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**James C. Deming**, *Religion and Identity in Modern France: The Modernization of the Protestant Community in Languedoc, 1815-1848*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1999. xxi + 237 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 (cl). ISBN 0-7618-1382-9.

Review by Sarah A. Curtis, St. Louis University.

In the century between the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the Edict of Toleration in 1787, Protestantism was legally repressed in France, its practitioners harrassed and forced to convert. Given this history of persecution, the nineteenth century should have been a “golden age” for French Protestants, free at last to practice their religion openly and build institutional structures, while enjoying an unprecedented influence in government affairs, especially during the July Monarchy, when several Protestants gained high national office. Yet as James C. Deming shows in *Religion and Identity in Modern France*, the French Reformed Church instead struggled to adapt to the demands of this new age, torn between competing needs for institutional reform and reinforcement of its confessional identity. Faced with the challenges of social and economic change, a new spiritual “awakening,” and an open, voluntary society, French Protestants were as often divided as united in how to respond to the rapidly shifting ground beneath them.

Deming’s archivally-based study focuses on the Huguenot population in Languedoc, the traditional stronghold of French Calvinists since the Wars of Religion. Granted the right to worship in 1598, Huguenots were also geographically limited to particular towns, most of them in the south of France. In the mid-seventeenth century, however, persecution of Protestants increased, and by 1685 Louis XIV’s absolutist government had outlawed Protestant worship and pressured Protestants to undergo Catholic baptism. Although many did so, a significant underground Protestant life continued, resulting in the creation of the French Reformed Church of the Desert in 1715, which institutionalized, albeit illegally, Protestant worship and church structures during this period of persecution. The result of this history, Deming argues, was that by the time the French Revolution emancipated the Protestants, their identity was rooted in confessional difference more than spiritual awareness. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Huguenots of Languedoc were a powerful and close-knit community whose unity had been forged in shared repression, but one whose religious practices had barely evolved since the sixteenth century. Although emancipation was welcomed, it also threatened to undo that very unity by allowing Protestants, like Catholics, free choice in religion, and by unleashing powerful new spiritual forces within Protestantism.

Chief among these was the impact of Methodism and other evangelical movements that came to France via Britain and the United States. In Languedoc, as elsewhere, the chief objective of these movements was to encourage a close personal relationship with God by introducing new forms of worship such as

evening prayer meetings, hymn singing, and Sunday schools. Such grassroots efforts at spiritual renewal formed a clear contrast with the still-rigid forms of Calvinist worship, in which preaching was esoteric, prayers were longwinded, and music obscure. Deming also suggests that the "Réveil," as the evangelical movement was called, appealed to the lower classes and women by allowing for wider participation among worshipers of both sexes and by moving services outside of the hierarchical spaces of most French Protestant churches, where the best pews were rented by the elite and the lower classes were relegated to the back.

To a certain extent, evangelical Protestantism served as a wake-up call to Languedoc Calvinists, forcing them to imitate some of the evangelicals' most popular features in order to retain adherents. When the Methodists opened a chapel in Nîmes, for example, the popularity of their evening services and Sunday school so alarmed the local Protestant consistory that they quickly rented a building on the same street in order to hold similar services. This strategy proved so successful that in short order they were planning for yet another church on the new devotional model, located in a working-class neighborhood. Here, however, the Protestant elite abruptly withdrew funding, afraid, according to Deming, that "providing the working classes with their own building with services distinct in form from those in the other temples might encourage an independence in this class that would further loosen the social bonds holding together the city's Protestants" (p. 81). Deming argues that this same dynamic played out time and again in Languedoc: an initial impetus to reform followed by cold feet and half measures. When push came to shove, confessional unity, forged over two and a half centuries of persecution, almost always trumped reform.

