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Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, Eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. viii + 368 pp. Notes, illustrations, annotated bibliography, and index. \$70.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-8-997-5.

Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf, Eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. ix + 234 pp. Notes and indices. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-81493-6.

Review by Sarah A. Curtis, San Francisco State University.

Religion is once again making headlines in Europe, from the debate over whether to include a reference to God or Christian values in the new European Union constitution to the assimilation of Muslims into European society. Just when many Europeans appeared to have stabilized into some sort of post-Christian status-quo, seemingly settled issues regarding the relationship between church and state and the social role of religion have been reopened by integration, immigration, and global politics. In France, a country whose Christian practice is now one of the lowest in Europe,^[1] the conflict over the right of Muslim girls to wear headscarves in class has been cast in almost identical language--and on the same contested site of the school--as in religious/secular battles of the past. In this atmosphere, then, of revived tension around religion, two new essay collections published by Cambridge University Press promise welcome historical perspective on the European religious experience in the modern period.

The first, *Culture Wars*, examines conflicts between liberals and Catholics in ten countries (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Hungary) between approximately 1850 and 1920. The volume opens with two overview essays by its editors, one on the "new Catholicism" by Christopher Clark, and the other on the rise of European anticlericalism by Wolfram Kaiser. By the late nineteenth century, the authors contend, these two distinct but equally transformative processes met head to head in "culture wars" that "embraced virtually every sphere of social life" (p. 1). Usually approached in the context of national politics, the two opening essays provide useful perspective on the international aspects of both the Catholic revival and the anticlerical response that bolster the editors' claim that the culture wars were a pan-European phenomenon. On the Catholic side, there was a significant grassroots upsurge in religious devotion all over the continent that manifested itself in "extra-sacerdotal forms of worship and experience" like pilgrimage, visionary encounters, and mass veneration (p. 17). At the same time, the growth of ultramontane piety meant more direction from above, eclipsing the national churches in the process. The Roman Church used the new communications medium of the mass circulation newspaper to promote its agenda and unify Catholics across national borders. Over time, this press presented an increasingly "binary worldview" (p. 39) that exacerbated the culture wars by demonizing the other side. But Clark rejects the argument that "Catholic mobilisation hindered or delayed processes of political modernisation in the European states" (p. 45), highlighting instead its broad appeal to Europeans in an age of mass democracy. In Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Italy, Catholic political action resulted in the development of actual political parties; everywhere, he contends, Catholics used "modern" techniques of communication, public demonstration, association, and education to advance their cause, as well as drawing women into political action.

Kaiser's essay on anticlericalism also serves to highlight the "European dimension" of the culture wars, often lost in the specifics of national histories (p. 49). He argues that anticlericals in different European countries developed a common intellectual foundation through the translation of key texts; that they

made contacts across borders and consciously adopted models from other countries; and that “the energies generated by conflict in one state raised the emotional temperature among anticlericals in other states” (p. 65). Kaiser also surveys the main anticlerical agents (liberals, freemasons, socialists) as well as their propaganda points (rationality, freedom, education) and their scapegoats (the papacy, Jesuits). He finds proof of the commonalities among anticlerical campaigns in the strikingly similar visual imagery used to caricature and criticize Catholicism, especially the Pope and the Jesuits. Anticlericalism, in short, was not just a convenient political movement growing out of the needs of particular national parties and an intellectual elite, but a pan-European movement with a common belief system, vocabulary, and social roots. Like the new Catholicism, it developed a binary “friend-foe schema” over time (p. 75), which further polarized Europeans into two camps.

