

H-France Review Vol. 8 (October 2008), No. 126

Jeanne-Marie Tuffery-Andrieu, *Le Concile National en 1797 et en 1801 à Paris: L'Abbé Grégoire et l'utopie d'une Eglise républicaine*. Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, xxiv +383 pp. Notes.\$105.95. U.S. (pb), .ISBN 978-3-03911-426-9.

Review by Emmet Kennedy, The George Washington University.

The national councils of 1797 and 1801 were the last signs of ecclesiastical life in the French Revolution of 1789. The councils were made necessary by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790 which legislated a thorough administrative reform of the church by drastically reducing the number of dioceses, stipulating the election of the clergy by the national secular electorate in each department, thus subordinating the entire church to the Nation. The ensuing 1791 ecclesiastical oath to the Constitution and the briefs of the pope the same spring condemning the Civil Constitution led to a schism. Those who swore loyalty to the Constitution were the "Constitutional" clergy, salaried by the State. Those who did not were called "Refractories" and were excluded from state salaries, appointments and toleration. In 1793, the Terror found all priests guilty by association. The movement known as "dechristianization" had begun. The churches, as well as priests, altars, calendar, sacraments, sacred vessels and vestments were attacked. The purpose was to extirpate Christianity in France.[1] Formal persecution ceased in 1794 with the end of the Terror, but so then too did the payment of all salaries to the now ex-Constitutional Church. Liberty of religion was pronounced, but it was coupled with a hostile form of separation of church and state. No public support could be expected and no influence of religion on public institutions was to be allowed. Church buildings, which had often been expropriated by the State, were returned to "the cult" sparingly. The secularization of the public sphere was to be completed in a space of six years displacing a church that had been established by the monarchy for eight centuries.

A number of historians, in the spirit of Christian democracy or "Catholic Aufkl rung," have tried to revise this Manichean representation of the Revolution by finding religiosity in revolution and vice-versa. This conciliatory approach, now a half-century old, is well represented by the work of Bernard Plongeron [2], Timothy Tackett [3], and the present study. Its historical protagonist is the ex-conventionnel, Abbé Henri Grégoire, a forceful defender of every liberal cause compatible with Christianity from the emancipation of Jews and slaves to the establishment of a national educational system, and a national language. Grégoire escaped the regicide vote on Louis XVI and refused Dechristianization or apostasy. He was the leading figure of the ex-Constitutional church in the Directory as ex-Constitutional Bishop of Blois, and of the two national church councils of 1797 and 1801, even though he does not dominate the book as the sub-title suggests.

After the Terror neither the refractory, nor the ex-Constitutional church could be said to exist as organized, national institutions. Both had been divorced by the state. Neither had anything equivalent to the stable old regime parishes or the tithes. This is where the national councils assume their importance. The church was in such material and moral disarray that some new authority was necessary to rejuvenate it. Residual "ex-Constitutional" bishops assumed the mission "to put back in order a church which the revolutionary storm had damaged" (p. 290).

Historically, the Catholic Church called councils (local or general) periodically to address some major problem, usually a heresy, threatening it from within. The councils during the Directory were not called by Rome, but they nonetheless invoked the Council of Trent, among others, because it had restored discipline within the church in a period of equivalent religious turmoil. The novelty of the conciliar idea in 1797 was to have combined Tridentinism with fourteenth-century Conciliarism, which stressed, as did subsequent Gallicanism, the superiority of a council over the authority of a pope. Such an idea was found to be compatible with the republican, elective idea of the Revolution which the author likens to “presbyterian” church governance (p. 180). The gist of Conciliarism was the stress on the assembly as the ultimate seat of authority. Thus, a great part of this book after the “Central Preparation of the Council” (Part One) is “The Local Preparation of the Council” (Part Two) or the elaborate electoral process leading to the National Council. Readers of Patrice Gueniffey’s works on the elections to French Revolutionary assemblies will find this section of particular interest.[4]

