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Roger Price, *Religious Renewal in France, 1789-1870: The Roman Catholic Church between Catastrophe and Triumph*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 416 pp. \$119.99 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-3-319-67195.

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There is definitely an embarrassment of riches here. In two parts, curiously labelled “L’Église de France” and “A Change of Perspective,” Roger Price takes on his themes: “God’s Church,” “Doctrine,” “Pastoral Care,” “the Protection of Moral Order,” “Saints and Sinners,” “the Practice of Religion,” and “Anti-Clericalism,” the first five belonging to part one and the last two belonging to part two. The title and subtitle would have it that the work is a history of religious renewal in France from 1789 through 1870, going from catastrophe to triumph. The catastrophe began in 1789 with the Revolution, and the triumph presumably came in with the reign of Napoleon III. In part one, Price pairs his portraits of Catholic ecclesiology and churchmanship with archival materials. Most of the theological-pastoral summaries give us the western European Catholicism of the era, but the quotes and the examples that concretize them are from Price’s French archival materials, enhanced by his choice of pastoral letters, sermons, spiritual guides, pamphlets, newspapers, and journals. Most of these, oddly enough, date from years between 1840 and 1860, although some statistical tables cover more, for example priest recruitment across the years.

We should look at the first five chapters that constitute part one to show how this combination works: the broad focus narrative of European Catholic history, paired with the 1840-1860 materials that pertain to France alone. The somewhat lengthy quotes that follow in this review should reveal what I mean by “broad focus” narrative, and readers can decide on the usefulness of this approach for themselves.

In the first titled chapter, “God’s Church” we find a broad presentation of “authority within the church”:

According to Roman Catholic theologians, God had manifested Himself through Christ—the earthly presence of His only Son through whom He had chosen to reveal the Word; the Truth of which was further affirmed when He spoke through ‘His Gospels and divine writings, apostolic tradition, and through the Church, the only guardian, interpreter, and supreme judge of revelation. Inspired by a widespread (re)reading of Saint Augustine’s *La Cité de Dieu*, and centuries-old traditions, theologians and ordinary parish priests believed that, divinely ordained, through doctrine, life and worship, the Church could claim to be the key agent in the transmission of God’s Word, and the means of securing the defeat of Satan and the final victory of Truth over Evil and, at the end of time—heralded by the Second Coming of Christ, the final establishment of the rule of God on earth (p. 12).

Here we are in the aftermath of the Revolution as it were, and quotes from a papal bull of 1794 and a law of 18 germinal, year 10, precede a selection of hierarchical responses to challenges to their authority that date from 1865 (the bishop of Nantes), from 1870 (Prefect of the Aisne), and tales about the appointment of bishops in mid-century (pp. 13–20). The subtopics in this section include the appointment of bishops, the recruitment of priests, educating the clergy, hierarchy and discipline, the

religious orders, and “preserving the fabric” (buildings and furnishings), with most of the examples from 1840–1860. The author provides evidence of the social backgrounds of bishops, priests and members of religious orders, the means of recruitment, and the spiritual, intellectual, and physical elements of seminary life. Finally, church-building goals and obstacles to them are studied.

In chapter three, “Doctrine: The Move Towards Rome,” we find the following introductory paragraph:

The purpose of life, according to the Church, was to serve God and to secure personal Salvation. Life could thus be represented as preparation for death, when all would be judged. Belief in the message delivered by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, together with good works, enabled men and women to seek forgiveness for the Original Sin committed by Adam and to secure relief from the fallen state into which consequently all humans had descended, as well as for personal sin—both grave and thus ‘mortal’, and less severe and ‘venial’. Faith in the risen Christ, and genuine penitence would be rewarded with Divine forgiveness and the gift of Life Everlasting. Unrepentant sinners were, however, threatened with eternal damnation and all the sufferings of Hell—further proof of the power and majesty of the Lord. The struggle between God and Lucifer, between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, was thus dramatized as a means of preserving the faithful from temptation and sin (p. 73).

Here, then, under the rubric of “the move toward Rome,” we find presentations of the lessons of history, the creation of a universal community of faith, the cult of Pius, devotion to Mary, the Syllabus of Errors, and the Vatican Council. The principal vignettes show the problematic relationship of the archbishops of Paris with the papacy and local celebrations of Pius’s proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and the theological contortions of the liberal bishops as they tried to explain Pius’s condemnations of democracy and freedom of conscience.

Chapter four, “Pastoral Care: The Clergy and the People of God,” begins with another broad-focus account:

The meaning and social function of the sacraments was clearly evident within the sacred space of the parish—in which the clergy sanctified the major states in the life of the family and the rituals associated with the worship of God contributed to ‘the processes of community formation’ it was on Sunday in particular, at mass, on a day devoted to God, that Christ’s sacrifice was remembered through the mystery of the Eucharist and reconciliation between Man and God became possible following the prior examination of one’s conscience and confession of sins, by means of penance and forgiveness (p. 114).

This is from the first page of the subtopic on administering the sacraments, followed by reports on childhood socialization, catechizing, confession, preaching, schooling, the religious press, ceremonies, missions, and pilgrimages. The narrative sums up clerical advice on punishing children and confessing details of sexual behavior, preaching, the curé of Ars, and the pilgrimage phenomenon (Lourdes, La Salette) with the role of railways in its success.

In chapter five, “The Protection of the Moral Order,” we read at the beginning:

The fundamental message was simple. Life on Earth was only a brief prelude to the eternal life of the soul. Death was the moment of passage from one world to the next. The ultimate destination—Heaven or Hell—depended on the outcome of a constant and apocalyptic struggle by both individuals and mankind in general against Satan, the Anti-Christ, who through the original sin of Adam and Eve had introduced suffering and death into the world (p.169).

