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Anthony J. Steinhoff, *The Gods of the City: Protestantism and Religious Culture in Strasbourg, 1870-1914*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. xviii + 518 pp. Figures, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$168.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-90-04-16405-5.

Review by Steven C. Hause, Washington University in St. Louis.

The Franco-Prussian War and the Frankfurt Peace Treaty had an especially severe impact on the Protestant population of France. The census of 1872 (the last to collect data on religious affiliation) found that the Protestant population of France had fallen to 540,000 from 850,000 in the 1866 census. Some Protestants vigorously disputed this report as an undercounting, but it was not extremely far from correct. Thirty years later, official Protestant sources were only claiming a total (all *cultes*) of 650,000. The 1866 census had also found that the Protestant minority included 295,200 Lutherans, the vast majority of whom (255,000) lived in the departments of eastern France.[1] Although a significant Lutheran minority would remain in France after 1871, chiefly concentrated in the Franche Comté, the majority of French Lutherans had become German Lutherans.

The consequences of the war for French Protestants stretched far beyond the loss of a quarter of their community. The loss of Alsace meant the loss of the Faculty of Theology at Strasbourg which had trained some of the best known liberal Protestants, including Pastor Athanase Coquerel fils, Deputy and Senator Frédéric Desmons, Senator Auguste Dide, and Elie Reclus. The remaining Faculty of Theology for Protestants, at Montauban, had been a center of Protestant Orthodoxy since the awakening (*le réveil*) of the 1830s, and the faculty there included such Orthodox leaders as Pastor Adolphe Monod. One of the most visible consequences of the war, therefore, was the founding of a new Faculty of Theology at Paris in 1877. The creation and funding of this faculty through the Ministère des Cultes was no simple issue in an anticlerical age when funding for the Catholic Faculty of Theology was being slashed.

Similar consequences can be explored in a variety of ways: in the creation of an important community of Alsatian Lutherans in Paris, in the impact on the much-discussed Protestant wealth due to the loss of Protestant-owned industries (especially in textiles) and financial institutions, in the rise of an Alsatian Protestant political faction in Paris (of whom Senator Auguste Scheurer-Kestner would become the most famous member), or in the late nineteenth-century theme of French nationalists that French Protestants were pro-German and had favored Germany during the war (a charge laid with some vigor against Gabriel Monod, the founder of the *Revue historique*).[2]

The Protestant community of late nineteenth-century France has received significant attention in recent years from scholars such as Jean Baubérot (of the *Ecole des hautes études*), André Encrevé (the editor of the *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* [BSHPF]), Patrick Harismendy (Professeur at Rennes 2), and Patrick Cabanel (Professeur at Toulouse-Le Mirail).[3]

French historians have taken comparatively less note of the Protestant community in Alsace after 1871. Some important studies, such as Alfred Wahl's 1980 *thèse d'état*, have been available, but they have not focused on Alsace as a *Reichsland* of the German Empire.[4] Anthony J. Steinhoff, an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, has now made a major contribution to

adjusting that balance. Steinhoff's *The Gods of the City* (a revision of his University of Chicago dissertation), provides an excellent study of the situation in Strasbourg as a city of the German Second Reich. The finished product is a small jewel of archival research in both German and French sources. The bibliography of archival sources warms the heart of an old Rankean by stretching for nineteen pages.

Steinhoff's work on Strasbourg supports an important current interpretation of the religious history of modern Europe, revising the argument of religious decline based on demonstrable urban trends of declining church attendance and falling rates of baptisms and church weddings. Instead, Steinhoff proposes, "religious communities were not worlds lost in urbanization's wake. Rather, they were transformed worlds, whose members and institutions participated actively in the construction of urban modernity" (p. 2). He thus follows Hugh McLeod and others in questioning "the secularization thesis." [5] Instead of focusing on the data of decline, Steinhoff joins "the spate of new research on European religion [which] shows that religion contributed significantly--and positively--to the construction of European modernity" (p. 7). He backs this up with informative, well-researched chapters on the working of the church in Alsace, notably chapter five, "The Worshipping Community."

It is important to note that Steinhoff naturally locates his study of Strasbourg within the context of German history. He "raises important questions about the relationship between religion, region, and national identity in Imperial Germany," not the Third Republic (p. 17). He also locates his work more in German scholarly traditions and literature than French, which is certainly appropriate for the years 1870-1914. But he uses many French sources for the study of Strasbourg, and thus could raise the same questions about national identity in republican France.

