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J. Michael Hayden, *The Catholicisms of Coutances: Varieties of Religion in Early Modern France*. Montreal and Kingston, London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013. xvi + 368pp. Maps, graph, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$100 CAN and US (cl). ISBN 978-0-7735-4113-9.

Review by Elizabeth C Tingle, Plymouth University.

The Cotentin peninsula is, in its own quiet way, one of the loveliest regions of France, with a corrugated landscape of hills, valleys and estuaries traversed by arrow-straight, former Roman roads, and with vestiges of wooded *bocage* terrain. This landscape has been transformed in recent years by *remaniement*, the EU-subsidised destruction of hedges and small fields to create larger, more efficient farms. Before that, its building patrimony and archives suffered substantial damage in World War II. Now, the religious history of the region's inhabitants has been ably reconstructed by J. Michael Hayden in a detailed and scholarly study of the diocese of Coutances, which covered the north and west of the Cotentin, constituting most of the modern-day *département* of the Manche. The book under review grew out of a joint project with Malcolm Greenshields on diocesan reform in the Catholic and Counter Reformations that was published in 2005 as *Six Hundred Years of Reform*.^[1] The present study of Coutances is a focused examination of one diocese, to contrast with their wide-ranging survey of episcopal reform across France, for the same long period from the mid-fourteenth century to the French Revolution and beyond.

The aim of Hayden's work is to examine the nature and causes of changes in religious belief and practice over time. The author states that this is not an institutional history or one of relationships between elites and non-elites, politics, economics and religion. Rather, it focuses on religion alone, its development, its impact on individuals and society, and affinities between the religious culture of the pre-revolutionary period and that of the twentieth century (p. 3). Coutances was chosen because of the richness of its diocesan synod and visitation records, catechisms, confession manuals and *cahiers de doléances* prepared for the Estates General of 1789. Also, there are two particularly rich sources for the region, the journal of the sixteenth-century noble Gilles Picot, seigneur de Gouberville and a late seventeenth-century ecclesiastical history of Coutances by René Toustain de Billy, *curé* of Messnil-Opac. The latter is particularly valuable since it draws upon a large number of sources destroyed during the Normandy invasions of 1944. In all, Hayden has made meticulous use of a wide range of different primary sources for his reconstruction of the religious life of the see.

Central to the work is the concept of "catholicisms"—lower case plural—"an umbrella word that covers all the variations in religious beliefs and practices within the diocese" (p. 3). This concept contrasts with Catholicism—upper case singular—defined as the faith and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. As the conceptual core of the study, however, I felt this term merited greater interrogation. The attempt to find a word that describes a seamless continuity between inward belief and outward practice is interesting—the two are frequently contiguous—but there are differences between interior thoughts and exterior actions, spirituality and devotion, faith and piety, that an umbrella definition leaves unexplored. Further, Hayden claims that his methodology sets this book apart from other studies of early modern French dioceses: a longer time frame, consideration of all social groups, the use of thick description and an innovative method developed for the *Six Hundred Years of Reform* project, that is, a systematic means of interrogating and analysing pastoral visit and synod statute records. (p. 8) The conclusions of the joint project—that there were two periods of Catholic Reformation, early and late—are again tested here. There are comparisons with Robert

Sauzet's work, principally his study of the nearby diocese of Chartres which was similarly based on visitation records and thick description, and also his study of the diocese of Nîmes.[2] Bruno Restif's excellent work on Rennes, Dol and Saint-Malo dioceses also offers interesting comparison with Hayden's study, for Restif uses diocesan records and those of parishes, such as wills, confraternity archives and church architectural histories, to add different "voices" to those of the clerical hierarchy in some contrast with the study of Coutances.[3]

The first two chapters provide context for the study. The first surveys the social and physical geography of the diocese and the wars and insurrections that affected its people, from the Hundred Years War to the Revolution of 1789. Cutting across these events was the uneven development of the Catholic Church. As in his earlier work, Hayden finds evidence in the diocese for a first Catholic Reformation between 1480 and 1580 and a second lasting from c. 1580 to the later seventeenth century. In chapter two, the "catholicisms" of the people of the diocese are described, from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, that is, official and popular beliefs and practices before the Reformation. These were similar to those found elsewhere and largely shared across social groups: a concern for the sacraments, saintly veneration, intercession for the dead, a concern to mitigate sickness and to avert the evil forces of sorcery and magic. By the early sixteenth century, however, such beliefs were in decline among the university educated, and from the early seventeenth century, missionaries and educated clerics began to bring some of their transformed ideas to the countryside through catechism and other teachings.