After these fine comparative opening essays, however, this volume is strictly a “if this is Belgium, it must be chapter 4” kind of book. Organized around national case studies, interesting points of comparison exist, but by and large the work of teasing them out belongs to the reader, as few authors refer explicitly to other national histories, except to the extent to which smaller nations looked to anticlericalism in France or the Kulturkampf in Germany as models for reform or examples to avoid. Contrasts, of course, abound: countries with large catholic majorities versus those with both Catholics and Protestants, centralized states versus decentralized ones, monarchies versus republics, agricultural economies versus industrialized ones, and so on. But some similar motifs show up as well: the role of the Jesuits, for example, or the cult of the Sacred Heart, in popularizing a new kind of Catholicism. And almost everywhere the sites of contestation were the same: the school, religious processions, civil marriage, and burial, to name a few.

The essay on France, by James McMillan, combines a general outline of the “origins and faultlines” (p. 81) of the republican-Catholic conflict with a case study of an episode in the school war in the diocese of Rennes in Brittany. McMillan reminds the reader that his purpose is not to review the well-known legislative war, but to examine the “culture war on the ground, in order to demonstrate that the culture war was fought not just between a bourgeois intelligentsia (republican and Catholic) in the forum of parliament and the national press but also involved ordinary people, both villagers and priests, in obscure corners of provincial France” (p. 77). Although McMillan acknowledges that the mythic vision of a war between republican and Catholic France that opened with the Revolution and that had its final showdown after 1877 has been nuanced and revised by recent historiography, he still finds that “the war of the two Frances’ is a concept which retains a good deal of validity” (p. 80), especially in the way that it politicized local conflicts at just the same moment that France was developing a stable democratic state.

McMillan traces the origins of this war first to the disestablishment and persecution of the catholic church during the Revolution and then to the revival of Catholicism in the nineteenth century. He briefly sketches the contours of that revival—ultramontane Catholicism exemplified by figures such as Louis Veuillot, increased belief in miracles and apparitions, and the rise in devotion to the cult of the Sacred Heart—as well as its opposite, the rise of thinkers and societies devoted to free thought and the *idée laïque*. But, he argues, the most important battles of the war were on the ground in confrontations between priests and villagers. His short case study of Brittany highlights one such conflict, using documents from the diocese of Rennes, including the example of a Catholic priest who insulted and assaulted a young girl transferring from a congregational to a lay school (and was subsequently put on trial) as a way of showing clerical resistance to the Goblet Law of 1886 that laicized school personnel. The case is illustrative in a number of respects and McMillan uses it skillfully to highlight various aspects of anticlerical-Catholic conflict on the local level. But it confirms rather than questions the traditional view of the *guerre scolaire* during the early Third Republic. Like many such accounts, the outcome has an air of inevitability and the lack of any documentary evidence from the Catholic side rather gives the impression of one hand clapping.^[2] But McMillan’s objective, as is perhaps natural for a volume of this kind, appears to be less to break new ground than to sum up the main issues of the

culture war in France while incorporating one ground-level study to give readers some idea how the conflict was actually lived by individuals at the time.

Indeed, most of the country studies in the collection take precisely that same form—a general overview plus a case study—which makes it an excellent teaching volume, more useful in some ways outside of one's national field than within it. (An annotated bibliography is also a welcome resource.) Especially useful are contributions on the culture wars in smaller or more remote European countries that are often neglected in narratives of nineteenth-century Europe: Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary. The essay on Belgium, by Els Witte, for example, describes the “ideological civil war” over educational control that took place between 1879 and 1884 and that had a very different outcome than in France. In Belgium, catholics emerged stronger than ever and the liberals in disarray, a lesson learned, Witte suggests, by Jules Ferry who “took a much more cautious approach” in secularization, having witnessed the backlash that a more radical policy engendered in Belgium (p. 128). The example of Belgium can serve, then, as a reminder to French historians that the outcome of the Third Republic's culture wars was not preordained.

The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe is a slighter, yet wider ranging, volume that brings together a dozen papers by historians, theologians, and sociologists from the last of three conferences held in the 1990s under the auspices of the Missiology of Western Culture Project. Its central premise is that, although christianity may still survive in Europe, the period of “Christendom,” when close ties between religion and state or religion and society still existed, is now over. The papers in this collection examine the later stages of this decline (after 1750) as well as attempt to find an explanation for it. But if one theme ties them together, it is a critique of the most common explanatory system, the “secularization thesis,” which contends that societies lose religious practice and belief as they modernize. The question that remains, however, is whether there exists any other overarching explanation that can replace it.

