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Jotham Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism & Political Ideology in Renaissance France*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004. xi + 322 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$59.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8132-1384-3.

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If there are two orthodoxies that have come to inform scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France in recent years, they are that competing religious sensibilities lay at the heart of the Wars of Religion and that “absolutism” as a political style required the participation of elites as much as a royal will to focus French political life on the person of the king.[1] In his *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism & Political Ideology in Renaissance France*, Jotham Parsons addresses both the place of religion in the development of the French state and the relationship of Bourbon ideologies of rule to earlier formulations of monarchical powers and legitimacy. By tracing the development of Gallican political philosophy as it became articulated in controversies large and small over the course of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, Parsons argues that not just religion, but the role of the Catholic Church in France, played a fundamental role in defining ideas of political authority that underlay the French monarchy. The result of this erudite, extremely well-researched, and nicely written work is to reroute the course of early modern political philosophy and to construct a new narrative of the development of ideologies underwriting royal authority. This is not a book that one can race through quickly, but it is one that amply rewards the reader’s careful attention. Boldly revisionist and thought-provoking in its conclusions on early modern political ideology, it also invites reflection on the relationship of religion and political forms more generally—a debate that continues to divide our society today and a concern to which the author makes obvious, but unobtrusive reference.

Gallicanism, for Parsons, has long remained an elusive political philosophy for contemporary scholars, because it cannot be reduced to a specific set of positions on the mutual rights and responsibilities of the French crown, the papacy, and the Roman Catholic Church in France. Just as Jean Bodin famously reduced the myriad marks of political authority to the single power to make law and sliced through the broad array of political structures to formulate his notion of sovereignty, Parsons links the particular policies of the Gallican position with the changing dynamics of the European political situation.[2] Rather than focus on the details of episcopal elections or papal taxes, he identifies the heart of Gallicanism with an emerging set of theories about the relationship of religion to the secular order and with an understanding of how the Church as an historical institution related to the French monarchy. Although late medieval Gallicanism was grounded in calls for Church reform that fit with millennial visions of a fully sacralized society, explains Parsons, Gallican writers in the sixteenth century gradually developed an insistent historical approach to the Catholic Church as an institution, its relations with the French monarchy, and thus to the role of religion in the world. Largely hailing from the legal circles of the Parlement of Paris and specifically associated with the *parquet*, Gallican controversialists drew on the developing historical vision of Rome as expressed by the likes of Joachim du Bellay, the skeptical approaches to truth articulated by Michel de Montaigne, and, above all, the historical exposition of monarchical institutions as laid out by Jean du Tillet and Étienne Pasquier, among others. Armed with a characteristically humanist approach that grounded contemporary values and institutions not in nature or revealed religion, but in the slow accretion of custom, Gallican lawyers carved out a vital place for their own institutions that interpreted French law and for themselves as the kind of virtuous reporters who could objectively construe the past. Questioning the notion that Church authority was based on revealed religious truth, erudite Gallicans rather saw this authority as embedded in the same process of

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historical development as defined the French monarchy. Although they continued to see church and state as working toward the same goals—indeed political stability in their eyes was dependent on the harmony of religious attitudes and social behavior—they also tended to view the religious order as following the secular. The very idea of a French church required that the “republic” precede the “church,” both chronologically and ontologically.

Yet, as erudite Gallicans formulated their historical outlook in reaction to the challenges of the religious wars, the Council of Trent, the Jesuit mission, royal excommunications, and a series of jurisdictional battles over the authority of French bishops, the internal contradictions of their own views limited the efficacy and staying power of their arguments. As Parsons explains, although Gallican controversialists did all they could to reinforce secular authority at the expense of a competing ecclesiastical jurisdiction and took the first steps to theorize a secularized state, their own religious assumptions and historical methods prevented them from following their line of argument to its logical conclusion. Although erudite Gallicans rejected a transcendent authority for ecclesiastical jurisdiction and saw this jurisdiction as both territorial and historically contingent, they did not abandon the idea that church and state must work in tandem to achieve a harmonious and stable society. Further, as Parsons points out, by privileging a thoroughly historical approach to religious authority, they could not have rejected the legitimacy of the visible, hierarchical church, even if that had been their object. Of course, rejection of the Catholic Church was most decidedly not the Gallicans’ intent, because as committed Catholics, they did not deny the efficacy of the sacraments or even the influence of the clergy over the souls of individuals, including the king. Thus, they could never go so far as to argue that the pope had no jurisdiction over the monarchy and that the Church had no authority in secular affairs. Thus, Parsons seems to suggest that the logical conclusion to the Gallican position was a Lutheran ecclesiology, but that the Gallicans’ Catholicism made it impossible for them to arrive at a full separation of the religious and political spheres and left their position open to attack.

Indeed, one of Parsons’ most important arguments is that the Gallican view was ultimately influential not in determining the shape that the French monarchy would take, but rather in galvanizing the French clergy forcefully to counter their position. The first estate thus came to articulate countervailing theories of the importance of revealed religion in guiding the king and of a divine mandate in securing the political order. Both ideas required an important role for clerics in advising the king themselves and in upholding the power of the monarchy. Thus, in response to persistent attempts on the part of Gallican lawyers and judges to tie issues of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, episcopal prerogatives, and attempts to carry out the directives of the Council of Trent in French dioceses to the question of royal independence from Rome, French bishops led the fight in the courts and in the newly developed Assemblies of the Clergy to impose their own views of the spiritual authority of the ecclesiastical orders over the more easily secularized notion of jurisdiction and of a divinely instituted monarchy over a political authority based largely in a naturalized custom. The dispute came to a head in the Estates General of 1614, when the first estate defeated an article proposed by the third that called for it to be declared a fundamental law of the kingdom that no power on earth could absolve the king’s subjects from their obedience to him and that the proposition that the king could be deposed for any reason was not only unlawful, but impious. Although Parsons’ division of the battle lines between the first and third estates is too broad, an important consequence of his argument is to trace the lineage of theories of absolute monarchy not to the Gallicans but to their clerical opponents. Thus, the origins of Richelieu’s theories of reason of state are to be found not in Gallican attempts to create a monarchy independent of papal interference or in the *politiques’* privileging of political stability over religious divisions, but in the French clergy’s arguments to associate the monarchy with a transcendent authority and to focus power on the person of the king as an individual accountable the stirrings of his soul and thus to be guided by spiritual advisors.