The Councils were also influenced by Jansenism and Gallicanism as Dale Van Kley has shown for the Revolution’s beginnings.[5] The Jansenism in question was not predestinarianism or moral asceticism, but rather the political Jansenism of the eighteenth century, which stressed the role of state hegemony in church reform. The Gallican articles of 1682 posited the independence of the state from the pope in all matters, except doctrine, when affirmed by a universal council of the church. The elective principle was to be combined with eventual state reform (p. 166). The author perceives this union of democracy and authoritarianism in Grégoire’s “absolute committee authority” (p. 337). The whole electoral and committee process seems to operate somewhat like the political machine which François Furet found in the Terror.[6]

The idea of a French National Council was born after the Terror when several ecclesiastics, who called themselves the “Reunited bishops” (Henri Grégoire, Jean Baptiste Saurine, Eléonore-Marie Desbois de Rochefort, and Jean-Baptiste Royer), convoked a council with two encyclical letters of 1796. In the latter, they asserted their episcopal authority and outlined their idea on ecclesiastical discipline. They urged submission to the civil powers, and to the 1790 demarcation of dioceses, but “condemned the marriage of priests, [and] rejected apostate or sacrilegious priests and bishops,” who had abdicated Christianity during Dechristianization (p. 27).

Specifically, the other moral and disciplinary problems facing this church in 1797 were: the secularization of marriage, validated only by a civil authority; the legalization of divorce in 1792 threatening the marriage bond itself; the suppression of Sunday by the Revolutionary calendar or *decadi*; and discontinuation of the sacraments. The bishops idealized the primitive church as a norm. Doctrinal instruction consisted of a Christian civicism, heir of the Enlightenment and Revolutionary pedagogy, more than Christian revelation (pp. 174-179). It would not be hard to surmise a need for penitence in a population that had just experienced outbursts of blasphemy, sacrilege, repeated denunciations, murders of relatives and friends, and reckless disruption of marriages. But confession was not much stressed by the ex-Constitutional church; if it existed, it was to be “public” as in the primitive church, not private as in the Roman Catholic Church. Of course the biggest problem facing the councils in 1797 was the schism separating the two churches themselves. The ex-Constitutional Church was open to reconciliation on certain grounds, but wary of notorious refractories (pp. 56-59, 312-313). The refractories for their part were happy to receive the “retractions” of ex-constitutional priests and bishops, who were otherwise regarded as “schismatics,” or “so-called bishops” of “such and such a diocese.”[7] Attempts were made by the Permanent Committee of the ex-Constitutional Church to bring the two churches together, despite Grégoire’s opposition (pp. 312-316). Grégoire’s leadership comes off in Tuffery-Andrieu’s candid study as a desire to conciliate all Catholic clergies favorable to the revolution, but not enemies of it. Despite its anti-papalism and presbyterian hearkening back to the “primitive church,” the Conciliar movement of the 1790’s conceived of itself as “Catholic.” And despite its anti-papalism, it did not reach out ecumenically to Protestants. It was the extreme Gallican representation of French Catholic Christianity, different from refractory Roman Catholicism’s support

of papal primacy over the church (p. 290).

Assemblies were convoked in 1797 by bishops' circulars to local diocesan assemblies, where elections of worthy ecclesiastics took place. Records frequently exist for the number of voters, but not those who were elected (p. 213). Refractories were sometimes elected, as at Aix and Lozère, whereas elsewhere as in the southwest, "widow dioceses"—ones generally opposed to Grégoire's church—did not vote at all (p. 215). Attendance at the Council was not guaranteed by election as funds to subsidize travel were frequently lacking (p. 224). The ex-Constitutional Church was hierarchical in the sense that it was headed by a Permanent Committee of (three to five) "Reunited Bishops," which published the Council's *Actes*. The spirit of the Council was reformatory rather than dissident (p. 317). No acrimony toward the government's suspension of clerical salaries seems to have been voiced.

The second council which began June 29, 1801, encountered a shock before it could pursue its agenda. There was division at the top emanating from the ex-Constitutional bishop of Paris, who opposed its convocation. More importantly, having commenced on June, 29 1801, it terminated abruptly on 16 August, one month after the signature of the Concordat to which the Constitutional bishops quickly assented, except Grégoire, who never did so for the duration of his life. One of them, Detorcy, wrote in a reaction printed in the *Actes* of the Second National Council: "We were convoked only in order to concur in peace; events have led to this happy moment sooner than we expected...consequently we have nothing more to do" (p. 323). This sudden and general acquiescence is somewhat surprising and the author does not fully explain it, perhaps due to a lack of documentation (p.328). The Concordat briskly swept aside (reappointing many) existing clergies, refractory as well as Gallican. With them was removed all the confusion and indecision of these republican ecclesiastical idealists. A less independent Church of France than had existed under the old regime was created.

