Call for papers

Modernism
Annual Journal of Contemporary Religious Reformism, 11 (2025)¹

Women and Modernism

In European culture and society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of a branch of studies within Christianity aimed at renewing, redefining, and reformulating the contents of the faith was intertwined with the rediscovery of the importance of spiritual experience and religious dimension in the lives of men and women.

Studies inspired by the categories of gender history have brought to light the existence of a “neo-Christian” women’s culture that contributed to the theorization of ecclesial and liturgical reform, and through social engagement and literary dissemination expressed women’s desire to step out of the private sphere and participate in the construction of a regenerated society. In Italy, some pioneering works – including Il femminismo cristiano. La questione femminile nella prima democrazia cristiana, 1898-1912, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1979 by Francesco Maria Cecchini and Élites femminili e nuovi modelli religiosi nell’Italia tra Otto e Novecento, QuattroVenti, Urbino 1997 by Roberta Fossati – have revealed how vast the phenomenon of Christian feminism was. In her latest work Verso l’ignoto. Donne moderniste di primo Novecento, Nerbini, Firenze 2020, Fossati has shown the wide diffusion throughout Italy of personalities, cenacles, and associations, which confirms how female activism was present in many areas of religious knowledge, pedagogy, and education.

This early twentieth-century movement included figures such as Adelaide Coari, Antonietta Giacomelli, Elisa Salerno, Maude Petre, Enrica von Handel-Mazzetti and Augusta von Eichtal (to name a few). Although biographical events of the protagonists of this female neo-Christianity have been explored in depth in many studies, the historiographical panorama still lacks a comprehensive European perspective on the study of female figures and groups related to modernism, both in terms of general interpretive categories and in terms of a potential mapping of experiences and research subjects.

In order to contribute to the debate in these directions, Modernism will devote the monographic issue planned for release in 2025 to the topic Women and modernism. This is to give a picture, on as international or at least European level as possible, of the presence of individuals or groups traceable

¹ Italian journal of the Romolo Murri Foundation in Urbino. According to the Italian Classification of Scientific Journals, Modernism is considered a Class A scholarly journal for the Disciplinary Scientific Sectors M-STO/04 (Modern and Contemporary History) and M-STO/07 (History of Christianity and the Churches).
to female reformism of the early twentieth century, and to answer the following historiographical questions:

- From the point of view of categories, within what terms can we speak of Christian feminism for the realities of female modernism? What relevance and effectiveness has the category of neo-Christian female culture instead?
- What links developed with cenacles and spiritual research circles, or even with scholars and intellectuals open to the historical-critical study of Christianity in different national contexts?
- How did the terrains of debate and initiative expressed by women’s modernism build in common with the emerging feminist movements? What were, on the contrary, the major tensions and conflicts starting, for example, with the issue of confessional teaching in schools?
- How much remains to be explored in relation to women writers, educators, pedagogues, journalists, poets, and children’s authors have been touched by the spiritual quest between the two centuries?
- Is it possible to analyze some paths of interdenominational spiritual search ante litteram or otherwise outside Catholicism and Protestantism stricto sensu?
- What personal and ideal paths make it possible frame the relationship between liberal Catholicism and feminine modernism in Italian history?
- Within what terms and spaces were possible terrains of osmosis between female modernism and female Catholic Action protagonists in the different countries?
- What relationship can be reconstructed between the reflections of authors such as Alfred Baudrillart and Antonin D. Sertillanges and women’s modernism inside and outside the French-speaking countries? And in the rest of Europe, which Catholic clergymen and thinkers influenced Christian feminism?

Submissions of articles based on new sources (private papers and institutional records) are encouraged.

Articles may be written in Italian, French, or English. Proposals should be sent by September 15, 2023, in the form of abstracts of up to 500 words, accompanied by a short bio, to the following addresses

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Authors will be notified by October 31, 2023, whether their proposal has been accepted. Selected papers must be submitted by October 15, 2024, for double blind peer review.