The first set of essays in this volume start at the end, so to speak, by examining developments since the 1960s. Unfortunately for historians of France, none of them deal directly with the French experience, though some of the theory, methods, and conclusions can be profitably compared to the French case. Collum G. Brown's essay, “The Secularisation Decade: The 1960s,” based on evidence from England, Scotland, and Wales, argues that this decade was the watershed period of dechristianization to which all earlier periods (the Enlightenment, for example, or the late nineteenth century) pale in comparison. In his view, no other period can lay claim to such “genuine secularisation,” (p. 35) and therefore the concept cannot apply to earlier historical periods nor could historians before the 1960s even begin to understand what it meant. Only now do Europeans (or at least the British) live in a truly secularized society and permanently so. In his essay entitled “New Christianity, indifference and diffused spirituality,” Yves Lambert, a French sociologist, however, proposes a conception of “modernity” as a “new axial age” comparable to the one in which the “religions of salvation” (Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam) replaced polytheistic faiths (p. 65). His reading of the data from the European Values Study shows not only a trend towards religious decline but also “a movement of christian revival and the development of an autonomous spirituality” among young people, that he terms “ultra-modernity” (pp. 71-72). Christianity—or at least religious beliefs or practice under that label—might flourish, his interpretation suggests, even without Christendom.

Two essays in the historical section (parts 2 and 3) are directly concerned with France: Thomas Kselman on “The dechristianisation of death in modern France” and the late Michel Lagrée on “The impact of technology on Catholicism in France.” Although both authors are well known for their pioneering work on nineteenth-century Catholicism,^[3] their essays here, like all those in the volume, are brief (12-15 pages on average) and therefore give little more than the main outlines of the issues they raise. Kselman examines cemeteries as *lieux de mémoire*, to use Pierre Nora's now classic term (though he correctly points out that Nora neglects both cemeteries in particular and religious sites of memory in general) in order to argue that the use of Christian symbolism in death survived even while

church practice and influence was eroding in other ways. Even during the most anticlerical phase of the Third Republic, most French still chose to be buried under Christian crosses, which then became symbols of national mourning and trauma in the war cemeteries of World War I. "The cemeteries of France," he writes, "became a kind of training ground, a contentious terrain at times, but one which and through which the French eventually worked out an understanding of death that accommodated Christian belief and symbol with a devotion to family, village, and nation" (p. 156). Although Victor Hugo insisted on a civil funeral and burial in 1885 (a rite that attracted one million spectators), a century later François Mitterrand chose a Catholic funeral in the Cathedral of Notre Dame balanced by a separate political remembrance at the Place de la Bastille. Kselman argues finally that the persistence of Christian crosses in the contemporary French cemetery, however "inchoate" their possible meanings (p. 158), has to be taken into consideration before France is written off as dechristianized.

Michel Lagrée's contribution examines the role technological advancements have played in French Catholicism, rejecting a simplistic view that technology has been "inevitably the main agent of the world's disenchantment" (p. 179). Beginning in the nineteenth century French Catholics exploited new technologies to their own advantage: railways and then airplanes delivered the faithful to new pilgrimage sites; newspapers, radio, and eventually television spread the message of the Gospel; and new building technologies changed the physical structure of churches. But Lagrée also shows that many clerics had ambivalent feelings towards the new technology, worrying about the effect of electrical lighting on the symbolism of liturgical candles, for example, or, debating the merits of linen ritual dress in a world of cheap cotton textiles. He also briefly explores the ways by which technology upheld a spiritual world view, however unorthodox to Catholic clerics, by citing "the almost religious aspect surrounding new technologies" and "the spirit of the supernatural and of wonder" they introduced (p. 170). His conclusion is a plea for a more complex understanding of two specialized disciplines: the history of technology and the history of religion.

