with the living; but as in the case of her medieval companions, these friends were overwhelmingly male. There was, however, one exception to this gendered pattern: the philosopher and student of comparative religions, and near Catholic-convert Simone Weil, six years Davy’s younger and who died in 1943 at the age of thirty-seven in London while working for de Gaulle’s Free French. Davy cultivated a close spiritual bond with Weil after the latter’s death that “drew from the same metaphors of fictive kinship she used with the Cistercian monks.” (139) Davy had met Weil in person only a handful of times. Then, in 1950, Davy began to publish articles and books that lifted up Weil “as a new kind of sanctity in the modern world” (146). Davy would also grow close to Weil’s parents, and go on to found a utopian community in rural France for international students in Simone Weil’s honor to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

How to explain this intense continuing communion with a woman she hardly knew? For Moore, the answer lies in part in their similar ecumenical interests and political choices, but especially a rebellious religiosity which set both of these brilliant female intellectuals apart from their contemporaries. In Weil alone, Davy felt she had met her match, someone touched by God in a way that transformed those around her. As Davy herself put it “[Weil’s] gaze aroused an exit from the self, an opening towards the essential” (146). Moore elegantly sums up the relationship as follows “Davy discovered her voice through Weil, her ‘kindred spirit’ and released herself within Weil’s texts” (153).

Chapter five carries us back and forth across the Atlantic as Moore shifts into a different register: the emergence of a transnational interracial Catholic counterculture and a Black Catholic internationalism. The peripatetic radical Black poet Claude McKay lies at the center of this story. McKay, who displayed a lifelong interest in religion, was part of the African American diaspora that headed to Europe after World War I to escape the horrors of Jim Crow; he returned to New York in 1934, converted to Catholicism in 1944 and died four years later in Chicago. Through McKay’s relationships with Black Catholics in Europe and the United States, he developed a worldview similar – but not exactly the same – to that of the other Catholic moderns Moore has discussed: one that privileged friendship over family, tended toward mysticism, and embraced internationalism and hostility to fascism, racism, and communism. Since McKay left few descriptions of his many relationships (platonic and sexual), Moore draws on a combination of early published writings and later unpublished material.

In interwar Paris McKay frequented the famous literary salon of the Catholic Nardal sisters from Martinique, which fostered solidarity among all francophone Blacks. He also did a stint as a docker in multiethnic Marseilles that led to his 1928 novel *Banjo*, which celebrated Black male camaraderie in a mystical ecstatic vein. On his travels in Spain, McKay discovered its tradition of Black Madonnas. But it was only when he returned to New York and befriended Ellen Tarry, a Catholic Black writer originally from Alabama and a racially conscious activist “that [McKay] began to claim Catholicism as something of his own” (175). In 1940 Tarry introduced him into a small countercultural and interracial lay Catholic community of volunteers in Harlem called the Friendship House, dedicated to addressing the problem of race in the United States. Four years later this vagabond religious seeker was baptized, drawn in, as McKay put it by “a little of that mystical world of the spirit” (216) that this version of Catholic modernity embodied. Moore in the end places McKay in the company of other artists disappointed in this era with the white Christian legacy in the United States. McKay chose Catholicism in part to signal Blackness in new terms – an apt if imperfect container (like all containers) for “both his desires for and condemnations of the modern world” (224).

⁵ A good example is Marie-Magdeleine Davy, *Le thème de la lumière dans le Judaïsme, le Christianisme, et l’Islam* (Paris: Berg International, 1976).

It should be clear from this summary that Moore empathizes with all the members of the network she has chosen to chronicle. But she is not blind to their flaws. The friends in *Kindred Spirits* were hardly saints as they burned spiritually for each other. Several had children that they ignored, preferring spiritual kin to biological ones. French global piety, Moore also reminds us constantly, was rooted in colonial violence, even if she could have said more on all these points. I myself have doubts about Moore's decision to apply the term 'counterculture' only to the minority interracial Catholic intellectuals and activists in Europe and United States who swam against the anti-Black racism of the Catholic mainstream. Surely the associations between Christians and Muslims or Christians and Jews in fascist or colonial Europe, which Moore references in her other chapters, represented countercultures too. This point begs a larger question. *Kindred Spirits* goes in so many directions at once that I was unclear why this particular constellation of spiritual friends was chosen in the first place. McKay is the hardest one to connect both to the elite circles in which the other friends moved, and to the mysticism that fueled so much of the resistance chronicled in these pages. His critical years in London are skipped over.

But these are quibbles that should not detract from what Moore has achieved; this book is passionately written, richly layered, and revelatory. Moore persuades us that historians can and should explore the emotional realm of exceptional historical actors connected through faith and friendship. Doing so helps us see extraordinary individuals whose resistance has been overlooked because it was conducted in a realm deemed private and apolitical. Perhaps most importantly, Moore leaves no doubt that through friendship her particular circle discovered *within Catholicism itself* the strength to resist both the bundle of hatreds associated with modern empires and the steady pull of a desiccating secularism; their emotional undercurrent in turn generated some of modern Catholicism's most creative and radical trends.

In that sense, *Kindred Spirits* is an open invitation for scholars now to follow other affective diasporas among avant-garde Catholic writers and artists, centered in other places. As Moore herself suggests, the cities of Cairo, Montevideo, and Jerusalem could anchor equally compelling transnational narratives (230). For anyone seeking a fuller history of the circles, networks, and constellations that powered intellectual resistance to the most dehumanizing ideologies of the twentieth century, *Kindred Spirits* is a very rewarding read.

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