

---

*H-France Review* Vol. 3 (December 2003), No. 147

**Philippe Boutry and André Encrevé, Eds.** *La religion dans la ville*. Bordeaux: Éditions Bière, 2003. 270 pp. Maps, tables, figures, and notes. 28.00 € (pb). ISBN 2-85276-081-9.

Review by Stéphane Gerson, New York University.

This book begins auspiciously, with a stimulating essay by André Encrevé. Encrevé recapitulates the traditional depiction of the modern city as a “tombeau de la religion.” The “urbanisation massive” of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is often said, deprived religious ceremonies, symbols, and social practices of much of their resonance (pp. 7, 5). Without rejecting this depiction, Encrevé proposes that the enmity between modern cities and religion is neither natural nor an automatic by-product of modern western society alone. Nineteenth-century Britain did not, after all, witness a break between its working class and christianity. “Religion” can thus adapt, in some forms, to modern cities. Is the same true, Encrevé asks, of the institutional model fashioned in the crucible of Roman institutions and christian predication—a parish-centric model of centralization and hierarchy, a model in which a clergyman monopolizes the local community’s social and moral authority, a model of fragile tolerance toward dissenting voices? Encrevé thinks not. The “crisis” in the relationship between religion and city is first and foremost, he argues, the crisis of a model that prevailed within catholicism, dominated France, and struggled to adapt to modern urban society. The modern city, Encrevé furthermore suggests, should be seen as a source of religious innovation, generating new forms of religious life (as well as rejection), new expressions of sacrality, and new demands for religious “pluralism” (p. 14).

Whether one endorses its premises or not, this introductory essay merits a detailed summary. It captures, first, a guiding impulsion behind this book, a collection of articles published by the Institut Jean-Baptiste Say. Founded at the Université Paris XII Val de Marne in 1995, this institute is devoted to the study of “urban cultures.” The book’s two co-editors, Encrevé and Philippe Boutry, and six of the other eleven contributors (a mix of professors and graduate students) are affiliated with Paris XII. Second, this essay augurs a welcome dialogue between religious history and urban history—two disciplines that have rarely engaged one another. To the extent that “the early-nineteenth-century religious revival was limited to rural areas” and “municipalities tended to remain centres of anticlericalism”[1], religious historians of nineteenth-century France have logically directed their gaze toward the countryside. Cities have received some attention (with respect, above all, to what Boutry called “le détachement religieux” and the quarrel between *laïcité* and catholicism).[2] But the dominating questions have revolved around the reconstitution of rural parishes, the forces that galvanized or hindered “religious impregnation” in the countryside, regional temperaments, and popular beliefs and devotion.[3] Urban historians have by the same token paid only cursory attention to religion, seen as an epiphenomenon in the emergence of modern societies.[4]

However sweeping and inattentive to non-christian religions as this essay is, finally, it poses important questions regarding modern France and the recent transformation of its religious landscape. This is a landscape in which dominant religions (starting with catholicism) have lost much of their hold on the population[5]; a strikingly low proportion of residents declare that religion plays a “very important

role” in their lives[6]; and a growing number articulate new and often syncretic forms of belief, contributing to what one scholar calls an “individualisation des références religieuses.”[7] Sociologists of religion have investigated the phenomenon, but historians have lagged behind.

Upon finishing this essay, the reader thus has high expectations for this collection. Strangely enough, however, most of the contributions ignore Encrevé’s hypotheses. Not all, it is true. In a characteristically comprehensive article on parish structures in the Parisian periphery, Boutry depicts a rigid Parisian diocese, unwilling or incapable of responding to the transformation of *extra-muros* Paris during the first half of the nineteenth century. The diocese gave a “traitement de type rural” to this increasingly urban space (p. 36). This behavior, Boutry suggests, contributed to dechristianization in these suburbs. Aurélie Petit’s portrait of the parish clergy in mid-nineteenth-century Paris (recruitment, personnel, living conditions) emphasizes the archbishopric’s disciplinary tendencies and its shortcomings. In order to control the make-up of its priesthood, it sought to train as many candidates as possible in its own seminaries, advising those provincial priests, “à l’abri même de tout soupçon, tant soit peu sérieux,” against traveling to Paris in search of a job (Monseigneur Affre [1847], p. 125). Intent on maintaining a distance between clerics and laypersons, it placed considerable importance on the *soutane*. Insensitive, finally, to the financial plight, housing woes, and professional frustrations of curates, it contributed to a precarity that presumably hampered their pastoral mission.

