

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Noah Shusterman's review of Joseph F. Byrnes, *Priests of the French Revolution: Saints and Renegades in a New Political Era*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.

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The original review may be found on the H-France Review web site at:
<http://www.h-france.net/vol15reviews/vol15no137shusterman.pdf>.

2 November 2015

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I appreciated Noah Shusterman's review of Joseph Byrnes' book. Of course, not every reviewer will focus on the same things in a book. I want to add, though, for the benefit of readers who are already familiar with the religious history of the Revolution, that I don't see Byrnes' approach as primarily narrative. One thing I found particularly interesting about Byrnes' book comes from his effort to build on John McManners' work and to explore the "religious attitudes and psychological experiences" of his subjects. Byrnes, himself a former member of the clergy, comes to history from the field of religious studies; he is eager to understand what led these priests to make a whole range of choices in the midst of revolutionary ferment. As someone who knows well many of the clerics he writes about (not only Grégoire, but also Royer, Le Coz, etc.), I was very interested in Byrnes' analysis of their efforts to reconcile their priestly vocations with changing political circumstance and their transition - in some cases - from idealism to violence. Byrnes' emphasis on the theological and political diversity of constitutional clerics, who are too often lumped together, was for me one of the book's strengths. I've reviewed the work in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, but encourage anyone interested in revolution as lived experience to explore Byrnes' book itself.

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<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415808682/> (Haitian History: New Perspectives,
available from Routledge)

5 November 2015

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I want to profit from the H-France publication of the Noah Shusterman's review of my *Priests of the French Revolution: Saints and Renegades in a New Political Era*, to highlight my thesis and approach, rather than haggle over details of the review. This is an email to H-France and not a formal author response.

My double theme across the years has always been “religious identity and national Identity.” In an earlier book, published with Penn State University Press, which has this theme in the subtitle, I situate my work within a rather complex range of discussions. Here, in the present book, I study religious—specifically priestly—identities as they were expressed and lived out by a cross section of French priests and bishops between the opening of the Estates General and the signing of the Concordat. Permit me to quote from the Prologue: “I have researched and studied the archival and primary source material to explain the priests of the French Revolution precisely as priests, on the premise that their priestly commitment, with its mutations, is the primary explanation of their behavior.” And, also in the Prologue, I take considerable pains to discuss the Catholic and French traditions of priestly identity up to the Revolution. Accordingly, I have presented my personalities on their own—often in their own words—as well as in their interactions with their religious and political contemporaries. I determined my narrative and footnote strategies to facilitate this presentation: present tense once established in a given letter or sermon (mainly by means of a past tense) for long summaries with quotes, and individual footnoting for all quotes (eschewing the trick of referring to the several quotes within a given paragraph in a single footnote). Real errors in the texts of my books are corrected in a special subsection of my internet site.

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