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Joseph F. Byrnes, *Catholic and French Forever: Religious and National Identity in Modern France*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. xxiii + 278 pp. \$50.00 U.S. (cl) ISBN 0-271-02704-5.

Review by James F. McMillan, University of Edinburgh.

Joseph F. Byrnes engages with an important subject, namely the role of religion in French national life since 1789. The book is not a monograph but a series of essays and reflections on a theme which, as he tells us in the Preface, he has been pondering since the 1960s, both as priest and academic. In the Introduction, Byrnes explains that he believes he is able to throw more light on his subject through a series of case studies than through a more general religious history, which is fair enough, particularly if the book is targeted at a specialist market. On the other hand, he clearly envisages a wider readership, because, having divided his seven essays into three sections entitled "Divorce," "Defense" and "Détente," (each corresponding to a stage in the evolution of Church-State relations in France as Byrnes sees things), he feels obliged to provide each section with an introduction for the uninitiated, and in doing so begins to write the general history which he wanted to eschew. While all the essays contain some new material based on original research, the section introductions are less satisfactory, and precisely highlight the need for a new general religious history of France in the English language which would fully reflect the richness of French scholarship in the field.

It is to the author's credit that the range of his research is wide, embracing the Revolutionary period as well as nineteenth-century and twentieth-century topics. In Chapter One, he takes a fresh look at the "constitutional" clergy and their shifting identities as they reacted to the progressive divorce of the Revolution from organized religion. Some thought that they could be good republicans as well as good pastors: others renounced their priesthood in order to identify more wholeheartedly with the Revolution: and later many who had sworn their oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy retracted it. The story is not unfamiliar, but Byrnes tells it through the eyes and words of individual testimonies which dramatize the chasm opened up between churchmen and the republican idea of the nation after 1789. Chapter Two continues the theme of the creation of the "two Frances" with a re-examination of the attempt on the part of the revolutionaries to harness the sacred to the Revolutionary cause through the institution of revolutionary festivals. Byrnes rightly stresses the failure of this attempt, and the fact that it accentuated the religious and national divide. Chapter Three suggests that the continuing cleavage between Church and nation can be approached by contrasting the writings of Chateaubriand and Destutt de Tracy, which is true, though whether this comparison makes for either a unique or even the best vantage-point to understand the "inner evolving dynamics of the now separate religious and national identities" (p.10), as Byrnes claims, may be doubted, not least because of suspicions about Chateaubriand as an exemplar of Catholicism in his personal life.

In Part Two ("Defense") Byrnes provides two essays designed to illustrate the "siege mentality" (p.xx) developed by the Church against what were perceived as the increasingly hostile forces of the modern world. Chapter Four – the best in the volume – examines "piety against politics" in the form of pilgrimages to Chartres in the nineteenth century. These pilgrimages were conscious efforts at the reconstruction of a French Catholic identity and conceived as counterdemonstrations to other manifestations and celebrations of Frenchness. Chartres embodied another, more enduring France, in contrast to the Second Empire or the Third Republic, and symbolized the alliance of throne and altar.

Also, in promoting this religious vision of the nation in contrast to that of the secular Republic, churchmen were able to draw on deep reserves of feminine piety, epitomized by the likes of the countess Clementine de Chabannes, a tireless propagandist for the Chartres pilgrimage site and sometime editor of the bulletin *La Voix de Notre-Dame de Chartres*, one of the principal sources for Byrnes's chapter. The clergy, however, remained the prime movers in the Chartres pilgrimage movement, which was conceived as a religious bulwark against the ravages of the secular world. Chapter Five retains the focus on defense with an interesting look at the role of the clergy in championing local languages as an instrument for safeguarding the faith in the face of government attempts to homogenize the French language. Here Byrnes contrasts the religious consequences of success in the defense of German in Alsace and the failure to support Catalan in the Roussillon.

The two essays in Part Three are intended to highlight the "Détente" between Church and nation after the bitter divisions of the early twentieth century which produced the separation of Church and state in 1905. A crucial agent in this process, in Byrnes's view, was the experience of the First World War. In Chapter Six, Byrnes turns to the experience of soldier-priests and *instituteurs*, who came to know each other better in the trenches and emerged from the war with a heightened sense of mutual respect. Such reconciliation may well have taken place at an individual level: but here Byrnes places more interpretative weight on his evidence than it can possibly bear. The same may be said for his claims, in Chapter Seven, that full reconciliation can be attributed to the art historian Emile Mâle, who in his distinguished works on medieval and Renaissance art in France "brought his highly secularized fellow citizens face to face with their French Catholic heritage" (p.178). Even in France, intellectuals simply don't have that kind of power or influence.

All of the essays will be of interest to scholars who wish to know more about the relationship between religion and nation in France, and, with luck, they may serve to help stimulate a new generation of Anglophone graduate students to work in a field which, particularly for the twentieth century, is not well served by works in English. There has been no twentieth-century sequel to Ralph Gibson's pioneering synthesis on the social history of French Catholicism between the Revolution and 1914.[1] Byrnes's touch is surer on the Revolutionary period and on the nineteenth century than on the twentieth – a reference to Paul (*sic*) Daladier (p. 212) is perhaps symptomatic – but even so his conceptualization of the nineteenth-century "culture war" fails to bring out fully either the crucial issue at stake, namely the role of religion in public life, and the determination of militant, ultramontane Catholics to fight for the reintroduction of a Christian social order. The reference to "old Veillot and his cronies" (p. 90) misrepresents the importance of Veillot in particular and the ultramontanes in general.[2] The intransigent, ultramontane vision of Catholicism predominated in Paris, as much as Rome, in the first half of the twentieth century, even if it gave rise to movements such as social Catholicism and Christian democracy, and clerical enthusiasm for Vichy was no accident. Even the late Cardinal Lustiger (d.27 April 2007), Archbishop of Paris from 1981-2005, a converted Jew who accepted the secular state to the point of invoking the 1905 Separation Law against the wearing of Muslim headscarves in the schools of the Republic, regularly denounced the legacy of the Enlightenment and the "modernity" of a world without God. Equally, adepts of the *idée laïque* continue to see religion as a threat, as was clear from the polemics surrounding the visit of Pope John Paul II to France in 1996 to celebrate the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of the baptism of Clovis at Rheims. Being French and being Catholic is undoubtedly less problematic at the beginning of the twenty-first century than it was at the beginning of the twentieth, largely because of the progressive secularization of French society (which accelerated only after the 1960s), but the "Détente" which Byrnes attributes to the trenches of World War I has still to take place in some quarters.

NOTES

[1] Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[2] James F. McMillan, "Rediscovering Louis Veillot: the Politics of Religious Identity in Nineteenth-Century France," in *Visions/Revisions: Essays on Nineteenth-Century French Culture*, Nigel Harkness, Paul Rowe, Tim Unwin, and Jennifer Yee eds., (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003): pp. 305-322; James F. McMillan, "Louis Veillot, *L'Univers* and the Ultramontane network in nineteenth-century France," in *Liens personnels, réseaux, solidarités en France et dans les îles Britanniques (xi-xxe siècle)*, D. Bates, V. Gazeau, E. Anceau, F. Lachaud and F-J Ruggiu, eds., (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006): pp. 221-236.

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