Both Boutry and Petit’s articles buttress Encrevé’s hypothesis, though neither historian discusses it. Yet more troublesome, none of the other articles offer germane evidence. The pickings are equally slim regarding the second part of the hypothesis—the emergence of new forms of religious expression in urban settings. In a rich piece on Massif Central migrants to Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Patrick Cabanel proposes that, faced with a dearth of religious unions, *amicales*, and specialized parishes, protestant migrants developed a “paroisse de la mémoire” (p. 256). Religious belief transmogrified into a religious identity whose foundations were memories of the annual Desert assemblies (held since 1911) and publications (the Bible, novels, and works of history). To understand the growing popularity of “croyances hétérogènes” (p. 260), Florence Dérouault undertook an oral history of eleven seers (from astrologers to fortune-tellers) and thirteen of their clients. Beyond the sociological portrait of these clients (predominantly young, feminine, poorly educated, middle class, catholic but detached from the church), she proposes that, for most, these activities represent “une forme de spiritualité et une croyance, qui est néanmoins distincte de la croyance religieuse” and compatible with it (p. 266). Suggestive as they are, both articles suffer from methodological and conceptual problems: in Cabanel’s case, highly speculative affirmations (without supporting evidence regarding the “paper parishes”) and a failure to distinguish along age, geographical, and gender lines; in Dérouault’s case, a narrow database and a failure to link this “individualisation de la croyance” to urban settings (p. 260).

Encrevé’s hypotheses, it quickly becomes apparent, will remain just that. The contributors do not bring conclusive evidence, sustained argumentation, and comparisons to bear on his vision of a rigid institutional model. Is the religious landscape yet another facet of the *exception française*—linked to the revolutionary experience (and its imperial aftermath) and the religious conflicts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? And what about the Anglo-Saxon scholarship that has recently emphasized the ways in which nineteenth-century French catholicism adapted to a modern society, either in its practices or in its conceptual blueprints?[8] One wishes that the contributors had addressed such questions.

The remaining articles—most of which pertain to Paris and its suburbs—illuminate various aspects of religious life. Several discuss catholic and protestant institutions. Jean-Pierre Moisset’s arcane but rewarding study of parish finances in nineteenth-century Paris uncovers original patterns in a city of declining observance but abundant personnel. Rites of passage made up the largest source of income (rather than donations during services or official subsidies, as elsewhere); salaries made up the largest

expenditure (cult expenses were lower than elsewhere). Interested readers will find much more detail in this article than I can summarize here. Elsewhere in the collection, they will also learn about the resonance of Paris, be it as a lure for catholic clergymen who sought to escape their social and intellectual conditions (Petit); or as a temporary center of political and financial power (but not of faith) for protestantism between 1848 and 1880s, at which time the “génie propre des sensibilités protestantes”—a belief in the primacy of local churches—reasserted itself (Patrick Harismendy, p. 78).

A number of articles direct our attention toward the Parisian *banlieue*. Whereas Boutry suggests that, in the early nineteenth century, the “jeu des clientèles et des protections” of resident notables yielded a preferential treatment for its parishes (p. 35), Encrevé analyzes the means by which protestantism took root in these suburbs between the 1830s and the present. He identifies the numerous actors behind this process (from consistories to free-acting pastors and evangelical societies) and the “methods” they employed (a bourgeois core, the opening of a school followed by a parish, etc.). He also emphasizes the impact of the 1950s—an epoch of urban renewal and expansion of the protestant parish network—and the ministry’s efforts to “répondre à la diversité des besoins religieux” in a pluralistic society (p. 58). Like other contributors, Encrevé uncovers clergymen who were both attuned to, and concerned about the influx of migrants into the suburbs. “Cette population est une population de déracinés,” one pastor explained in 1904, “On s’est déraciné d’abord de province pour venir à Paris, on s’est déraciné de Paris pour aller en banlieue. Et, chose grave, on ne s’enracine pas dans la banlieue” (p. 55). Religious sociability and festivities would cure this isolation—if only one could implant them in this arid soil. Traditional sympathy toward the city did not prevent some protestants, including liberals, from voicing a critique that, as Cabanel shows, echoed catholic denunciations of rural depopulation and moral depredation. These protestants entertained the additional, and distinct, fear of losing—through intermarriage and exposure to catholicism—not only faith but the very essence of protestantism. Catholics and protestants responded to these perils through a mix of projects and initiatives, encompassing regional geography, manuals on the dangers of urban life, *Unions provinciales*, and chaplaincies. Initially focused on deterring immigration, the leading objective progressively became one of supervising migrants. While this collection fails to advance significantly our knowledge on this last topic, Jacques Prévotat’s peculiar contribution—half-article, half-archival inventory—has the merit of showcasing a mix of responses to foreign immigration within postwar catholic circles. Whereas some high-level clergymen equated integration with the immigrants’ acquisition of an internalized and universalized faith that subsumed their religious particularism, others accepted these foreigners as an “élément enrichissant pour la communauté catholique française” (p. 229).

