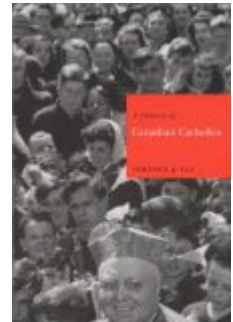


Terence J. Fay. *A History of Canadian Catholics*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002. 392 pp. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7735-2313-5.



Reviewed by Gary Miedema

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The Story of Canadian Catholics

In his introduction, Terence Fay notes that *A History of Canadian Catholics* is "the first comprehensive history of Catholics in Canada" (p. ix). Comprehensive it certainly is. From the first missionaries to the present, it surveys the stories of key leaders and movements, the varying stories of regions and linguistic groups, and the story of both men and women Catholics along the way. While other volumes have certainly analyzed the history of Catholicism in Canada, Fay's book stands alone as a one-volume, single-author survey which mixes together the history of French- and English-speaking Catholics in this country.

Fay organizes his history around three large themes. In the words of the introduction, "Gallikanism (French Spirituality), Romanism (Roman Spirituality) and Canadianism (the indigenization of Catholic spirituality in the Canadian life-style) emerged through the four centuries of Canadian Catholic history" (p. xi). Those three "isms" provide the titles for parts 1, 2, and 3 of the book. In what Fay himself calls a "strong narrative style" (p. viii), part 1 traces the importance of the Galli-

can traditions of French Catholicism on the Canadian church from the first missionaries in the Maritimes and New France, through the Conquest, to the mid-nineteenth century. Part 2 tells the story of the fading of French Gallican influence in the nineteenth century and the rise of ultramontanist, a variety of Catholicism which turned its focus of submission away from the state and on to the centralizing power of the Roman Papacy. Included in this section is the devotional revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century, an assessment of Catholic/Protestant tensions, and an emphasis on the building of separate Catholic institutions, including schools. Finally, in part 3, Fay traces the development of what he argues to be a uniquely Canadian Catholicism. "Canadianism," he argues, developed in the twentieth century out of the tension between French- and English-speaking Catholics, on the one hand, and the tension between French- and English-speaking Catholics and other linguistic and cultural minorities, on the other. Running through the development of the west, the Great Depression, the two world wars, Vatican II, and the charismatic renewal, part 3 puts particular

emphasis on the determination of the Roman Catholic church to make room for diversity, and to side with the weak and the poor in Canada, particularly in the midst of the 1930s, and in the bewildering change of the 1960s and 1970s.

The strength of this book, as noted above, is its ability to view the Catholic peoples of Canada as a whole, and to trace their history, regardless of linguistic and ethnic differences, from the beginning to the present. Much to his credit, Fay is particularly sensitive to issues of ethnic, linguistic, and gender diversity, and does well to paint a picture of a church which, since the Conquest, has had to learn how to be both one and many. Based on secondary and previously published sources, the book is written in the form of a fairly quick-moving, traditional chronological narrative which will be quite easily read and understood by a wide range of readers.

Intended to survey already available historical studies and to summarize them in one place for a general audience, this book was not intended to meet the needs of specialists. Since this review list is intended for the latter, however, a more in-depth critique of Fay's work might be warranted.

First, Fay's narrative, while certainly readable, is indeed traditional. To the author's credit, where interesting "bottom-up" history is available, it is included. No doubt limited by his sources, however, his chronological account sometimes turns into a rather dry survey of the succession of one bishop, with his accomplishments, to the next.

More significant for scholarly readers, the book tends to want to tell a simple story rather than engage in significant analysis. Fay's themes, for example, could have been more sharply defined. A definition of "Gallicanism" is confined to the footnotes, while the theme of Canadianism, perhaps by its very nature, remains amorphous, appearing most clearly in the formation of the Canadian Catholic Conference in 1943, but fading

again thereafter. More significantly, interesting moments of conflict and tension are sometimes too quickly skimmed over (for example, the clash between the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Quebec and the liberal French Canadian elites in that province after the Conquest) while the very real theme of the absorption of the Church with political, economic, and social power at various points in its history seems neglected. Here, other surveys of the history of the Catholic people of Canada have done a more captivating and illuminating job of highlighting, for example, how the Church in Quebec was damaged by its cooperation with the British authorities after the Conquest, and only regained influence among Quebecers when the failure of the Rebellions of the 1830s helped to weaken its liberal opponents.[1] When working through the twentieth century, Fay spends some time on the issue of secularization (p. 271), but that significant theme is, again, too simply described. In his reference to secularization amongst Protestants, he follows the lead of David Marshall's *Secularizing the Faith*,[2] with only a footnote to recognize the fierce debate between that volume and the work of Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie. He also addresses the entire issue without the aid of Jose Casanova's very important work on secularization in primarily Catholic countries, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. [3]

Be that as it may, *A History of Canadian Catholics* will serve its intended audience well. By offering a one-volume survey of Catholics in Canada aimed at the non-specialist reader, it fills a hole that has long needed filling. *A History of Canadian Catholics* pulls together into one place the insights of a vast collection of secondary sources, and its footnotes and bibliography will provide a good guide for those wishing a more in-depth analysis of particular events, people, or movements. It will offer to many an easy and understandable entry point into the very complicated history of Catholicism in Canada. For accom-

plishing that very difficult task, Fay deserves many thanks.

Notes

[1]. I am thinking here, in particular, of Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin, eds., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[2]. David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

[3]. Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

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