Historians of France will be especially interested in the comparative value of chapter four, "Contested Visions: Church and State in the Reichsland", and chapter six, "Beyond the Culture Wars: Religious Education in School and Parish." These topics provide a striking contrast to religious events in France during the same years and provide an especially interesting perspective on the Alsatian experience and the difficulties of the reintegration of Alsace into France after World War One. German Lutherans did not inherit the same drive to establish laic schools as the French did, nor to separate the church(es) and the state. Thus, as Steinhoff notes in his conclusion, Alsace returned to France with a "tradition of local, ecclesiastical law" which was incongruent with the French law of separation of 1905. Hence the paradox of the 1920s, when "the French government opted to retain the ecclesiastical status quo in the 'lost provinces' ...Whereas the French state had little to do with the churches in the rest of France, it renewed its involvement in the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities' affairs in Alsace and Lorraine" (p. 431).

Among the important comparative reminders which *The Gods of the City* provides is the differing political characterization of Protestantism in Germany and France. Steinhoff points out, for example, that "many of the Reichsland's Lutheran and Reformed Churches' difficulties stemmed from the differences in Protestant tradition on the two sides of the Rhine. To the east, a conservative Protestant theology held sway in church organizations... To the west, in post-Napoleonic France, liberal theological positions remained prominent in the churches" (p. 172). Although a conservative, orthodox Protestantism would become increasingly dominant in France too, following the Synod of 1872, Steinhoff makes an important point. In 1871, Strasbourg was still the most liberal of the Faculties of Theology. Such comparisons stretch in many important directions: the greater conservatism of the Lutheran tradition which evolved in German history compared with the tragic history of Huguenot relations with the French state.

Steinhoff, of course, focuses much more on his theme of Strasbourg as a case study in urban modernization. He argues throughout the book that "The signs are clear that the time has come to dismiss the notion of the 'secular city' as an urban legend...religious impulses continued to shape life in the big city" (pp. 435-6). Church attendance, baptism, and marriage were, of course, all still in decline.

Steinhoff argues, however, that while those things were happening, the churches found a new and important role in “negotiating change” in the city. “Rather than assuming that religion ceased to play a significant role in this environment, as contemporary sociologists and other observers have asserted, this study proceeds from a different logic ... highlighting the opportunities that the new conditions offered” to revitalize the churches and give them new roles in the community (p. 433).

Finally, it should be noted that the fruit of Steinhoff's excellent archival research include a rich assortment of maps, data, and appendices which make the book a fine source for primary evidence.

NOTES

[1] Pastor Henri Gamier, ed. *Agenda Protestant. Recueil de renseignements relatifs aux églises et aux oeuvres du protestantisme de langue française. Année 1898* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1898), p. 154. See also the analysis of the 1872 census in François-Georges Dreyfus, “Les Protestants, la droite, et l'Assemblée nationale,” in André Encrevé and Michel Ricard, eds., *Les Protestants dans les débuts de la Troisième République, 1871-1875* (Paris: BSHPF, 1979), p. 169; and the analysis of Lutheran population in “Statistique de la population luthérienne,” *Journal du protestantisme français*, January 25, 1879.

[2] For example, during the Dreyfus affair, Gabriel Syveton and the *Ligue de la patrie française* circulated the assertion that during the Franco-Prussian War, when Monod had served on a French ambulance at the front, Monod had declared that he would never kill a German. *L'Echo de Paris*, July 28, 1899.

[3] Jean Bauberot's *Le Retour des Huguenots: La Vitalité protestante, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1985) and André Encrevé's *Les Protestants en France de 1800 à nos jours* (Paris: Stock, 1985) remain excellent introductions to the period. Bauberot's (who served as a member of the Stasi Commission on laïcité) numerous recent works on French Protestantism include several volumes on laïcité, such as *La laïcité, quel héritage?* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990). Harismendy's *Le Parlement des Huguenots: Organisations et synodes réformés français au XIXe siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005) is an indispensable explanation of the administration of the Reformed Church, and thus a valuable comparison to Steinhoff's description of the situation in Strasbourg. Harismendy also edited the BSHPF volume on French Protestants and separation of church and state, 151 (2005). Among Cabanel's works, see especially his survey, *Les Protestants et la République* (Paris: Editions complexe, 2000) and his *Juifs et protestants en France, les affinités électives, XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2004).

[4] Alfred Wahl, “Confession et comportement dans les campagnes d'Alsace et de Bade, 1871-1939” 2 vols. (Thèse d'état, Université de Metz, 1980)

[5] See Hugh McLeod, *Secularization in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), for an introduction to the debate on the secularization thesis.

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