A final set of articles deals, not with religion, but with the forces it had to confront as well as the broader political culture—essentially under the early Third Republic. These articles cover now familiar ground on the *Libre Pensée*, anticlericalism, and the republican cult of great men. I will not summarize them at length. Jacqueline Lalouette, the eminent specialist of the *Libre Pensée*, furnishes an exhaustive discussion of its presence in the Seine and Seine-et-Oise. Her article ranges from membership to cultural practices and political ideology, but does not, ultimately, uncover defining characteristics of real significance in the suburbs. [9] Céline Duray sums up the radical anticlerical doctrine of Gambetta’s *République française*—a scholarly undertaking whose necessity is less than obvious. Céline Cicekoglu analyzes the funerary ceremonies for anticlerical Paul Bert in 1886—an event that other historians have previously examined, though without as much detail about the politics of Auxerre, where Bert was buried. [10] Finally, Hervé Croce’s well-documented study of Garibaldi’s posterity in Italy and France presents the stages of this memorial process (funeral, monuments, street names, etc.) and portrays a figure caught, somewhat predictably, between clericals, anticlerical freethinkers and freemasons, and consensual republicans.

Beyond the now commonplace conclusion that republicans recuperated “traditions religieuses pour constituer une nouvelle sacralité fondée sur des valeurs laïques” (p. 160), Croce has little to say about the interplay of religion and modern city. The same is true of the other articles on political culture, none

of which addresses explicitly the book's underlying *problématique*. This is, in part, because the editors have culled together papers given during three *journées d'études*. Between 1996 and 1999, these *journées* focused on different themes: religious life in the suburbs; the "demande de pluralisme" generated by big cities (p. 14); and the impact of urbanization on churches. Not only do the contributors not always talk to one another, therefore, but papers from the various *journées* are also interspersed throughout the issue. This complicates the reader's task. So, too, does the editors' loose analytical framework. To articulate a project of this scope around "la ville et son influence sur la vie religieuse" (p. 5) makes sense on the condition that one define with some precision the terms "city," "influence," and "religious life." The editors do not do so. (They may have struggled, in fact, to title their book: should it be *La religion dans la ville* [as indicated on the cover] or *La religion et la ville* [in the table of contents and running head]? Much may hinge on this choice of preposition.) As a result, the contributors wander off in their own directions. Some discuss Paris, others middling towns, others yet the suburbs. Some approach the modern city as a representation, others as the site in which religious life unfurls, others yet as a political center. Some analyze religious and clerical responses to urbanization; others simply study religious phenomena within an urban setting (which does not mean that these phenomena were exclusively urban); others yet seek to illuminate the urban landscape through this religious prism. All of these questions are valid, no doubt, but this dispersion is dizzying. The whole is less than (some of) the parts.

While most specialists of modern France will find something of interest in this book, some religious historians will question the equation between religion and christianity. Urban historians will yearn for more sustained discussions of immigration, urban planning, architecture, or the relationship between, on the one hand, religious structures and observances and, on the other, patterns of residence, circulation, and interaction within the city. Cultural and social historians, finally, will search in vain for discussions of gender, intellectual currents, and religious ceremonies. This book's main contribution may well reside, ultimately, in the questions it poses, the historiographical shift it pinpoints, and the dialogues it forebodes. The editors deserve congratulations for setting an ambitious agenda. Religious history, Boutry writes in the book's conclusion, has much to teach us about urbanization, "pluri-confessionnalité" (p. 268), social mobility, acculturation, and the like. It does—and, now, it must also flesh out and engage Encrevé's provocative arguments about the christian institutional model, the modern city, and religious pluralism.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

- André Encrevé, "Introduction"

