H-France Review Vol. 12 (June 2012), No. 67

Matériaux pour l'histoire religieuse du people français, XIXe-XXe siècles : Bourgogne, Franche-Comté et Lyonnais, Savoie et Dauphiné, Grand Midi et Algérie. Présentation et organisation assurées par une équipe composée de Bernard Delpal, Claude Prudhomme, Christian Sorrel, coordination de Bernard Hours, avec le renfort de Guillaume Fantino (cartographie), Christine Chadier et Stephane Nivet (notices, tableaux et graphiques). Lyon: Laboratoire de recherche historique Rhône-Alpes, 2011. 590 pp. 60 € (cl). ISBN 982-2-9537928-2-9.

Review by Joseph F. Byrnes, Oklahoma State University.

The present volume is the fourth, and last, of a series that began in 1982, following the lead of the priest scholar, Fernand Boulard. All the preceding volumes were published before H-France was operative, so a word or two about the earlier volumes is in order. Today, most historians of modern French history (and sometimes, even their undergrad students) are familiar with some basic Boulard maps, if not the statistical tables, more often than not, thanks to the remarkable 1989 synthesis of Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* [1], who had the first two volumes of *Matériaux* at his disposal (and who collaborated on volume III): see his chapter six, "Religious practice: region, gender, and age." Father Boulard died in 1977, but publication of the first three volumes (1982, 1987, and 1992) was assured by his collaborators, Jacques Gadille (for volume I), Yves Hilaire, and Gérard Cholvy.

The *Matériaux* is a monument of data collection on churchgoing and related, publicly observable, religious practices in Catholic France across the past two centuries. In virtually all French dioceses, surveys of parish life were made from time to time, distinguishing the practice (Sunday church attendance or reception of Holy Communion) and the "practicers": male, female, young, old. Already in volume one, the editors gave fair warning about cavalier interpretations, noting that variations in the survey questions can determine--variably--the data, and that the *meaning* of practice could change over the years and differ between locations, e.g. church-going in a small village could mean social conformity, whereas church-going could mean religious witness in a large urban setting. At the time of the publication of Volume I, the terms "unbelief," "religion" (of course), and especially "dechristianization" were central analytical concerns. Volume II (introduced by Yves-Marie Hilaire) and Volume III (introduced by Gérard Cholvy) incorporated specific, minor sociographic reforms. Volume IV is the work of Bernard Delpal and the team listed above. In the interest of full disclosure (as the cliché goes), I must say here that I have worked on other projects with some of these scholars from the LARHRA team (Laboratoire de recherche historique Rhône-Alpes) and the research group RESEA (Religion, sociétés et acculturation), centered at the Université de Lyon III.

The categories of practice and practicers have been modified slightly over the years, probably in order to coordinate and simplify the statistical tables. They are *cénalisant* or *communicant* (those who go to communion outside of the Easter season); *messalisant* (those who go to Sunday mass regularly); *messé* (those at Mass whose habitual behavior is unknown); and *pascalisant* (those who go to communion under the special conditions of the Easter season--this category, used since the 1860s, indicates a special obedience to a church law that they "make their Easter duty," i.e., confession, if necessary, and communion

around Easter).

Accommodations have been made to homogenize as much as possible the varieties of regional categories: arrondissements, dioceses, large cities and their cantons, smaller cities--distinguished from their rural surroundings or not. The original diocesan surveys are supplemented and corrected by other archival data (AN and AD), as Bernard Delpal explains in the introduction. Processing the data, editors had a twofold goal "(a) déceler les réponses peu fiables (le plus souvent à l'échelon paroissial) et éviter qu'elles ne compromettent les résultats d'ensemble (canton ou arrondissement), (b) tirer tout le parti possible des recensements civils, en particulier pour déterminer exactement les assujettis aux gestes ou sacrements considérés, et aboutir ainsi à des taux fiables" (p. 15). Volume four is divided into three sections, as were the preceding volumes: (1) *Notices*--regional histories by diocese, with the surveys taken across the years set in their church-historical and when possible and appropriate, in their national historical context; (2) *Matériaux*--statistical tables showing the results of the historical surveys; and (3) *Atlas*--charts that map out these results. The regions indicated in the long subtitle, comprising the southwest of France and including Corsica and Algeria, are classified by the editors as *trois grands ensembles.* In this volume there are also separate histories, statistical tables, and charts for Protestants, Catholic dissidents, Armeniens, and Jews of the Midi. Some minority Catholic groups are presented within the Latin rite diocesan framework; some are dealt with separately.

