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Arthur McCalla, *Religion and the Post-revolutionary Mind: Idéologues, Catholic Traditionalists, and Liberals in France*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023. xi + 449 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$130.00 CAD (hb) ISBN 9780228016588; \$130.00 CAD (eb). ISBN 978022801660, ISBN 9780228016595.

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Scholars of the French Revolution have long been attentive to the many ways in which religion was implicated in the upheaval, from the preparation of the Estates General and the proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to Napoleon Bonaparte's restoration of the legal practice of religion with the Concordat of 1801 and the Organic Articles of 1802. Narratives that once privileged the revolutionaries' anticlericalism and irreligion, which reached an apogee during the Terror's dechristianization campaigns, now attend more to the religious and ecclesiastical chaos that revolutionary measures provoked. If Napoleon's ecclesiastical policies restored a certain sense of order, there was still no consensus on the underlying question of religion's place in French political and social life, neither under Napoleon, nor even during the Bourbon Restoration.

Arthur McCalla's monograph invites scholars to look closely at and reflect on how French thinkers grappled with such questions about religion during the "post-revolutionary" era, which he defines as the period running from the Directory's founding in 1795 to the Bourbon Restoration's collapse in 1830. Examining the writings and activities of both better-known—for example, Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Louis de Bonald, Benjamin Constant, Félicité de Lammenais—and lesser-known French intellectuals—for example, Ferdinand d'Eckstein, Théodore Jouffroy, Constantin-François Volney—, McCalla seeks to revitalize scholarly interest in early nineteenth-century French intellectual history while also underscoring how central the category of religion was to these men. Indeed, not only did they debate religion's relevance for present-day French society and politics, but these thinkers also sought to ground their positions in historico-philosophical reflections on the nature of religion itself, especially prior to the emergence of Christianity. Although McCalla's focus is on French intellectual thought, he adroitly notes that these discussions did not occur in a vacuum. In particular, French thinkers routinely engaged with contemporary German research on religion, from Friedrich Creuzer's pioneering work on symbolism and myth to Friedrich Schlegel's studies of ancient Indic languages and religion.

As the book's subtitle intimates, McCalla frames his inquiry in terms of an extended discourse among three intellectual groups. The *Idéologues*, prominent during the Directory, the Consulate, and early Empire, set the opening terms of the debate with their critiques of religion and their secularist understandings of the state. In response, Catholic thinkers mounted a defense of

(revealed) religion, contending that it was the authority of tradition that permitted humankind to receive knowledge, not unaided reason. During the Bourbon Restoration (1815-1830), liberal intellectuals joined the debate, critiquing both the *Idéologue* positions and the more recent views of Catholic traditionalists. Although McCalla is correct to state that these three positions are in conversation with one another, it should also be noted that by the 1810s the *Idéologues* have dropped out as active participants; there are few *Idéologue* responses to early Catholic traditionalists (notably Louis de Bonald) and none to French liberals.

To explore these three camps, McCalla has organized the volume in terms of six parts. Each part is devoted to a particular intellectual current and follows a similar tripartite structure. A first chapter provides biographical and historical context for the movement in question. A second chapter examines the thinkers' views on religion via a close reading of key texts. Finally, a third chapter explores some of the political and social consequences of this theorization of religion. Part one is devoted to the *Idéologues*, above all as represented by Destutt de Tracy and Volney. Working from their notion of *idéologie*—which we can understand as the primacy of sense-based knowledge—*Idéologues* categorically rejected theological dogma and ritual. In keeping with Enlightenment-era notions of the state of nature, they dismissed the idea that humans were innately religious; hence, religion was solely the product of human action. Based on these ideas, *Idéologues* maintained that society should liberate itself from religion and that the (French) state should actively promote that liberation, for example, in its educational policies. McCalla's attention to Volney in this part, however, is odd. While there is little doubt of his *Idéologue* credentials, the texts that McCalla uses to discuss Volney's contributions to this discourse are not at all post-revolutionary: *Voyage en Syrie et en Egypte* was published in 1787 and *Les ruines, ou Méditations sur les révolutions des empires* first appeared in 1791.

In the next two parts, McCalla turns to the Catholic traditionalist rebuttal. Part two explores one strain, which he calls the “sociological traditionalism” of Louis de Bonald, a counter-revolutionary and theocratic posture that viewed God as the source of all knowledge and posited that (true) religious sentiment was essential to the preservation of civil society. Accordingly, after 1815, Bonald advocated a re-Christianization of French state and society. To buttress these positions, he also turned towards history, arguing that religion was indeed natural and possessed fundamental truths, which were then perfected (and made public) through the emergence of Jewish monotheism and, finally, Christianity. Idolatry, paganism, and atheism, by contrast, were corruptions of “true” religion. Part three takes up the other main strain, the “theological traditionalism” of Lamennais and his followers. Like Bonald, Lamennais condemned the modern error of placing individual reason over revelation. But whereas the layman Bonald sought to identify the (religious) laws and principles for a properly constituted society, the cleric Lamennais sought to subordinate “modern science and social science to revealed dogma” to “reconcile natural knowledge and revealed truth” (pp. 156-157). In his theory of religion, Lamennais recognized the vestiges of primitive revelation in many of the world's (ancient) religions, but still held that history confirmed the truth of the Catholic religion. Finally, while Bonald envisioned a world in which a proper balance was struck between Catholicism and monarchy, by the 1820s Lamennais embraced an “intransigent ultramontanism” that “demanded a total subordination of society to the spiritual power”, while also calling on the church to be an engine of social progress (p. 183).

