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Gérard Cholvy, *Les Religions et les cultures dans l'Occident européen au XIXe siècle (1800-1914)*. Paris: Karthala, 2014. 398 pp. 27.00€. (pb). ISBN: 978-2-8111-1313-1.

Review by Carol E. Harrison, University of South Carolina.

Gérard Cholvy's latest book is a magisterial survey of nineteenth-century religious history that builds on his sixty-year career in the field, from his early work in the historical geography of belief and practice in the diocese of Montpellier to his recent biography of Frédéric Ozanam, forerunner of French social Catholicism. *Les Religions et les cultures dans l'Occident européen au XIXe siècle* develops out of Cholvy's earlier major synthetic works, in particular the multi-volume *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine*, co-authored with the late Yves-Marie Hilaire.

The book opens with a survey of the terrain of religion in Western Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the first chapter, Cholvy presents brief discussions of the religious situation in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; the rest of the book will follow developments in these four regions. The key to the book's argument, however, is in chapter two, which turns to the Enlightenment's challenge to religion and focuses on the secularization thesis, a product of the Enlightenment and a guiding principle of much twentieth-century historiography. The dominance of Marxism among mid-twentieth-century intellectuals encouraged scholars to assume that history trends toward the "eradication of religious sentiment" (p. 36), Cholvy argues. In recent decades, however, the decline of communism and the revival of religious fundamentalisms have created an opening for new investigations of *le fait religieux*, and Cholvy has been at the forefront of this research in France.

In the chapters that follow, Cholvy attacks the secularization thesis by piling contrary evidence on top of it and letting it crack under the weight of a massive accumulation of facts about religious practice in the century after the French Revolution allegedly led Europeans away from their churches. The volume of material in religious history he presents is impressive. In particular, Cholvy draws his evidence from individual lives, and the text is in many ways a catalogue of Europeans who organized their lives around their religious beliefs: the twelve-page index is composed entirely of proper names.

Chapters three through five proceed chronologically. We begin in chapter three with "romanticism and religious revival," from the beginning of the century to 1848. Cholvy touches on the influence of Chateaubriand and Lamennais, Nazarene painters and Lake poets, the Oxford Movement, German Biblical criticism, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul and the YMCA. Chapter four, on positivism and related ideas such as literary naturalism, considers nineteenth-century admiration of science and its claim to undermine religion. The chapter concludes with an extended discussion of Christian activism influenced by social science and the Social Question: outreach to the working class through primary schools and Sunday schools, tracts, football clubs, settlement houses, and the Salvation Army. Chapter five brings us to the turn of the twentieth century and an analysis of the modernist crisis. Cholvy concludes the chapter with a discussion of the extent to which Christianity's nineteenth-century revival was a mass phenomenon. Both Catholics and Protestants adopted elements of the popular culture of the

era, and the mass press, popular leisure and entertainment, job training schemes and pilgrimages all helped to ensure that the social groups who had seemed to be in the vanguard of dechristianization never completely abandoned the ranks of believing Christians. By 1914, Cholvy asserts, it was clear that religious belief and practice had not declined in linear fashion but rather had swung back and forth, as if on a pendulum. It should have been clear that Auguste Comte was wrong in his claim that human societies pass inexorably through three stages of development, from the theological to the metaphysical and finally the positive. Rather, Cholvy maintains, all three modes of social organization co-existed, with the balance among them shifting across the nineteenth century. A running tally of students from the Ecole normale supérieure who entered the priesthood demonstrates Cholvy's point about the oscillations of religious fervor by focusing on individual lives and choices.

The second half of the book is organized thematically. Chapter six presents nineteenth-century religious art. Cholvy gives us religious architecture from French neo-gothic to Orientalizing designs for synagogues. His discussion of painting traces the renewal of religious themes in French romanticism by painters like Delacroix, German Nazarene art, and the English Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. The religious influence on music was similarly broad, encompassing the liturgical chant revived by the French Benedictine Dom Guéranger and opera. Chapter seven on women's religiosity surveys the world of women religious and devout laywomen. Cholvy touches on teaching and hospital orders and the Protestant development of the deaconess and her social mission. Again the emphasis is on individual lives and many of the century's leading female figures appear: Madame Swetchine and Julie de Krüdener, Florence Nightingale and Madeleine Sophie Barat. Women played a larger role in churches than in civil society, Cholvy concludes, and religious activity gave them a socially acceptable outlet for their talents. Finally, chapter eight examines the role of religion in European overseas expansion. Cholvy surveys Catholic missionary orders and their Protestant rivals, noting their roles as agents of imperialism as well as their often difficult relationships with colonial authorities. He ends the chapter with an extensive discussion of the career of Charles Lavigerie, France's "Algerian cardinal."

Cholvy's synthesis, as one would expect, gives greater weight to some topics than to others. *Les Religions et les cultures dans l'occident européen* is primarily a book about Christianity. There are occasional references to developments within Judaism, especially emancipation and Jewish converts to Christianity (e.g., pp. 242-43). Cholvy's decision to focus on Western Europe means that many of the central developments in nineteenth-century Judaism are excluded: Theodor Herzl, Zionism, and its Eastern European followers fall outside the scope of this volume, for instance.

*Les religions et les cultures* is profoundly Franco-centric, both in its choice of topics and in its assumptions about its audience. Far more pages are devoted to France than to other countries and the presentation of each topic tends to begin with France, setting that country's experience up as the norm against which we measure others. Treatment of France is also much more nuanced and detailed: Cholvy regularly analyzes French trends on the departmental or diocesan level, but we read about Britain or Germany from a bird's eye view. The extent to which the intended audience is French may occasionally be disconcerting to other readers. Cholvy expects his readers to be surprised to learn that Irish Catholics were poor--because the French Protestant minority, whom readers might imagine as analogous, was quite well off. Similarly, in discussing Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, Cholvy notes that their influence was delayed "car lire l'allemand n'est pas courant, lire la philosophie allemande moins encore" (p. 100). We are, of course, referring to French people who didn't read German, although the text does not make that point.

Cholvy concludes *Les Religions et les cultures dans l'Occident européen* with a brief autobiographical essay that surveys his long publishing career in religious history. He dedicates much of this postscript to a defense of regional history, and it is a reminder that the broadly comparative work of this latest book is rooted in an unrivalled knowledge of French religious history in its most local details. His assessment of the value of regional studies echoes his method in this book: the accumulation of evidence from case

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studies is what allows historians to challenge conventional interpretations. For instance, the thesis of the early dechristianization of France's working class, he notes, eventually had to give way to the mass of counter examples that meticulous regional and diocesan research turned up of workers in various parts of France who continued to receive communion, who joined Catholic clubs, and who baptized their children and sent them to Catholic schools. While acknowledging that diocesan studies of the kind that he produced as a young scholar are no longer central to the profession, he nonetheless makes a strong case for scholarship deeply rooted in regions, not just nation-states.

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