Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society, and Religious Change in France, 1580-1730*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009. xvii+506 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. $55.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 978-0-300-15098-8.

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In the course of less than three centuries, the early modern French Catholic Church went through two near-death experiences. In the 1550s and 1560s, many feared that it would succumb to some combination of Calvinism and royalist-Gallican reform; in the 1790s, the pressures of the Revolution all but destroyed it. Given that record, it is perhaps surprising that through most of the old regime, France was among the firmest pillars of the Roman religion. Professor Bergin's latest book is in a sense a history of how that could be so. Covering the century and a half after any immediate danger of Protestant-led annihilation had passed, but before the weaknesses that would leave the Revolutionary-era Church so exposed had become particularly visible, it seeks above all to diagnose the underlying causes of French Catholicism's strength and dynamism. In that, it does an extraordinary job—the breadth of the survey alone will probably make this the standard treatment of the subject for many years to come. Indeed, it is sufficiently magisterial that, after briefly discussing its contributions to the field, I can think of no more useful line of criticism than to discuss some of the avenues of further research that it suggests to me.

The early modern movement of Catholic reform has traditionally had a rather bad reputation. Even leaving aside purely confessional scholarship and the (not always unjustified) black legend of Inquisition brutality, Jesuit scheming, and the like, historians have found much in it to dislike. One school, associated with the Teutonic concept of "social discipline," implicates the Catholic Reformation, and its Protestant counterpart, in the creation of modern state and social structures whose coercive and pervasive modes of discipline are implicitly located in the genealogy of twentieth-century totalitarianism.[1] Closer to Bergin's home turf, both French scholars (notably Jean Delumeau) and English ones (notably John Bossy but also, in some of his moods, Robin Briggs) have decried the way a more or less broadly defined Catholic reform movement replaced a local, organic, and socially integrated medieval religiosity with something far more alien and oppressive towards the common people.[2] More recent scholarship, both in English and in French, however, has tended to move away from this kind of negative evaluation, and Bergin's book continues that trend in a fairly self-conscious way.[3] Between this general level of sympathy and the sheer amount of time Bergin has spent immersed in the lives and issues of seventeenth-century bishops, it is not surprising that what he has written is largely an account of the French church as seen from the inside.

As befits his insider perspective, Bergin's focus and his explanatory framework are essentially institutional. Successive chapters discuss the economic and administrative organization of the

secular and regular clergy, and the episcopacy and diocesan organization—the latter being subjects on which Bergin's expertise is unparalleled. In the second half of the book, the social perspective is somewhat broader, but it still returns repeatedly to the institutional structures of religious life: shrines, education, confraternities, and so on. The catalog of institutional reforms and innovations that he describes is certainly impressive: a wealthier, better-educated, secular clergy; numerous new and reformed male and female orders, spread systematically over the country; bishops who, like their clergy, were better educated, more professional, and more engaged on the ground; a wide variety of new or reinvigorated devotional practices aimed at all walks of life, ranging from pious literature and confraternal organizations to an at least moderately intensified sacramental life; a massive educational program at all levels from the most elementary to the most advanced; and of course the forms of organized interior spirituality for which the century is perhaps best known. Certainly, as Bergin points out in his conclusion, this was by any reasonable standards a highly successful program to the point that it had become a highly attractive model throughout Catholic Europe by the end of the seventeenth century.

Bergin stresses two important aspects of this program of institutional reform. The first is that it was by its nature inscribed in the long term. Although he detects some slackening of the pace in the second half of the century, he insists on the continuing vigor and adaptability of the reformist impulse. At the parish level, in particular, much of the heavy lifting was done in the later part of Louis XIV's reign. The explosion of devotional literature, often directed towards a clearly popular audience, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests some ways in which the long effort of reform was beginning to bear fruit.[4] At the same time, in order to succeed in the long run, the reform was of necessity flexible, collaborative, and relatively pragmatic. Bergin chronicles, among other things, the ways in which regular orders, old or new, were continually reshaped, redistributed, or replaced by more flexible secular congregations; the gradual adaptation of the seminary model to the realities of the available parish clergy; and the negotiations that surrounded decisions to retain, rework, or supplement existing confraternities. There is an obvious parallel here to the relationship between "absolute" monarchy and the subsidiary or local political culture of seventeenth-century France. In both cases, detailed study makes it clear that centralizers negotiated with, accommodated, and responded to a real demand from the broader society.[5] It might be interesting to explore this connection more systematically, since similar social and cultural factors presumably underlay both political and religious change in this period.[6]

Bergin's last chapter departs from this story, though, taking up the classic tale of the development of Jansenism and its much broader-based cousin, moral rigorism. While his discussion is nuanced and helpful, it also marks the most important limit of his study. For Jansenism was only minimally institutional, as its ability to survive and flourish after the successive destruction of its toehold in the Sorbonne, the *petites écoles*, and the Port-Royal complexes demonstrated, to the great distress of kings and ministers from Louis XIII and Richelieu onwards. One lesson of that story is clearly that ideas, even apart from their institutional instantiations, mattered profoundly for early modern Catholicism. Bergin would certainly not dispute that fact, and even aside from his own perfectly valid preferences, there are good reasons why he would choose not to focus on this aspect of the problem. There is no other good institutional overview of the French church in the *grand siècle*, while those interested in its life of ideas can turn to the work of Brémond, Orcibal, Certeau, or Sainte-Beuve, to mention only

the classics.[7] Nevertheless, it seems as if there is still a good deal of work to do to *integrate* the intellectual and institutional histories of the century of saints.