Parts four and five examine the Restoration-era critique by liberals of both Catholic traditionalism and the *Idéologue* heritage. Part four, dedicated to what McCalla terms “statist

liberalism,” investigates a group of intellectuals, sometimes described as “doctrinaires” (a political term), sometimes as *Globistes* (because of their connections to the liberal *Le Globe* journal). Such thinkers as Maine de Biran, Victor Cousin, and Théodore Jouffroy rejected *Idéologue* sensationalism on both epistemological and political grounds, but also Catholic traditionalists’ blind deference to revelation. Wanting neither the old religion nor no religion, these liberals hoped to see Christianity replaced with a new, laicized and rational spiritualism, a position they felt accorded with broader patterns of historical development. However, whereas the doctrinaires shared with *Idéologues* a dirigiste approach to religious policy that subordinated individuals’ and corporations’ liberties to the “sovereignty of reason”, the *Globistes* tended to prioritize a more neutral state, even defending Lamennais’ criticisms of church and state towards the end of the Restoration (p. 244). This more tolerant vision of the relationship between religion and civil society was also shared by Benjamin Constant, whose “pluralist liberalism” is the subject of part five. Constant, McCalla points out, was keenly interested in religious questions. During his years in exile in the German lands, he increasingly drew on German theology and philosophy to develop his ideas on ancient polytheism, culminating in his magnum opus, *De la religion, considérée dans sa source, ses forms et ses développements*. In this text, Constant rejected Enlightenment and *Idéologue* notions about religion, accepting instead that religion was innate to human nature. Nonetheless, if religious sentiment was universal, its formal manifestations were historical in nature. Like his doctrinaire and *Globaliste frères*, McCalla stresses, Constant saw religion as a potentially progressive force and proposed that a new form of “nonsacerdotal religion would be the most appropriate form for post-Revolutionary France” (p. 303). Similarly, Constant advocated for total religious liberty, a position that distanced him from many other liberals, but also Catholic traditionalists.

McCalla does not give the last word, however, to the liberals. Rather, in part six he returns to Catholic traditionalism, where he explores what he calls the “Orientalist traditionalism” of Ferdinand d’Eckstein. In many respects, this is the most innovative of McCalla’s explorations. Unlike the other intellectuals in this study, Eckstein grew up and attended university in the German lands. Under the influence of Schlegel, he converted from Judaism to Roman Catholicism, arriving in France only in 1816. Schlegel also remained a major intellectual influence on Eckstein, leading the latter to appreciate the importance of ancient oriental texts for western thought and religious history and develop a new method for studying ancient mythology. These developments are especially evident in the pieces Eckstein wrote for *Le Catholique*, a journal he edited between 1826 and 1829. Convinced that Catholics needed to engage with modern ideas to “Catholicize them”, Eckstein also used the journal to critique liberal views on religion and its place in contemporary society (p. 375). If, anticipating Lammenais’ post-1830 liberal Catholicism, Eckstein felt that it would be best to separate church and state, he insisted that the church continued to have a key role in spiritualizing society.

Overall, there is much to admire in this volume. McCalla has a fine command of his subjects and writes clearly about their ideas, with the result that the reader not only gains valuable insight into French contributions to the emerging discipline of the history of religions, but also can see the intimate place that discussions about religion had in early nineteenth-century epistemological reflection. Clearly, Owen Chadwick’s famous “secularization of the European mind” was still some time off.[1] The study also has the great merit of opening up new perspectives on the debates, primarily during the Restoration, over the relations among religion, state, and society, above all by calling attention to the broader intellectual context in which these debates unfolded.

Yet, many readers will find themselves frustrated by a number of McCalla's choices vis-à-vis the book's structure. The overly brief introduction neglects to establish either a clear historiographical agenda or an overarching argument for the study. Even at the level of the individual parts, he makes little effort to propose, much less develop, an argumentative framework. None of the chapters provide any sort of true conclusion; they just end. While the tripartite division of each part achieves a certain structural clarity, this comes at the cost of rhetorical coherence, a weakness that is especially evident in part four (on "statist liberalism"). McCalla's take on the general conclusion is also curious, for instead of weaving together the multiple threads of his analyses into a coherent whole, he wishes to sketch out the respective afterlives of the *Idéologue*, Catholic traditionalist, and liberal positions, at least as they relate to subsequent political discussions. This takes him rather far afield from the evidence presented in the rest of the monograph; it also suggests that the book's rich exploration of epistemological questions and the study of ancient religions is ultimately of secondary importance. Finally, the decision to streamline the book's footnotes by only referring to works by short titles (even for the first reference!) is exasperating. It would have been preferable to have had endnotes rather than this half measure which obliges the reader to go back and forth between the main text and the bibliography. These concerns notwithstanding, scholars with an interest in early nineteenth-century European intellectual history and religion will find much food for thought in McCalla's study.

NOTES

[1] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

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