Chapter three is devoted to the bishops of Coutances who set the tone for much of the religious life of their see, particularly as they were leaders of reform, where it happened. There was change over time in their spiritual interests and actions. Coutances was not a major prize for ambitious prelates, and from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, bishops were largely absentee grandees leaving the administration of their dioceses to suffragans and vicars. There were several exceptions in the fifteenth century, men for whom service to the church was paramount. Gilles Deschamps and Philibert de Montjeu advocated wider church reform, for example, while Geoffroy Herbert (1478-1510) led reforms in Coutances, promulgating a new missal, four sets of synod statutes, the keeping of weekly Offices for the Blessed Virgin in churches, and almost certainly visiting parishes. The first half of the sixteenth century again saw absentee bishops, but with Arthur de Cossé's appointment in 1560 came renovation and reform, despite the destruction wrought by the religious wars. De Cossé held annual synods, appointed the able Nicolas de Briroy as his vicar general, promoted the repair of friaries damaged during the wars, and issued instructions for pastoral visits as prescribed by the Council of Trent. With his successor, Briroy, came further reform: pastoral visits, synods, new liturgical books and encouragement of the parish clergy to preach or at least read homilies. During the seventeenth century bishops became better educated and more conscious of their pastoral duties. Léonor de Matignon encouraged the foundation of religious orders and introduced Cardinal Richelieu's catechism into the diocese. Claude Auvry established two seminaries, and Charles-François Loménie de Brienne saw to the education of priests. By the eighteenth century, Hayden argues, the bishops of Coutances, like their wider French colleagues, considered reform to be achieved and simply to be maintained through regulation and visitation. They were unaware of the significance of wider cultural and intellectual transformations of scientific revolution and Enlightenment and especially of the growing discontent of their lower clergy with their fiscal and institutional inferiority. Hayden concludes that over the whole period, bishops saw their office primarily as a source of status and income even as their "catholicisms" varied. The best bishops believed they had a duty to lead their priests and through them, the laity, to a holier life, while others were less engaged. We know little of the interior spiritual beliefs of these men, although their actions presumably reflected something of their religious views.

In chapter four, the clerical elite of the diocese is examined. The cathedral clergy were numerous and in addition to the chapter, included choral vicars and a host of stipendiary priests, often of turbulent behavior and character. But it is the canons who are centre stage in this work, as they were in *ancien régime* Coutances. While there was some reform of their habits and spirituality over time, these men were concerned above all with their financial and social privileges. Hayden concludes, as did Sauzet for the cathedral chapter of Nîmes diocese, that most of these men followed the rules of their religion and office, but their spirituality was not advanced. One exception was the

group of canons who served as archdeacons, especially in the seventeenth century, for these men were often the promoters of Catholic reform in the rural parishes. Hayden also considers the diocesan officials of Coutances, men trained in theology and the law, along with local men who made good elsewhere, in Parisian benefices or as bishops of other dioceses. Again, there is a nice level of detail about how the cathedral and other cadres were organised and how they behaved, although evidence for their interior lives is more limited because of a lack of direct primary sources.

Chapter five discusses the religious orders, male and female, enclosed, mendicant and hospital. The loss of their archives during the Revolution and World War II means that little is known about them. Approximately 100 religious houses of all sorts existed in the diocese across the period 1350-1789, with two major periods of foundation, the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. As with other dioceses, the decay of monastic houses through *in commendam* holding in the sixteenth century, the rise of pastorally-focused groups in the seventeenth century, especially the schools and hospitals organised by religious women, and the decline of the enclosed male orders in the eighteenth, is the general history of the group in Counter-Reformation Coutances. By the later eighteenth century, the utility of the new orders compared favorably with the decline of membership and activity of the enclosed, which, together with landlordism in the countryside, served to make the latter unpopular. This stands in contrast with Georges Minois's conclusions for Tréguier diocese, where he argues that many of the new orders were also considered a burden by town administrations.[4] Nuance could be added with a consideration of the impact of the mendicants on lay spirituality, through anniversary foundations and confraternity affiliation, as well as something of the spiritual life of the religious themselves through their writings and library holdings, but it is unlikely that such documentation survives.

Chapter six is devoted to parish priests, above all *curés*, although vicars and stipendiary priests are also considered. Hayden argues that the "catholicisms" of the parish clergy of the years 1350-c.1650 were not much different from those of their parishioners. From the late seventeenth century onwards, however, this changed. The introduction of Catholic reform through synods and visitations improved performance of pastoral parish duties and the physical condition of churches, visible from c. 1630. The greatest change came after the mid-seventeenth century with the introduction of seminary training, together with the establishment of ecclesiastical conferences. These augmented the theological and pastoral education of priests and inculcated an introspective spirituality focused on Christ and Mary rather than the saints. As a result, the "catholicisms" of priests became significantly different from those of their parishioners: the cultural bond with their flocks was broken while that between priests was strengthened. (p. 191)

