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Elizabeth A. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2013. xiv + 270 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$ 60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-804-78380-4.

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While the missionary presence in the British Empire has long been a source of nuanced and critical historical enquiry, the same cannot be said for the French colonies. Instead studies of the French colonial empire have, until recently, either largely ignored missionaries or written them off as willing handmaidens of French colonial administrators. Elizabeth Foster's *Faith in Empire* joins a growing body of literature replacing this overly simplistic view of the French colonial experience with a messier and more accurate one in which missionaries were important colonial agents with their own agenda who frequently clashed with local officials over competing visions of French colonial goals and obligations. Specifically, Foster uses religion as a lens to show that the reality on the ground in Senegal often deviated significantly from republican rhetoric and metropolitan initiatives due to the complex interactions of local officials, Catholic missionaries, converts, and non-Christian Africans. In the process she shows how civilians--both European and African--helped shape French colonial rule in Senegal.

This is an important, if occasionally uneven book with much to offer. Over the course of six thematic chapters Foster uses specific incidents, debates or issues to chart the ebb and flow of church-state relations in Senegal from 1880 to 1940. She argues that during this period the Spiritan mission focused on conversion and the pursuit of a Catholic civilizing mission emphasizing assimilation as the key to improving African society. As part of this process, the Spiritans sought to partner with the local administration so as to goad it into taking a more forceful stance against what the missionaries considered objectionable local customs. Ultimately, however, colonial administrators rejected both the mission's overtures and its vision, preferring to focus on more pragmatic goals like maintaining order and solidifying power. Foster convincingly shows that this rejection was less a case of exported metropolitan anti-clericalism than it was a reaction to the mission's tendency to provoke disorder and its status as a rival for influence with the African population. The existence of competing European visions in turn created ongoing, albeit sometimes masked, church-state tensions which African groups, including the coastal mixed race *métis*, Wolof and Sereer populations, sought to exploit to their own advantage. The end result was a series of conflicts, concessions and compromises that rendered French rule in Senegal malleable and inconsistent.

Foster begins chapter one by exploring the importance of Catholicism in the Four Communes and shows that, in the early 1880s, Spiritan missionaries and local administrators had close cooperative relationships based on mutual conservatism and a shared philosophy of sacrifice. As a result, government officials were frequent participants in Catholic public ceremonies whilst the mission helped to glorify and memorialize military exploits. All that changed in the mid-1880s as the French expanded into the interior and military governors were replaced by a civilian administration which sought to consolidate local political control so as to facilitate the extraction of resources. To that end, the colonial administration began ignoring existing power-brokers in the Four Communes, including powerful *métis*

traders, in favor of cultivating its own local allies. All this threatened the Devès faction which used anti-clericalism and republican rhetoric in an attempt to win votes in municipal elections so as to safeguard its own interests. The anti-clerical campaign, which culminated in a slanderous newspaper account accusing a nun of becoming pregnant, failed to generate many votes, but it did drive a wedge between church and state since local administrators opted to distance themselves from the Spiritans lest the public at large accept the insinuation that they had become too closely allied with the clergy. This in turn set in motion the start of local church-state tensions that plagued French rule in Senegal for the next sixty years. Foster also shows how the anti-clerical campaign put the Spiritans on the defensive and revealed internal tensions within the mission as it struggled with how to respond to the slander case and an uneven foray into local politics as rival *métis* factions lobbied Paris in support of different candidates for bishop of Senegambia. According to Foster, the mission's failure to systematically back its allies in General Council elections alienated some members of the Catholic community and set off infighting which facilitated the expansion of the new civilian administration's power.