## STRUCTURES

- Philippe Boutry, "Les structures paroissiales de la périphérie de Paris au lendemain du Consulat"
- André Encrevé, "Sur l'implantation du protestantisme en banlieue parisienne à l'époque contemporaine"
- Patrick Harismendy, "Paris, capitale religieuse ou politique du protestantisme français au XIXe siècle?"
- Jacqueline Lalouette, "Libre Pensée et anticléricalisme dans la Seine et la Seine-et-Oise (vers 1870-1914)"
- Jean-Pierre Moisset, "Les finances du culte catholique dans les paroisses urbaines: l'exemple de Paris au XIXe siècle"
- Aurélie Petit, "Le clergé paroissial à Paris: 1840-1870"

## ANTICLÉRICALISME ET LAÏCITÉ

- Céline Cicekoglou, "Le Tombeau de Paul Bert: les obsèques à Auxerre, un témoignage public"

- Hervé Croce, “La présence de Giuseppe Garibaldi dans l’espace urbain en France et en Italie de 1882 à 1907”
- Céline Duray, “La République Française et l’antycléricisme des années 1870”

## OPINIONS ET CROYANCES

- Jacques Prévotat, “Quelques sources relatives à la pastorale des étrangers dans la banlieue parisienne au XXe siècle (1913-1961)”
- Mélanie Le Play, “L’antisémitisme dans *La Cocarde* de l’abbé Paul Fesch (mai-août 1894)”
- Patrick Cabanel, “Le reste de religion en ville: catholiques et protestants du Massif Central à Paris, XIXe-XXe siècle”
- Florence Déroutault, “Croyance et voyance à Paris et en région parisienne. Regards croisés”
- Philippe Boutry, “En guise de conclusion”

## NOTES

[1] Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000): 345.

[2] Philippe Boutry, “Industrialisation et déstructuration de la société rurale,” in Jacques Le Goff and René Rémond, eds., *Histoire de la France religieuse 3: Du roi très chrétien à la laïcité républicaine (XVIIIe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 1991): 284.

[3] Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, *1800/1880* (Toulouse: Privat, 1985): 318. For a significant exception, see Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Paris, capitale religieuse sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Cerf, 2001).

[4] Boutry makes this point in the volume’s conclusion, pointing to the following book as an example: Annie Fourcaut, *Un siècle de banlieue parisienne (1859-1964): Guide de recherches* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1988). Religion is also absent from Florence Bourillon, *Les villes en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Ophrys, 1992), and makes but cursory appearances in another important urban history: Jeanne Gaillard, *Paris, la ville (1852-1870)*, eds. Bourillon and Jean-Luc Pinol (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997 [thèse, 1975]).

[5] Pierre Bréchon, “Les attitudes religieuses en France: quelles recompositions en cours?,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 109 (January-March 2000): 11-30.

[6] With slightly more than 10 percent of positive answers, France finished last in a 2002 poll that also included, in ascending order, Germany, Italy, Britain, and the United States. See “A Nation Apart,” *The Economist* (8 November 2003): 4. See also Henri Tincq, *Dieu en France: Mort et résurrection du catholicisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2003).

[7] Bréchon, “Attitudes religieuses,” 29; as well as Frédéric Lenoir, *Les métamorphoses de Dieu: La nouvelle spiritualité occidentale* (Paris: Plon, 2003); Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Le pèlerin et le converti: La religion en mouvement* (Paris: Champs-Flammarion, 1999); and Leïla Babès, ed., *Les nouvelles manières de croire: Judaïsme, christianisme, Islam, nouvelles religiosités* (Paris: L’Atelier, 1996). For more popular takes on the phenomenon, see “La nouvelle quête de Dieu,” cover story, *Le Nouvel Observateur* (16-22 October 2003); and “Notre besoin d’irrationnel,” cover story, *Psychologies Magazine* 219 (May 2003). Islam is another story, of course, and this book does not touch on it.

[8] See Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Suzanne Kaufman, "Selling Lourdes: Pilgrimage, Tourism and the Mass-Marketing of the Sacred in Nineteenth-Century France," in Sheila Baranowski and Ellen Furlough, eds., *Being Elsewhere: Tourism, Commercial Leisure and Identity in Modern Europe and North America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001): 63-88; Sarah A. Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); and Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[9] Jacqueline Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France, 1848-1940* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997); and idem, *La république anticléricale, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

[10] See Lalouette, "Paul Bert, libre-penseur," in Léo Hamon, ed., *Les opportunistes: les débuts de la République aux républicains* (Paris: Éditions de la MSH, 1986): 240-41; and Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789-1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 229-31.

Stéphane Gerson  
New York University  
stephane.gerson@nyu.edu

Copyright © 2003 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies. ISSN 1553-9172