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Annette Chapman-Adisho, *Patriot and Priest: Jean-Baptiste Volfius and the Constitutional Church in the Côte-d'Or*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. xxvi + 246 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$120.00 U.S (hb). ISBN 978-0-7735-5870-0; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7735-5871-7.

Review by Edward J. Woell, Western Illinois University.

This book appears to have several tracks. On one of them, it traces the ecclesiastical career of Jean-Baptiste Volfius, the constitutional bishop of Dijon who and went on to oversee not only his church in the Côte-d'Or Department but also the remnants of that institution between Year IV and the Concordat of 1801. On another, however, the book documents the two clerical sides of the schism created by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, albeit with more emphasis on the constitutional clergy within this one department. On still another track, while it purports to not look at the "national" stage (p. 8), the book does exactly that through a narrative that incorporates national religious legislation and attempts by leading prelates to reestablish Catholicism after the Terror.[1] The intent of the book is to present "a regional case study of the constitutional church, supplementing several regional studies of the revolution's religious history that have appeared since the bicentennial" (p. 8). Although the study's comprehensive argument seems somewhat opaque (more on this later), Annette Chapman-Adisho proposes that the story "demonstrates the challenges, opportunities, reversals, and changes of heart that made up life in the revolution's first decade" (p. 9).

Consisting of ten chapters as well as a conclusion and epilogue, Chapman-Adisho's book follows a conventional chronology, beginning with the creation of the new diocese of Dijon in 1731. The author traces the convoluted process for establishing this see, which was made possible by the expanding economic promise of northern Burgundy, and yet was also complicated by competing rights and privileges among ecclesiastical entities in Dijon and Langres. Although Chapman-Adisho states near the end of the first chapter that "the creation of the diocese of Dijon underscores the understanding that the local is key to understanding the early modern French Church" (p. 23), it is not necessarily clear how this creation contributed to the dynamics of religious politics in and around Dijon once the Revolution began.

The second and third chapters recount political and religious developments in Dijon and its surrounding countryside leading up to, and resulting from, the outbreak of revolution in the summer of 1789. Volfius, a Jesuit who maintained his position as professor in the collège de Godrans in Dijon after his order's suppression, established his revolutionary *bona fides* as a chaplain for the town's nascent bourgeois militia in 1789. As the Constituent Assembly turned

its attention toward an array of ecclesiastical reforms in 1790, among the bishops firmly rejecting the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was Dijon's own René des Monstiers de Mérimville. He was among the thirty bishops that endorsed *l'Exposition des principes*, the infamous pamphlet that rallied opposition to the new reforms. Despite the approximately 62 percent of the public functioning clergy in the Côte-d'Or that took the 1791 Ecclesiastical Oath, and Volfius receiving an almost unanimous vote in his election as constitutional bishop, his episcopacy was troubled from the start. Chapman-Adisho indicates that the department's relatively high oath-taking rate belied the actual situation on the ground. Many of the department's priests took the 1791 Oath with restrictions, and even some of those who did not qualify their oath refused to read Volfius's initial pastoral letters to their parishioners. It is here where this study is most valuable, for it counters a widely held historiographical view that when it came to this oath, there supposedly was "no middle ground, no room for compromise or ambiguity, or the maneuvering of consciences. You could be only be for or against, a patriot or a counterrevolutionary."^[2] While national politics surely fed this perception, Chapman-Adisho shows that it runs counter what was unfolding in many communities of the Côte-d'Or, where the 1791 Oath meant little to most rural Catholics, and the clergy itself was wont to straddle the two warring sides.

Chapters four and five address the organization of the department's Constitutional Church and what Chapman-Adisho terms the "first terror" aimed at the clergy (p. 11): a series of laws regarding religion hastily passed by the lame-duck Legislative Assembly after the fall of the monarchy in the late summer of 1792. One key issue confronting Volfius, in keeping with the Civil Constitution's reforms, was the circumscription of parishes in the city of Dijon. Eventually, four of its parishes (Saint-Nicolas, Saint-Etienne, Saint-Jean, and Saint-Philibert) were closed while three others were retained (Saint-Michel, Notre Dame, and Saint-Bénigne). Yet it took two national laws—one passed in May of 1791 and another a year later—to effect these closures. Chapman-Adisho claims that implementing these reforms "required negotiation with the people who saw their parishes and clergy as a community interest," and that redrawing parish boundaries in Dijon indicated "a broad degree of support" for these reforms (p. 64). But given Chapman-Adisho's adept recognition of the social importance of these local institutions, it is questionable whether many of the people in Dijon's four closed parishes would have agreed with the author's assessment.^[3] As for the 1792 legislation and subsequent establishment of the republic, Chapman-Adisho suggests that Volfius seemed more accommodating of the new set of laws than other constitutional bishops. Unlike many of his colleagues, moreover, he was reluctant to respond to or involve himself in wider revolutionary events, including the execution of Louis XVI in January of 1793.

