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Piety and Politics: Catholic Revival and the Generation of 1905–1914 in France

Paul M. Cohen

New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987

iv + 347 pp.

Paul Cohen is not the first scholar to investigate the historical importance of young bourgeois intellectuals in western society, nor will he be the last. His work, which examines a decade of Catholics passing through the halls of the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*, seeks to define and reflect upon the values and commitments of this budding intelligentsia vis-à-vis their non-Catholic peers and the entire educated youth culture which would enter the trenches of 1914.

In this effort he makes some significant contributions to the *engagé* role played by France's Third Republican young intelligentsia. By targeting a particular group the Catholic *normaliens* of the pre-Great War period, he provides new and interesting insights into a highly committed sector of youth toward Catholicism in the midst of a society where the élites are increasingly anti-clerical and anti-Catholic. Quite consciously he adds a dimension to Robert Wohl's study of this society called *The Generation of 1914*. To be sure some of the more influential Catholic figures of this era have been studied. They include Henri Massis, Georges Bernanons, Francois Mauriac, Jacques Maritain, Marc Sangnier and Charles Péguy. However, to Cohen's credit, the book moves beyond biographical inquiry into group behaviour and collective development. He provides a profound and convincing picture of Catholic "spiritual journeys" among the faith's educated young élite, and his composite picture is convincing. He moves beyond the one-dimensional political analysis found in much of the earlier research and points scholarship toward the inspirational well-springs that led restless bourgeois youth to seek *engagement* as the mark of their values in a middle-class society which they found decadent. What David Schalk, John Hellman and Aline Coutret do for Catholics of the 1930s, Cohen is able to match for a sector of Catholic youth in his chosen period. Finally, he adds dimensions to the analysis of such figures as Jacques Maritain, Ernest Psichari and Charles Péguy which augment the growing literary corpus surrounding these men.

In spite of these strengths the book does have its deficits. There are three significant ones. First of all, Cohen's effort is too extensive. He hops from one major issue to the other, and his work would have been stronger had he held to one task without trying to bring in (sometimes by force) some of the chief matters of current scholarly debate in the field. Secondly, he spends an inordinate amount of time with well-known figures and doesn't link them sufficiently to the Catholic *normaliens*. By such highlighting he brings to focus how individualistic and anecdotal his data is. Consequently this limited material cannot bear the weight of his scholarly conclusions.

As well, this stands out with the attention he gives to the inconsequential Cercle Proudhon. Finally, he states that his data upholds the "neither left, nor right" contentions of Zeev Sternhell and his disciples. This seems to claim too much from too little. Certainly his *mystique/politique* polarity, borrowed from Péguy, is useful in comprehending a tiny, volatile élite like the youthful, bourgeois, *engagés* Catholics of this period, but it does not undermine the usefulness of left-right categories for understanding organizations and movements.

These few weaknesses do not destroy the value of the book. It is a strong first effort by a scholar who will leave his mark in the years to come.

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Religious Studies in Ontario: A State of the Art Review

Harold Remus, William Closson James and Daniel Fraikin
Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992
422 pp. \$24.95

This book tells a part of the story of a major change which has taken place in Canadian higher education since 1960: the study of religion emerging as an accepted academic discipline in the secular university. The most tangible form this took was the establishment of religious studies departments or departments of religion in virtually every Canadian university.

Since Ontario is the largest of the provinces and has the most varied and the largest number of faculty members working in the field, this book is important. As part of a series of studies on the state of the art of religious studies in Canada, it deserves careful reading, especially by members of the clergy and theological educators.

The plan of the book is to review all of the religious studies programmes in Ontario and to draw up a composite profile of the state of the art of doing religious studies in Ontario thirty years after religious studies left her status as "queen" in the university or the sheltered environment of the theological college and moved into the academy as servant. The three authors are all respected scholars and teachers, two in the area of scripture studies and one in the area of religion and literature. They also demonstrate that they have a very pleasant and clear writing style. They cover all the topics: overview of Religion and Religious Studies in Ontario, the perceptions of administrators, faculty and students (Remus); the preparation and hiring, teaching and research of faculty (Closson James), both graduate and undergraduate curricula (Fraikin), libraries, databases and even the Bible Colleges (Remus). In addition there is a fine section on conclusions and recommendations as well as rich appendices and tables.