One possible line of inquiry that helps explain the triumph of rigorism concerns the unusually prominent part public controversy played in the religious life of early modern France. Aside from favoring the kind of unsubtle and unrealistic extremism with which anyone who follows American political discourse is too sadly familiar, this endemic disputatiousness had at least two potentially nefarious consequences.[8] First, the demands of controversy tended to exalt the role of reason in religion, which in turn generated an attitude of *méfiance* not only towards popular superstition but also towards the mystical tradition (culminating in the anti-Quietist crusade). In the long run, as the cultural understanding of "reason" began to change, it may have hampered the Gallican Church's response to the challenges of the Enlightenment.[9] Second, controversy tended to undermine the very institutional integrity that was the foundation of the Church's success in France. The French love of controversy had many roots; some of them, like the strength of a disputatious university culture or the presence of multiple religious communities, had equivalents elsewhere, but others were more localized. In particular, the history of disputes over the "Gallican liberties" had long entrenched ecclesiological disputes in the French public sphere, while at the same time creating a powerful group of political actors (mainly in the sovereign courts, but including significant numbers of magnates and clergy) that was willing and able to protect dissident Catholics.[10] The result was a society endlessly productive of religious controversy, but ill-equipped either to suppress it (as happened in the Hapsburg lands) or to accommodate it institutionally (as happened, after great pain, in the Netherlands and England). And so the immensely successful French church developed an apparently inexpugnable tendency to tear itself apart, eventually even exporting that tendency to the rest of Catholic Europe.[11] At any rate, that is one possible way of resolving the paradox with which we began, though others are certainly possible. The great virtue of Bergin's study is that it raises such questions and also provides the materials for us to begin to judge our answers.

NOTES

[1] For a survey of this literature, see Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Imposing Church and Social Discipline," in R. Po-Chia Hsia, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity vol. 6: Reform and Expansion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 14.

[2] For the strongest forms of these arguments see Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: la culpabilisation en Occident XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983); John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present* 47 (1970): 51-70 (which, despite the title, is mainly about France); or Robin Briggs, "The Church and the Family in Seventeenth-Century France," in *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 235-76.

[3] Among Anglophone scholars, at least, the work of John O'Malley has been very influential in promoting a more sympathetic approach towards (to use his preferred term) early modern Catholicism. There has been a particular tendency to rehabilitate the French church's treatment of women, for example in Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). In French, to take just one example, Jacques Depauw, *Spiritualité et pauvreté à Paris au XVIIe siècle* (Paris:

Boutique de l'histoire, 1999) gives a sympathetic account of some of the more maligned aspects of seventeenth-century French Catholicism.

[4] On this literature, see Phillippe Martin, *Une religion des livres, 1640-1850* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2003), an extremely useful work that escapes Bergin's generally comprehensive bibliography.

[5] This has now become a commonplace of the literature, though seminal studies included Albert Hamscher, *The Conseil Privé and the Parlements in the Age of Louis XIV: A Study in French Absolutism* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1987); and William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that arbitrary and even brutal action remained part of the monarchy's repertoire. See John Hurt, *Louis XIV and the Parlements: The Assertion of Royal Authority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) for a corrective in that direction, which would certainly be valid for the Gallican Church as well.

[6] Despite being generally wrongheaded, Lucien Goldmann, *Le dieu caché*: *étude sur la vision tragique dans les Pensées de Pascal et dans le théâtre de Racine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), raises issues about the relationship between socioeconomic and religio-political change in the seventeenth century that deserve more consideration than they have usually received.

[7] Henri Brémond, *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France depuis la fin des guerres de religion jusqu'à nos jours*, 11 vols. (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1916-1936); Jean Orcibal, *Les origines du jansénisme*, 5 vols. (Paris: Vrin, 1947-1962); Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982); Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, 3 vols. (Paris: N.R.F./Gallimard, 1953-1955).

[8] Take, for example, the Oratorian theologian Louis Thomassin, a rather attractive figure whose persistent attempts to chart a middle ground in the controversies of the day led to predictably savage attacks from both sides, which ultimately deprived him of the influence he deserved. See Pierre Clair, *Louis Thomassin (1619-1695): étude bio-bibliographique, avec vingt lettres et deux textes inédits* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).

[9] There is a good analysis of this dynamic in Susan Rosa, "Seventeenth-Century Catholic Polemic and the Rise of Cultural Rationalism: An Example from the Empire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 87-107. On response to the Enlightenment, see Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[10] This is my particular hobby-horse: see Jotham Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

[11] Such, at any rate, I take to be the lesson of Dale van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

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