The five remaining chapters center on dechristianization in the Côte-d'Or in late 1793 and early 1794 as well as on national and local efforts to revive what was left of constitutional Catholicism after the Terror. Due to the diligence of several representatives-on-mission, most notably Bernard de Saintes, the Côte-d'Or became an exemplar of state-imposed dechristianization (albeit with the complicity of anticlerical locals). The department saw relatively high numbers of clerical abdications and resignations, including those of its chief pastor, Bishop Volfius, as well as numerous clerical marriages. Chapman-Adisho argues that Volfius's decisions in Year II must be understood within the context of the severe duress he faced as well as his desire to sacrifice his own public standing for the sake of preserving what was left of the department's Constitutional Church. The two years that followed the Terror saw a nationwide effort to build a Gallican Church on the smoldering ruins of its constitutional predecessor. Central to these efforts were the Reunited Bishops (*Évêques Réunis*) led by Royer, Saurine, Debois de Rochefort, and Grégoire.

Discussion of their endeavors by Chapman-Adisho is one example among several in the latter part of the book where a national narrative brusquely interrupts a more regional one. Returning again to the departmental context, we learn that Volfius reasserted himself as bishop in July of 1795, yet found himself no less plagued by a constitutional-refractory divide in his diocese. Moreover, some constitutional priests within the department faced renewed repression when they tried to resume their liturgies; this key finding shows how despite the Thermidorian backlash and the supposed religious liberty decree in February of 1795, a more latent form of revolutionary anticlericalism persisted in Burgundy (as it did in some other regions in France).

During the second half of the Revolution, Volfius maintained close epistolary ties to the abbé Grégoire that reveal, according to Chapman-Adisho, how the Dijon pastor occasionally took issue with decisions made by the Reunited Bishops. In the waning years of the Revolution, Volfius sought reconciliation with those belonging to the refractory side of the French Church, and he would have broached the subject with Pius VI had the pontiff not died before reaching Dijon in 1799. At the same time, however, Volfius favored conciliar church governance and accordingly held a synod for his own diocese in 1800, which sought to place Catholicism in the Côte-d'Or on a stronger institutional foundation. Meanwhile, two national councils—one in 1799 that Volfius attended and the other in 1801 that he did not—aspired to solidify the Gallican Catholic Church and clarify its teaching and practice. Yet, Chapman-Adisho shows that after the announcement and then promulgation of the Concordat of 1801 Volfius willingly stepped down as bishop and later underscored his support for his concordatory successor, Henri Reymond.

This book is built on a solid foundation of research, gleaned from numerous archives in the Côte-d'Or and well beyond it. Moreover, sound reliance on secondary sources can be found on almost every page. While the book's regional approach may strike some as staid, within these traditional confines stands a solid analysis. A few notable errors can be found in the book's wording and substance, yet these seem exceptional among otherwise reliable writing and research.[4] Nevertheless, it may be difficult for some scholars to surmise how this book might alter, modify, or supplement our current understanding of the French Revolution—in part because any comprehensive argument that would help answer this pivotal question is fleeting. Though there is much evidence for the “opportunities and challenges,” as well as the “resourcefulness and persistence” (pp. 154-155) of the Côte-d'Or's constitutional clerics, largely left on the table is what these matters might mean for our grasp of not just one region or the sole realm of religion, but rather the Revolution as a whole.

NOTES

[1] Much of the book appears to be based on the author's more expansive dissertation, “Patriotic Priests: Constitutional Clergy in the Department of the Côte-d'Or during the French Revolution” (PhD diss., University of Illinois-Chicago, 2006), which is also characterized by the three tracks of narrative noted here.

[2] Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 25.

[3] In fairness to the author on this matter, Chapman-Adisho explains that the May 1792 circumscription decree for Dijon stipulated that Saint-Nicolas' church and the Cordeliers' former

chapel would become *succursales* or subsidiary churches, which seems to have placated some of the people in two of the parishes (Saint-Nicolas and Saint-Pierre) eliminated.

[4] Among the typographical or syntactical errors is a reference on page 12, line 5, to “Chapter 9” that seemingly should read “Chapter 8.” On a more substantive level, my own research in the Côte d’Or suggests that the description of an incident in Is-sur-Tille, as found on page 113, is flawed. The citizen at issue, Jacques Baron Couvreur, did not remove a cross from the burg’s bell tower (there would have not been one there at that point in light of the republican policy of *laïcité* and the church having become a *maison nationale*); rather, he “re-placed” (“*remplacer*,” which admittedly may seem to us like a poor verb choice) a cross where one had previously hung. The document in question (L1161/19 Departmental Archives of the Cote-d’Or [ADCO]), included an order “[q]ue la croix placée sur le sommet du clocher de la maison nationale sera enlevée, qu'en conséquence il est enjoint au citoyen Baron Couvreur qui s'est rendu coupable d'une infraction à la loi en placent lui-même cette croix, d'exécuter à cet regard les ordres qui lui seront donnés.” In other words, since Baron Couvreur illegally put up the cross on the bell tower, local officials were to order him to take it down.

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