The author then discusses heresy, “materialism,” revolution, achieving perfection, and censorship. He provides detailed accounts of the local and often fraught relationships with the Protestant churches, the

Jewish community, clerical insults of misbehaving parishioners, the glorification of poverty, the attempts to censor major literary works, and Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus*.

In chapter six, "Saints and Sinners," Price immediately provides a name and a setting for his broad-focus—Mgr de la Tour-d'Auvergne speaking to ordinands in 1847:

He [the good curé] should scrupulously perform the rites of the Church, living frugally, practicing charity and love for the sick and poor. Piety and zeal must be combined with virtue. Dignified in his manner, modest in his demeanour, his words and gestures presenting an air of inner calm, serving as the guide and guardian of his flock, and submissive towards his superiors, the priest should be exemplary in his faith and personal behaviour (p. 215).

This is from the first page of the subtopic *Le Bon Prêtre*, and is followed by considerations of fulfilling obligations, priests and local notables, payment of priests, propensity of parishioners to complain, and moral failings. Anecdotes present the wide range of encounters with local authorities, the complaints of parishioners regarding clerical judgement about acceptability for first communions or church funerals. There is ample evidence of the moral failings of the clergy—abuse of children being one of them—in addition to the usual sexual and financial sins.

In the diminutive, but probably more important, second part, Price begins his chapter seven, "The Practice of Religion," with the rationale for the two parts and the methodology to be used:

The Church as an institution as well as the religious message(s) transmitted by its clergy have been considered in previous chapters. The primary concerns of chapters eight and nine will be the religious practices of ordinary believers. [...] A series of questions will be posed concerning the dialectical relationship between clerical representations and the way in which people perceived and made sense of the world in which they lived. Religious beliefs and everyday practice were moreover embedded within particular localized social milieu (communities/parishes), wider social networks (classed) and broader (regional and national) social and political systems. Individuals shared in the perceptions, in the discursive practices, collective norms, and in the *systèmes de représentation* of their family, community, and social and institutional milieu of origin or belonging. Their experiences were mediated by language, ritual and, often, conflicting identities/interests, as well as the varying conceptions of time and place (p. 265).

This is a tall order. But it is one that Price mostly fills, without wearying us by continual specific references to the elements of the methodology at play in any given explanation. Here in chapter seven, we are out of the range of the dogmatic/pastoral sum-ups. The author presents the religious practice of the social elites (consolidation and hope, public display of faith, Christian charity, and popular religion), religious practice in rural France, popular practices and the struggle for survival, industrialization, urbanization, and faith. Vignettes show the pragmatic promotion of religion by social elites who hoped to control the masses as well as their own personal anxieties regarding illness and death—all accompanied by a paternalistic strain of charitable giving. The gamut of superstitions in the countryside is here paired with statistics on the dechristianization accompanying the move to the cities.

Chapter eight, "Anti-Clericalism," although concentrating on the 1840-1860 period, begins by noting the existence of anti-clericalism during the Revolution, under Napoleon, and during the Restoration. The two major subdivisions of the chapter deal with religious practice of the opinion leaders and popular anti-clericalism, with important vignettes of the self-serving use of religion by the upper classes, the recommended manifestations of faith, and charitable foundations—especially the society of St. Vincent de Paul.

For all the riches contained therein, the book is limited by generalities that are too broad and specifics

that are too limited. The author is at his best when his sources are essential, such as the vast repertoire of church going and Easter practice found in the volumes of Fernand Boulard, Jacques Gadille, Yves Hilaire, and Gérard Cholvy, *Matériaux pour l'histoire religieuse du peuple français, XIXe-XXe siècles*, or Ruth Harris's brilliant social and psychological study of Lourdes that still presents it as an irreducibly *religious* phenomenon.[1] Readers will also find attention to questions that are *actuel* today, for example the clerical abuse of the young. Price offers a remarkable cornucopia of material—that embarrassment of riches. But does it justify the title, *Religious Renewal in France, 1789-1870*? This is not a continuing narrative across the years, but a study of individual topics mainly across several decades. Does it justify the subtitle, *The Roman Catholic Church between Catastrophe and Triumph*? We get very little on the “catastrophe,” although I should note that the 1789 Revolution with its aftermath is more fully presented in another Price study, parallel to this one, clearly structured as an ongoing narrative, and published at the same time.[2] Furthermore, it is very difficult to make the case that 1870 brought a “triumph.” The recent study of the First Vatican Council by John O'Malley clearly shows how the “triumph” was hardly a triumph for the French, or any national, church.[3]

In concluding, let me cite two books of a generation ago, touted by Price himself: the Cholvy/Hilaire *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, 1800-1880* and Ralph Gibson's *Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914*. [4] Cholvy and Hilaire study Catholicism as an element of French religion, i.e. in relation to Protestantism and Judaism. For all the elements and methods he lists on page 265 (quoted above), Price does not seem to venture beyond a standard, if mightily enriched, church history. To get in shape, readers might have a look at the Gibson book, or they might begin with Price's other book. Readers who take him on full strength in the present volume will have much to gain, however.

NOTES

[1] I have reviewed one of the Boulard/Cholvy/Hilaire volumes on H-France, but in relation to the other volumes: <https://www.h-France.net/vol12reviews/vol12no67byrnes.pdf> . Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Viking 1999).

[2] Roger Price, *The Church and the State in France, 1789-1870: 'Fear of God is the Basis of Social Order'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[3] John W. O'Malley, *Vatican I: The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2018).

[4] Gérard Cholvy and Yves Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, 1800-1880* (Toulouse: Privat, 1985); Ralph Gibson *Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

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