Several reasons can be ascribed to the failure of the ex-Constitutional church: it did not come to terms with half the clergy of France or the papacy until it voted itself out of existence. Secondly, Bonaparte trumped Grégoire's Gallicanism by imposing his own Gallicanism on the papacy (which owed much to 1790), yielding to the pope final approval on episcopal nominations. Thirdly, the ex-Constitutional church lacked money altogether. This was at the root of many of its organizational problems. The Concordat church, by contrast, was fully subsidized and salaried by the state. Fourthly, the resurgence of religion noted by Suzanne Desan, suggests, in my view, a popular reverence for the pope noticeable in the voyages of Pius VI and Pius VII in France in 1799 and 1801. But this needs further investigation.[8]

What was lost in the Concordat was an ideal "presbyterianism," the spontaneous rule of the church by its elders, in other words, self-rule, with all its doctrinal divergences and divisions. Tuffery-Andrieu proves that this never really obtained: what was gained by the Concordat was a greater doctrinal and disciplinary unity. The Concordataire church provided order without which moral life is difficult, but in exchange for religious routine. It took the missions of the Restoration and saints like Madeleine Sophie Barat, Catherine Labouré, the Curé d'Ars, Bernadette Soubirous and Thérèse de Lisieux, and the scores of founders of religious orders in the nineteenth century to breathe life into the Napoleonic structures.[9]

Jeanne-Marie Tuffery-Andrieu's study is thorough and careful. She is one of the first persons known to this reviewer to make a truly extensive and methodical use of the archives of the Bibliothèque de Port Royal. These archives enclose most of the passive correspondence of the Abbé Henri Grégoire with the entire ex-Constitutional Church of which he was the titular head. There are few collections of the Revolution as rich as this one, few as large, and few as inaccessible for administrative reasons. She has exploited this source to great advantage in order to tell one of the major stories of the Directory: the attempt to pull the Catholic Church out of smoldering revolutionary ashes.

Tuffery-Andrieu's research is thorough in both primary and secondary French sources. It is useful not only for its purported subject, but is probably the most up-to-date bibliography of French titles on the religious history of the Revolution. She did not, however, consult American works such as Alyssa Sepinwall's *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley, 2005).

The form in which the author has presented her material is very juridical. This is not surprising since it is indeed a thesis in canon law (in the Catholic Theology Faculty at the Marc Bloch University of Strasbourg) and is scholastically divided into "titles," chapters, sections, and sub-sections, making it very clear but not very conducive to understanding a historical development. The material is not fashioned into a story of a frustrated utopian enterprise, but is rather a logical exposition.

The Abbé Grégoire, while cited on almost every page, does not emerge as a true historical leader or personality. This is because it was not Tuffery-Andrieu's aim to paint him as such. He is simply presented as the principal correspondent of the ex-Constitutional Church. But her characterization of him as the center of the councils' "committee absolutism," provides much for reconsideration of his liberal persona.

NOTES

[1] Michel Vovelle, ed., *L'État de la France pendant la Révolution 1789-1799* (Éditions de la Découverte: Paris, 1988), p. 244.

[2] Bernard Plongeron, *Théologie et politique au siècle des lumières (1770)-1820* (Geneva: Droz, 1973). For a recent overview, see Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Catholic University Press: Washington D.C., 2000).

[3] Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: the Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 1986).

[4] Patrice Gueniffey, *Le nombre de la raison: La Révolution française et les élections* (Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales: Paris, 1993).

[5] Dale Van Kley *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J., 1996); "Religion and the Age of 'Patriot' Reform," *Journal of Modern History*, 80, no. 2 (June 2008), pp. 252-295.

[6] François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Gallimard: Paris, 1978).

[7] *Annales Catholiques*, 2 (1796): 41, 381.

[8] Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).

[9] Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au féminin" Les Congrégations au supérieure générale au XIX siècle* (Cerf: Paris, 1984).

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ISSN 1553-9172