Therefore, what emerges from Parsons' work is a completely different reading of the importance of "the church in the republic" than the Gallicans had in mind. Where the Gallicans used the tag "the Church is in the Republic, not the Republic in the Church" to indicate the priority of secular over ecclesiastical jurisdiction,[3] Parsons employs the phrase to suggest a number of conclusions that all stress the vital importance of the Catholic Church to the elaboration of the early modern state. For him, the tag seems neatly to encapsulate three phenomena: the central importance of the debate over Gallican liberties to the elaboration of centralized monarchy and absolutist political philosophy, a direct link between clerical theorists at the turn of the sixteenth century with apologists for royal power in the seventeenth, and, implicitly, the notion that religious legitimation necessarily lay at the heart of royal authority and that the Gallicans' attempts to separate the two were doomed to failure. This outlook seems to be confirmed in the book's conclusion, in which Parsons suggests that the logic of this mutual support only evaporated once understandings of the basis of political authority had shifted to an emphasis on the common welfare to be determined in aggregate by the people.

*The Church in the Republic* thus fundamentally rewrites the traditional narrative of the development of French political ideology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. First, it radically downplays the importance of the Protestant resistance theorists in the political debate by focusing the key controversy on the position of the Catholic Church in French society and the relation between religious and secular authority among Catholics.[4] In Parsons' work, Protestantism and confessionalism more broadly play only the negative roles of limiting the possibilities of calls for reform among Catholics and perhaps of providing a negative example of an endpoint to which Gallicans did not want to extend their logic.

Second, the work fundamentally shifts the fault lines of debate from the "constitutionalist" vs. "absolutist" theories of kingship within judicial circles to an argument between estates focusing much more on the origins and legitimization of royal authority than on the powers and responsibilities of kings. Although there is an obvious overlap in the issues at stake, the major effect of shifting the argument from the usual contrast between Claude de Seyssel and Jean Bodin to the more novel one of Étienne Pasquier and Louis Servin vs. Jacques Davy, cardinal du Perron is radically to downplay the historical significance of the point of view of sixteenth-century judicial theorists.[5] Rather than elaborating an understanding of the state that would be adapted and adopted in the seventeenth century, they are here relegated to espousing a view of monarchy that contained internal contradictions and that, in emphasizing the corporate nature of the crown over the individual soul of the king, was to be largely rejected by the reign of Louis XIII. Thus, Gallican theorists passed into the position of providing an "opposition" ideology by the mid-seventeenth century, and rightly so, according to Parsons, since while providing an important role for themselves in French political culture, they by definition left the monarchy less flexibility and a weaker claim to ultimate authority. Here, Parsons consigns the theories of a historicized, judicial crown to a weigh station in the road to a seventeenth-century monarchy that was absolutist in its emphasis on the person of the king, if not in the centralized control of the state.

Finally, the work may prompt us to rethink the array of political and religious opinions in France in the first third of the seventeenth century. By arguing that Richelieu was the heir of ideas and strategies more characteristic of the Council of Trent than of the sixteenth-century *politiques*, Parsons implies that there was less distance between the *dévot* and *bon français* positions than usually represented. This possibility must remain only a suggestion, however, since Parsons explicitly excludes the foreign policy debates of the seventeenth century from his analysis.

Thus, in *The Church in the Republic* we have a fascinating, new assessment of the role that religious debate played in the elaboration of French political ideologies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For Parsons, the humanist approach to texts and history was essential to both sides--indeed,

perhaps more crucial than the Wars of Religion, which served principally to harden the Gallicans in their rejection of transcendental foundations for worldly institutions and to limit the criticisms directed specifically against Rome. Whether all of the implications of the book's argument will be accepted remains to be seen; this is a work that prompts serious reflection sooner than immediate endorsement. Yet, grounded in a broad array of sources that range from the broad highways of political philosophy to the back alleyways of judicial controversy, and equally conversant in French and Latin, it is one that all historians interested in French early modern religious and political ideologies will want to read seriously.

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## NOTES

[1] The literature on both topics is extensive, but fundamental works include: Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de la religion vers 1525-vers 1610*, 2 v. (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1990); Mack P. Holt, "Putting Religion Back into the Wars of Religion," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 2 (1993): 524-51; William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Nicholas Henshall, *The Myth of Absolutism: Change and Continuity in Early Modern European Monarchy* (London: Longman, 1992). Barbara Diefendorf has recently connected the religious sensibilities of the period of the Catholic League with dévot practices in her *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[2] Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la République*, 6 v. (Paris: Fayard, 1986), especially Bk 1, chaps. 8 and 10.

[3] Parsons, *The Church in the Republic*, 166.

[4] For Protestant resistance theories and their place in a developing political ideology, see for example, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume 2: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[5] For the standard narrative, see for example, Nannerl O. Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

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