As an example of the way regional and diocesan coverage is structured, take the first "*ensemble*," which is set up as Bourgogne, Franche-Comté, and the Lyonnais; Côte d'Or (Diocèse de Dijon); Saône-et-Loire (Diocèse d'Autun); Haute-Saône, Doubs, Territoire de Belfort (Diocèse de Besançon); Jura (Diocèse de Saint-Claude); Ain (Diocèse de Belley); and Rhône-et-Loire (Diocèse de Lyon). As an example of the way the *notices and matériaux* are set up, one could look to the Archdiocese of Lyon. In the *notice*, Philippe Rocher reviews the heritage of antiquity and the seventeenth century, and especially the Revolution, when the majority of the clergy took the oath of fidelity to the nation, the law, and the king, implying acceptance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and when the ill-fated Adrien Lamourette was appointed to the See. Lyon, with its resistance to the Convention, was the scene of special violence and destruction. After the Concordat, Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Joseph Fesch, restored a semblance of order to the Archdiocese which included the first survey, in 1804, of both the financial status and properties of the clergy and of religious practice in the parishes.

The situation was, in fact, not nearly as disastrous as might be expected. The successors to Cardinal Fesch made their own less systematic surveys between 1841 and 1855, but Archbishop Pierre-Hector Coullié presided over an extensive survey in 1896. By this time, a serious falling off in practice, especially in the industrial areas, had alarmed Coullié and his clergy, hence the goal of reconstructing a Catholicism that could meet the challenges of the twentieth century. After the late nineteenth-century attempt to rally to the Republic, the religious practice of women fell off, and the number of vocations to the priesthood (higher in the Lyonnais than elsewhere) also fell. Cardinal Pierre-Marie Gerlier's promotion of surveys outlasted him, each of them exposing significant problems. Formerly faithful rural areas, especially the wine-growing areas of the Rhône valley, were indifferent, while in the cities the elites were mainly faithful, in total contrast to the peripheral urban areas. By the time of the 1959 survey, only one out of every four men went to Sunday mass in the Loire area, and only one out of three in the Rhône area. Other measures of devotion and practice also revealed that only a minority of Catholics participated in other forms of church life. In the *matériaux* pages for the Archdiocese of Lyon only the major surveys (with their regional details) are included: a 1804 survey of *messalisants*, *pascalisants*, and *cénalisants* done during the episcopacy of Mgr Joseph Fesch (1802-1839); a 1896 pastoral visit--with survey--of *pascalisants* during the

episcopacy of Mgr Pierre-Hector Coullié (1893-1912); a pastoral visit--with survey--of Catholic action and press circulation between 1937 and 1940 done during episcopacy of Mgr Gerlier (1937-1965); and a 1959 survey (Boulard) of *pascalisants*, *cénalisants*, *messalisants*, and annual communions (ages fifteen to nineteen) from the episcopacy of Mgr Gerlier. Pages of more limited statistical surveys follow, including vocations across the years and contributions to the Propagation of the Faith. This is the pattern, more or less, for all the dioceses.

From the Grand Midi and Algérie *ensemble*, I cite an original feature of the presentation of the diocese of Marseille, where the religious minorities are given special attention: not only the Protestants, but also refugees from countries that are a direct sail to the northern Mediterranean coast--Syria and Greece. There Syrians/Lebanese were Melkites ("Greek Catholics") or Maronites, and the Greeks themselves were Orthodox, of minor interest statistically in the diocese of Marseille, but of considerable historical interest. For Corsica, records start in 1801. In those early days, a vocation to the priesthood was attractive to Corsican-speaking youths and particularly to their families. By the twentieth century, vocations were down, but data still reveals the place of origin and the perseverance of the seminarians. Easy, then too, to record parishes created and the number of memberships in religious confraternities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Full surveys of practice date from the late 1920s and the Boulard era. Algeria presented a special methodological problem for the editors, with its threefold identity as metropolitan church (a bishop of Algeria under the archbishop of Aix), colonial church, and missionary church.

At the center of this history was the emblematic figure of Charles Lavigerie, founder of the White Fathers, whose renowned "*toast d'Alger*" to the Republic was, in effect, the Pope's way of initiating the Ralliement. With the Law of Separation in 1905, the mainland quarrels surrounding the change were transferred to Algeria, with the added complication that the earlier goal of a nominally Christian Algeria was no longer possible. In addition to the First World War, Algeria had the added crises of the Second World War and the war in Algeria itself. Statistics exist for the "*bon temps des colonies*," but are restricted to headcounts of the number of Catholics and the number of clergy.