Yet Deming is also at pains to argue that evangelical ideas served as unwitting agents of secularization. Here he finds a paradox: on the one hand, evangelical doctrine was more conservative than the principle of "freedom of inquiry" favored by liberal Protestant theologians, who saw themselves as heirs to Enlightenment thought. On the other hand, evangelicals insisted that believers enter into a freely chosen relationship with God, an approach that favored individual agency over the group identity French Protestants had nurtured through heredity and history. Deming sees this process of active association as one of the steps in the "modernization" of Protestantism in the nineteenth century, which paralleled the shift from corporate to individual identity in other aspects of French politics and culture. In a society where individuals were free to believe or not believe, Protestantism could only thrive, Deming implies, if its members made voluntary commitments to their faith. Protestant churches in the nineteenth century were destined to become free associations of individuals, and the evangelical awakening furthered this transformation.

Protestants also "modernized" by demonstrating their social utility in a period of rapid socioeconomic transformation. In Languedoc, they did so chiefly by expanding their charitable efforts on behalf of lower-class Protestants, especially primary schools and hospitals. In part, this was a defense mechanism in response to the nineteenth-century renewal of Catholic charity. Protestants complained that the monopoly of Catholic nuns over hospital facilities, for example, meant that Protestants were at risk of religious harassment while ill and dying. Increases in charitable giving also resulted from the changed social and political landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century. As the working classes grew, Protestant elites, like elites all over France, sought to use charity as a means of social control. In the years before the Revolution of 1848, when times were hard in Languedoc, charitable giving increased dramatically. Expanded social and voluntary institutions, from orphanages to old-age homes, Deming argues, acted as new sites of Protestant identity.

James C. Deming has done us a valuable service by unveiling the conflicts and actions of French Protestants in nineteenth-century Languedoc. The book, however, suffers from a number of limitations, both small and large. It is riddled with grammatical and typographical errors that should have been eliminated during copyediting if not before. There is some repetition of ideas as the book moves between a chronological and thematic format. Although the title implies that the book covers a relatively short time period, 1815 to 1848, it has considerable background material on the Old Regime, Revolutionary, and Napoleonic periods, and many of the nineteenth-century examples are drawn from the Second Empire. The advent of the Third Republic, with its deliberate policy of secularization, in fact would appear to be a more significant turning point in Protestant (as in Catholic) history than 1848. The table-heavy opening “context” chapter that details the social, demographic, and economic structure of nineteenth-century Languedoc would warm the heart of a French *directeur de thèse* but is barely integrated with the issues discussed in later chapters. Deming begins his preface with a brief allusion to the traditional association of Protestantism with the French Left that continues to this day (Lionel Jospin, for example, is Protestant), but this never becomes a theme in his book, which is often narrowly focused on institutional conflicts and Protestant in-fighting.

The broadest context Deming employs for his story is that of the Protestant spiritual awakening in early nineteenth-century America and Britain, and this adds considerable interest and scope to his narrative. He could, however, have profitably extended this kind of comparison to French Catholicism beyond the occasional discussion of Protestant-Catholic conflict in Languedoc. In the post-Revolutionary religious landscape, despite the obvious inequities of scale, the Catholic and Protestant churches faced quite similar challenges. Some of those challenges came from outside forces, especially industrialization and democratization. But others came from a religious seismic shift from Old Regime confessional allegiance to nineteenth-century voluntary association. Despite their overwhelming majority status, the Catholic church could not assume blind allegiance to the faith among nominal Catholics any more than could Protestants; indeed, the events of the Revolution had shown them how superficial that faith often was. Like Protestants, Catholics sought to increase their influence over the working-classes through charity and education. Many Catholics, like evangelical Protestants, sought a deeper spiritual awareness that manifested itself in devotions and pilgrimage. And nineteenth-century Catholic churches, like many Methodist revival meetings, became spaces where women predominated. Catholics, of course, are not Deming’s subject, but broader attention to these issues could have provided a larger and more vibrant context for his research. Nevertheless, given the paucity of books on French Protestants, we should be grateful for this solidly researched study that opens the door to many other possibilities.

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