The laity is the focus of chapter seven. Despite the socio-economic diversity of this group, Hayden argues that at any point in time between 1350 and the mid-sixteenth century, 99 per cent of Catholics had "what can be called a single, general Catholicism composed of slightly varying blends of beliefs and practices" (p. 196). This was a Catholicism that emphasised the knowledge of a few basic dogmas and the fulfilment of a few basic religious duties. The "catholicisms" of the mid-sixteenth century are exemplified using the journal of the Sieur de Gouberville. Life was ordered by the liturgical calendar, rites of passage, and observance of religious customs. From the later sixteenth century, the "catholicisms" of the laity changed. The spread of literacy, royal power, economic and social change in the countryside, led to divergences in "catholicisms" between different groups, exacerbated in the eighteenth century by the growing divide between urban and rural. Above all, Hayden's second Catholic reformation brought new expectations of the laity by bishops, achieved by parish priests and rural missionaries. Important mechanisms were catechism for children, missions, and the sacrament of confession, guided by use of Eudes' manual *Le bon confesseur* (1666). (p. 206) Visitation records of the eighteenth century show that parish religion was considered by diocesans to be in good shape: children were knowledgeable, churches were in a good state of repair, and Easter attendance was relatively high. But the second half of the eighteenth century saw troubles brewing. Parish clergy became discontent with their income and status relative to the upper clergy, and both priests and laity resented the removal of revenues from parishes through the appropriation of tithes by institutional owners. Hayden concludes by observing that, across the whole period, most people more or less accepted the beliefs and rules of Roman Catholicism, but the general attitude was one of acceptable minimal behavior (p. 257). While levels

of devotion certainly varied, it might be asked whether conclusions would be nuanced if, as in Restif's study, there was more consideration of lay practices such as confraternity membership, post-mortem rituals, private devotions, popular tracts, saints' cults and shrines. The sources left by bishops and missionaries could give a more resigned view of the laity than might have been the case.

In chapter eight, Hayden turns from Catholicism to consider two other religious groups, Protestants and Deists. In the sixteenth century, Calvinism had some impact in the diocese with up to eighteen Reformed churches in the 1560s. With this unusually large rural Protestantism, the region was adversely affected by the religious wars, and the Huguenot population declined through the seventeenth century with the increasing harshness of the royal government of Louis XIV, explored in the work of Luc Daireaux.[5] There was, however, a persistent minority in certain areas up until the 1730s. In contrast, Deism was only ever of minor importance in pre-revolutionary Coutances. The first Masonic lodge appeared late, in Cherbourg, in 1782. Hayden argues that the significance of dissent, particularly in its Calvinist guise, lay not in its numerical strength, but in its impact on later patterns of religious observance. Several studies of post-Revolutionary religion, such as those of Louis Pérouas on the diocese of La Rochelle and the Limousin region, claim that decisions made by *curés* in 1791 had effects which lasted into the twentieth century.[6] Hayden challenges these conclusions for Coutances, arguing that variations in modern practice date back at least to the late seventeenth century, and are a legacy of the local impact of the Revocation of 1685. Finally, Hayden asks whether Coutances was typical of other dioceses in Normandy, particularly Sées and Rouen. He concludes that Sées had more Masonic lodges, Jansenism and Gallicanism than Coutances, while Rouen witnessed some differences in the levels of catechism instruction and in the patterns of ordinations over time.

In conclusion, Hayden rejects the view of contrasting elite and popular religions, seeing instead an "official religion as defined by the church and ...unofficial religion, largely based on traditions, myths and superstition, believed in and practised in varying degrees by all members of society" (p. 15). The greatest change in the period came with the education of the clergy, which set them apart from their parishioners, then with the changing intellectual climate of the eighteenth century. Useful statistical appendices are provided for numbers of priestly vocations, levels of religious practice, and the Protestant presence. There is a good bibliography on the religious history of Normandy. Overall, this is a masterly work, where the particularities of the religious life of one diocese are set within the context of general developments and change over a long time period of time. The work is clearly written, elegantly expressed and conceptually challenging. It will be essential reading for all historians of Counter/Reformation France and indeed of Catholic Europe more widely.

NOTES

[1] J. Michael Hayden and Malcolm R. Greenshields, *Six Hundred Years of Reform: Bishops and the French Church, 1190-1789* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

[2] Robert Sauzet, *Les visites pastorales dans le diocèse de Chartres pendant la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Rome: Instituto per le ricerche di storia sociale e di storia religiosa, 1975); *Contre Réforme et Réforme catholique en Bas-Languedoc. Le diocèse de Nîmes au XVIIe siècle*, (Brussels & Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1979).

[3] Bruno Restif, *La Révolution des paroisses: culture paroissiale et Réforme catholique en Haute-Bretagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006).

[4] Georges Minois, *Les religieux de Bretagne sous l'Ancien Régime* (Rennes: Ouest-France, 1989).

[5] Luc Daireaux, *Réduire les Huguenots: protestants et pouvoirs en Normandie au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2010).

[6] Louis Pérouas, *Le diocèse de La Rochelle de 1648-1724. Sociologie et pastorale* (Paris: SEVPEN 1964) ; *Les Limousins, leurs saints, leurs prêtres du XV^e au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

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