But perhaps the most thought-provoking essay of the entire volume is Jeffrey Cox's "Master narratives of long-term religious change," echoes of which can be found in both Hugh McLeod's introduction and Callum Brown's argument that religious history needs to take a postmodernist turn that would expose secularization is a "false theory," a "false narrative," and a "false discourse" (p. 40). Cox argues that "secularisation is an invocatory theory, operating as a kind of stage set in the background of all intellectual effort to understand religion" (p. 205). He readily acknowledges that many historians have worked to undermine secularization as an explanatory theory but contends that as a "master narrative," the secularization story still "remains in the background to fill in the gaps of the historian's narrative" (p. 207). Even such seemingly minor word usages as claiming that "only" a certain percentage of Europeans engage in a religious belief or practice invokes the master narrative of inevitable decline. In part, Cox speaks here of the more general discussion of modern religion as held in the press or among non-specialists, but he challenges historians of religion to use their growing body of detailed research to "envisage an alternative master narrative to account for modern religious history" (p. 209).

What would such an alternative narrative look like in French history? Would it de-emphasize the "two Frances" that historians like McMillan still see as useful paradigms for the nineteenth century? Would it focus more on the continuity of Christian culture, as Kselman describes for death practices, than on the sharp rhetorical differences between Catholics and anticlericals? Would it find that those differences and the public demonstrations and violence that sometimes accompanied them were simply a part of a different master narrative, such as the participation of the lower classes in political action, as Christopher Clark suggests, regardless of whether they sided with the *curé* or the mayor? In the last decade, modern French religious history has shown enormous vitality, but the wealth of interesting scholarship in this field has not always influenced the larger interpretive framework of French national development. By putting the French case in a larger context, both these volumes challenge us to think in new ways about the role of religion in the modern French nation and the way that "master narratives" have shaped that interpretation.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Eds. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser.

- Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, "Introduction: The European culture wars."
- Christopher Clark, "The New Catholicism and the European culture wars."
- Wolfram Kaiser, "Clericalism – that is our enemy!": European anticlericalism and the culture wars."
- James McMillan, "‘Priest hits girl’: on the front line in the ‘war of the two Frances.’"
- Els Witte, "The battle for monasteries, cemeteries and schools: Belgium."
- Peter Jan Margry and Henk te Velde, "Contested rituals and the battle for public space: the Netherlands."
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The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000, Eds. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf.

- Hugh McLeod, "Introduction."
- Callum G. Brown, "The secularisation decade: what the 1960s have done to the study of religious history."
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- Peter Van Rooden, "Long-term religious developments in the Netherlands, c. 1750-2000."
- Martin Greschat, "The potency of ‘Christendom’: the example of the *Darmstädter Wort* (1947)."
- Thomas Kselman, "The dechristianisation of death in modern France."
- Michel Lagrée, "The impact of technology on Catholicism in France (1850-1950)."
- Lucian Hölscher, "Semantic structures of religious change in modern Germany."
- Jeffrey Cox, "Master narratives of long-term religious change."
- Werner Ustorf, "A missiological postscript."

NOTES

[1] See the statistical table from the "1999 European Values Study" on p. 71 of the McLeod and Ustorf book under review. In France, twelve percent of those surveyed reported church attendance more than

once a month, equalled only by Denmark; only Sweden had a lower rate. Fifty-six percent declared a belief in God; only Swedish respondents had a lower figure, at forty-seven percent.

[2] A somewhat more nuanced picture emerges when catholic archival sources as well as governmental ones are consulted. See Caroline Ford, "Religion and the Politics of Cultural Change in Provincial France: The Resistance of 1902 in Lower Brittany." *Journal of Modern History* 62 (1990): 1-33 and Sarah A. Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[3] Thomas Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1983) and *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Michel Lagrée, *Religion et cultures en Bretagne, 1850-1950* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).

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