

Lucia Pozzi. *The Catholic Church and Modern Sexual Knowledge, 1850-1950.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; 2021. 271 p. ISBN 978-3-030-79788-1. 72,5 €

Lucia Pozzi's innovative book, *The Catholic Church and Modern Sexual Knowledge (1850-1950)*, offers a refined historical analysis of the Roman Catholic Church's engagement with evolving medical perspectives on sexuality and the sexed body, spanning the 19th and 20th century. Challenging Michel Foucault's thesis that sexuality is exclusively produced by modern scientific epistemologies (a perspective also embraced by Thomas Laqueur in his analysis of Western medical understandings of modern sexual difference), Pozzi shows how the Church dynamically alternated between resistance and acceptance of secular, sexological discourses, illustrating a non-linear, context-dependent trajectory. The gradual shift towards a secularized discourse on sexuality in Europe, sidelining the Catholic perspective, was indeed driven by the Catholic Church's assimilation of medical discourses on sex and its pursuit of cultural hegemony. Pozzi's monograph deftly underscores how, within certain European contexts, the period under discussion witnessed the gradual creation of sexuality into a prominent public discourse. The emergence of novel ideas surrounding human sexuality between the 19th and the 20th century instigated shifts in gender relationships and renewed medical conceptualizations on anatomy and reproductive physiology, whose tandem shaped the institutional Catholic perspectives. This is primarily evident in the considerable volume of Vatican decrees addressing abortive procedures during the whole period the book covers.

Pozzi departs from an idea that a major part of historical analysis has overlooked the focal role played by Catholic institutions in shaping modern discourses on sexuality. The author's meticulous historical account aims to show how the secular understanding of sexuality not only influenced Catholic traditional views on sexual morals and the religious governance of sexual behaviors, but also contributed to the emergence of a modern discourse on sexuality and sexual knowledge, in an ever-evolving interplay and in the specific European socio-cultural landscapes of the time. Lucia Pozzi accomplishes these objectives by scrutinizing a broad spectrum of sources, including manuals of moral theology, pastoral medicine, periodicals, writings on medical and sexological topics, relevant correspondence among physicians and between Catholic authorities and representatives, and, most importantly, previously unexplored Vatican archival documents. The volume comprises eight chapters,

preceded by an introduction and followed by an epilogue scrutinizing the investigation's purposes and structure. The covered topics are diverse yet interconnected, encompassing discussions on onanism; the institutional stance of Catholicism on sexual and reproductive issues (including masturbation, abortion, and contraception); sexual purity with a particular focus on the female body; population theories and eugenics; nudism; the conceptualization of "abuse" within marriage; birth control and chaste wedlock. Each topic-centered chapter, whether examined in isolation, or considered within the broader context of the monograph, or in relation to the other chapters, distinctly displays the constant mutual exchange between medical and Catholic culture, an exchange that, at that time, primarily revolved around sexuality-related issues. The author successfully demonstrates how the Holy Office shaped Catholic moral judgments, steadfast in its refusal to relinquish authority to medical knowledge, reaching its apex with Pope Pius XI's 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii*, which marked one of the harshest condemnations of contraception ever produced and provided the basis upon which the Catholic doctrine was to be adopted from that point onwards. Throughout Pozzi's monograph, it becomes evident how in the Catholic Church's discourse sins progressively acquired a medicalized connotation and interpretation in terms of human physiology. Avoiding submission to pathology, which would have implied Vatican's passive acceptance of the emerging medical mentality, the Holy See strategically engaged Catholic physicians who facilitated the development of a modern, religiously codified cultural identity.

This support empowered Catholic physicians to discern what was "truly medical" or merely a "medical pretext". One example Pozzi uses is how the Catholic modern discourse conceptualized onanism as a sin, introducing interconnected medical ideas and new concerns in the management of the body, thus also revealing a discontinuity with previous religious discourses. Throughout the one hundred years covered in the book, the modern Catholic theories clearly influenced the conception of sexuality and ecclesiastical practices, while merging with popular medical discourses that, in turn, transformed the religious perspective and medicalized sexual sins. In the case of nudism, discussed in chapter six, the presence of a moral and health-related outlook on the body, endorsed by established physicians, presented a challenge to the traditional moral authority of the Church. As Catholic institutions condemned nudism as heretical, it became a paramount factor amplifying modern Catholic apprehension regarding the sexed body and its associated theoretical frameworks. These and other examples gradually display the Church's interplay of acceptance and rejection of scientific knowledge, depicting the

Holy Office's profound interest in diverse and 'new speculations' about sex, reproduction, and their moral and societal implications.

Every chapter functions independently, with its own references and a concise bibliography. Considering the interconnected nature of the addressed topics, this approach precludes the inclusion of a comprehensive bibliography of the entire monograph, along with a conclusive overview detailing the primary findings of the investigation and retracing the core themes and their interconnections. I would have appreciated the inclusion of a similar comprehensive list of the archives and primary sources employed, offering the reader a centralized reference point. In interpreting the complex intertwining of the Catholic Church's engagement with evolving sexual knowledge, Pozzi's volume not only challenges prevailing perspectives of sexual science, but also lays bare a refined historical trajectory. This publication establishes a crucial foundation for scholars and historians confronting the knotty relationship between the Catholic Church and issues related to sexuality and the human body. It is equally valuable for those interested in exploring the gendered history of reproductive bodies and investigating the intersection of scientific constructs on reproduction with institutional regulations, to which the Catholic Church has historically contributed, notably in shaping perspectives on feminized bodies and reproductive practices. Persisting in contemporary echoes and in present-day perceptions and theorizations, Pozzi's monograph stands as an essential resource for anyone engaging with these complex histories.

Elsa Usai

Universidad de Granada

ORCID: 0009-0002-4260-7735

Antonio Diéguez. La ciencia en cuestión. Disenso, negación y objetividad. Herder: Barcelona; 2024, 208 pp. ISBN 978-84-254-5076-1. 19,80 €

La pandemia de la COVID-19 ha acelerado procesos sociales y generado otros nuevos. También ha puesto las actividades tecnocientíficas en la mirada del público general y dirigentes políticos. Los que, como el autor de este libro, se dedican a las tareas metacientíficas, esto es, a pensar sobre la ciencia, han tenido oportunidad de ejercer como filósofos en un sentido que aúna el académico y