Chapter two explores the problems caused by the government's expansion into the interior during the 1890s and its decision to begin using Muslim Wolof local agents in the Petite Côte region. To the Spiritans this was a grave mistake because they regarded Muslims as inherently violent and untrustworthy allies who continually abused their position at the expense of the local animist Sereer population. Worse still, the mission felt that the use of Muslim agents undermined French interests in the region by privileging Islam over Christianity, thus retarding the spread of French civilization. Foster makes a compelling case that the administration's decision was a pragmatic one in the face of personnel shortages and that it was careful to select only those Wolof who had proven themselves willing to submit to French authority. Nevertheless, the Spiritans insisted that French interests would be better served by developing a loyal Catholic Sereer population, hence they frequently criticized official policies and encouraged limited Sereer civil disobedience whilst simultaneously seeking to convince the administration in Dakar to adopt the Catholic civilizing mission as an official policy. This naturally led to escalating church-state tensions exemplified by the mission's spirited support of a Sereer defendant accused of murdering a Wolof agent of the government. As Foster shows, both the Wolof and Sereer fueled the ensuing church-state antagonism and exploited the divisions within colonial society in an attempt to secure concessions for themselves. Eventually the situation became untenable, leading the administration to pursue de-annexation so that it could rule the region by decree. As Foster amply demonstrates, this decision illustrates the local administration's preference for colonial order and the maintenance of its own power over any metropolitan or missionary rhetoric of assimilation.

Foster uses the following two chapters to illustrate the many metropolitan challenges facing administrators in Dakar during the early part of the twentieth century. In chapter three, she shows that the French wrestled with the question of how to extend to the colonies the laicization campaign called for by the metropole's turn of the century anti-clerical laws and wondered if they should be extended to include Sufi brotherhoods and animist groups. The result was a hodgepodge of accommodation that varied from colony to colony, proving that supposedly sacrosanct republican principles like secularization were not simply imposed on colonies but were instead contested sites of negotiation. In Senegal, the decision to laicize schools and hospitals was resisted by a variety of local official and civilian actors from across the racial spectrum. While many did so because the priests and nuns who served their community had a reputation for sacrifice, the *métis* elites resisted laicization because they saw it as an attempt to weaken local political power by ending the General Council's control over subsidies and curricula. Moreover, since many *métis* politicians were practicing Catholics and the products of mission schools, they perceived laicization as an attack on their beliefs and political activities. Local officials, on the other hand, resented the campaign because they were unable to find cheap replacement personnel and complained that metropolitan interference in local matters was sowing the seeds of unrest. The end result was a mixture of republican rhetoric and foot-dragging in official circles that enabled the mission to engage in continued unofficial health and education initiatives. For Foster, this provides yet another example of how local resistance could mitigate metropolitan directives and demonstrates the

“incoherence and instability” of official thoughts on matters of colonial policy (p. 85).

Recent laicization campaigns and their ongoing inability to convince local officials to adopt the Catholic civilizing mission deeply stung the Spiritans. When WWI broke out, they therefore hoped to win over the administration in Dakar by emphasizing their own loyalty and patriotism by supporting conscription drives despite deep misgivings about the brutality of the methods used. While these efforts initially seemed to pay dividends in the form of thawing relations with the administration, they proved to be short-lived as both mission and government sought to regain lost power and influence at war's end. For the Spiritans, personnel shortages and the diversion of funding into the war effort translated into curtailed evangelism and the increased use of African catechists. Once hostilities ended, the missionaries naturally sought to revive their evangelical work and resumed their commitment to policies that often put them at odds with the administration in Dakar. Colonial officials had faced their own problems during the war years which manifested themselves in disorder and the loss of power and autonomy to a combination of metropolitan and local African forces. During the war, French administrators in Senegal resented the constant political pressure from the metropole to provide conscripts for the war effort because it denied them flexibility and provoked periodic uprisings which had to be put down by force. Worse still was the rising political activism of returning African veterans and the appointment of Blaise Diagne as Commissar of the Republic, a position he increasingly used to champion the rights of Africans throughout the Empire. Rather than accept the new political reality, once the war ended the administration in Dakar attempted to reassert itself and contain the growth of African political influence. Anything, including the Spiritans, which threatened that objective by encouraging African ambition was suspect. Consequently church-state relations once again became fraught with stress.