Thirteen pages of this volume are given over to reports on the Protestants of the featured regions, no surprise in that this was the area of France with the highest percentage of Protestants. Recordkeeping was not the same as for the Catholic populations, because data are available by consistory and not by diocese. Consistories do not correspond to departments; hence, the need for deductive work in the departmental archives, complemented by the private archives randomly set up by parishes, pastors, and varieties of evangelical preachers. Needless to say, indications of religious vitality were different from those for the Catholic *messalisants*, *pascalisants*, et cetera. Different, too, are the chronological reference points: the years after the revolution of 1830; circa 1852, because of a restructuring of consistories and the creation of parishes; and between 1852 and 1888, when the effervescence of evangelization could be considered a turning point. With the Law of Separation of Church and State of 1905, the Protestant churches began reconsidering their statutes and organizational structures and, with the war of 1914-1918, leaders of the different denominations intensified their attempts at unity. The repertory of dissidents that also figures at the end of the volume consists mainly of the *petites églises*, congregations derived from the Concordat rejecters, and the left-over convulsionary Jansenists. The final pages of the volume deal with the Armenians of Rhône-Alpes, along with the Jews of the Midi. Armenians arrived in great numbers after the early twentieth-century massacres: the basic apostolic Armenian Church, the small schism of Catholic Armenians that united with Rome, and the evangelical Armenian Church. Statistics are given for the sizeable Armenian communities at Décines in the Isère and in Lyon. Statistics

are minimal on the Jewish population until Vichy. For the nineteenth century, records exist only for 1808, 1872, 1897, and for two years of the 1930s.

The data are wonderfully and consistently ordered, but not homogeneous, because the surveys of religious practices were usually ordered up in circumstances peculiar to individual dioceses. Occasionally the surveys were part of a quasi-national effort, but mostly not; the headcounting was more a product of happenstance than systematic. Historians, sociologists, and political scientists will initially have to verify that there is data available in these *Matériaux* to answer their substantive questions. Of course, if the topic is *local* French history, they will need only to see if area surveys were made for the era they are studying. Otherwise, studies of how the local plays into the national, or comparisons of regions are the usual possibilities.

I will enter into brief detail, and with a certain amount of diffidence, of course, regarding one study that was greatly dependant on the statistics of the *Matériaux*, namely my own. I studied correlations between levels of religious practice and church defense of and promotion of local languages.[2] Of all the *pays limitrophes*, those linguistically non-French regions--the Nord (Flemish), Brittany (Breton Gaelic), the Roussillon (Catalan), and the Basque region--only one, the Roussillon, had low levels of religious practice, and I wanted to know why. Alsace and the Roussillon were an appropriate comparison because they were both integrated into the kingdom at the same time by Louis XIV, though one has to deal with the influence of a heavily Protestant presence in some areas of Alsace and the changeover to German government in 1871. With the aid of volumes two and three of *Matériaux*, however, it was immediately obvious that areas with a substantial Protestant presence were not significantly higher in churchgoing than the rest of Alsace. It was striking that the lowest practice areas of Alsace had a higher rate of churchgoing than the highest practice areas of the Roussillon (one geographically small exception to this rule in Alsace was the Schiltigheim canton, populated by transient, mostly non-Alsatian railway workers and their families).

The basic data were in the *Matériaux* and, when these were combined with material and statistics from other sources on the educational role of the church in supporting the local language, a compelling hypothesis emerged. In Alsace, the Catholic Church supported, even promoted Alsatian and German; in the Roussillon, there was no support at all for Catalan. With some other data and some further analyzing, I concluded that "to maintain its ascendancy, the church had a fundamental choice: support cultural tradition or cultural transformation, one or the other. In the Roussillon, it supported neither."[3] One might contest my use and interpretation of data, but not the *Matériaux* data themselves.

I have called this volume, with its other three volumes, a "monument of data collection," which it obviously is. It is also, in my view, monumentally underused! There is material here for bushels of comparative studies--both dissertations and articles. I can only hope that, now that the last volume has been published, the neglect will end.

NOTES

[1] Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 158-192.

[2] Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France*

(University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), see chapter five, "Local Languages for the Defense of Religion: Alsace and the Roussillon."

[3] Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever*, p. 145.

Joseph F. Byrnes
Oklahoma State University
joseph.byrnes@okstate.edu

Copyright © 2012 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172