In chapter five, Foster uses the campaign to build the Cathedral of the Souvenir in Dakar to show not just renewed church-state tensions, but also the inherent ambiguity in metropolitan ideals and colonial realities. The cathedral project initially emerged as a patriotic gesture designed to help win over colonial administrators by commemorating those who died for France during the colonization of Africa. This memorialization soon expanded to include those who died in the Great War and as such offered the Spiritans a new opportunity for rapprochement with the local government. When the cathedral was consecrated in 1936, the associated ceremonies were replete with displays of unity which seemed to indicate that the project had succeeded in bridging the gap between church and state in Senegal. The reality, however, was that they were further apart than ever and had to be goaded into participating in the cathedral project by the mission's headquarters in Paris and the Ministry of Colonies respectively. The reason for this was continued disagreement over how best to treat Africans. For local administrators, post-war African political activism and the prospect of uprisings over unmet expectations were very real dangers.

As a result, rather than promote the spread of French civilization as called for by the Spiritans, local colonial officials focused on trying to keep order by strengthening African customs and vesting authority in supposedly traditional African leaders who could be controlled. To the Spiritans, this amounted to an almost unforgivable shirking of the regime's duty to civilize Africans, hence they began pursuing an even more interventionist form of evangelism in the hopes of remaking Senegalese culture and society. This in turn was seen by officials in Dakar as a dangerously provocative course which threatened to disrupt African communities, resulting in the deepening of mutual hostility that prevented missionaries and local administrators from cooperating on anything, including the cathedral project, unless ordered to by their metropolitan superiors. When those orders came, missionaries inside Senegal initially resisted, complaining that the proposed cathedral site and the expense of the project were a distraction from their real work of gaining converts. Local officials similarly stalled on resolving conflicts about the construction site until goaded into action by Paris. As result, Foster makes the case that it was only in the metropole that the Cathedral of the Souvenir Africain lived up to its symbolism as an emblem of unity. Within the colony, the consecration ceremonies simply masked intensified church-

state and metropole-periphery tensions.

Foster uses her final chapter to examine the effect of these long-running tensions on government policy in rural Casamance after WWI. Catholic missionaries eagerly expanded into the region during the interwar period in search of new converts among the local Joola population in an effort to both press ahead with their civilizing mission and curtail the spread of Islam. In particular, the Spiritans focused their efforts on trying to free female converts from what the church regarded as oppressive pagan customs and male domination in the hope of fostering monogamous Christian marriages which would be more receptive to French civilization. As a result, the mission increasingly denounced the colonial administration for failing to do more in the realm of marriage and family reform lest it provoke disorder. Not content with wading into these issues, the mission also began targeting Joola circumcision rituals, claiming that they were both barbaric and often forced upon converts. For their part, the Joola were incensed by the mission's actions and turned to the government for assistance in maintaining their traditions. The government's willingness to back the Joola soon led to recriminations and angry denunciations on both sides of the church-state divide. The Spiritans soon escalated matters further with the claim that the use of forced labor in support of the economic development or *mise en valeur* was a hypocritical violation of republican rhetoric and was tantamount to slavery. The end result was a series of hostile exchanges in which the colonial administration was denounced as ignorant, inept, and abusive. Spiritan threats to take their complaints to the League of Nations and their willingness to publicize their charges in the press ensured that local tensions remained a constant feature coloring French policy in Senegal for the remainder of the interwar period.

Foster is to be commended for uncovering the existence of these tensions of empire and for demonstrating how they complicated and shaped French colonial policy in Senegal. As a result, her book is a very useful and important addition to the emerging scholarship on the role of missionaries and religion in the French colonial empire. That is not to say, however, that the book lacks problems. Although well-argued and based on copious documentation drawn from religious and official archives in Paris, Rome, Aix-en-Provence and Dakar, by structuring her text as a series of almost stand-alone essays, she is at times overly repetitious. On occasion, such as chapter one's discussion of the political activities of nuns and priests, some elements feel rushed, leaving the reader hungry for more detail. These are, however, minor criticisms that in no way detract from the book's very real merits and its value to all historians of the French experience in West Africa.

NOTE

[1] For examples, see J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sarah Curtis, *Civilizing Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010); Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Owen White and J. P. Daughton, eds., *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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