

***Sacred Rivals: Catholic Missions and the Making of Islam in Nineteenth-Century France and Algeria.* By Joseph W. Peterson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. xi + 284 pp. \$55.00 cloth; open access e-book.**

When France began its conquest of Algeria in 1830, Catholics rejoiced at the idea that North Africa might be open to Christian evangelization after a hiatus of over a millennium, as they saw it. French officials, on the other hand, worried that overt proselytization among the Muslim population would make conquest more difficult by inflaming religious sensibilities. Joseph W. Peterson's fine book shows how this dilemma shaped missionary work in Algeria for the rest of the nineteenth century. Views of Islam among French Catholics, both missionaries and their allies back in France, were neither monolithic nor stable over time. It is to Peterson's credit that he does not oversimplify those perspectives but uses them to show how discussions about Algerian evangelization informed Catholic debates about the place of religion in France and how religious tensions at home fueled missionary activity in the colony.

Peterson argues that initially it was ultramontane conservative Catholics who approached Islam in Algeria with the most sympathetic lens, admiring what they saw as the deep religiosity of Muslims and a harmonious relationship between mosque and state, two conditions that they could only dream about in post-Revolutionary France. On the ground, this was embodied most fully by the Jesuit mission in Constantine that opened in 1840, which they saw as fertile ground for conversion despite the restrictions put on them by the French authorities. Here they succeeded in converting two Muslim boys whose baptisms were approved by their families and who were sent to France for a Catholic education. In a compelling account, Peterson is able to mine the available sources to show how the Jesuits used the boys as "a stick for beating Catholicism's godless enemies at home" (77). On their return to Algeria, however, the brothers were less devoted to Catholicism than the Jesuits had hoped, and by 1892, one of them had penned an argument for more equal rights for Algerians, an unanticipated and unwelcome outcome.

Over the course of the second half of the century, Peterson traces the transformation of Catholic faith in the receptivity of Muslims to conversion – culturally patronizing as it was – to a more closed racially informed view spearheaded by "liberal" Catholics. Key to this transformation was the shock produced by the Syrian Druze attack on the Maronite Christians in Lebanon that inflamed French Catholic opinion, to which Peterson devotes two chapters in the middle of the book. One of the results was the mobilization of a liberal Catholic fundraising network made up of elites, the *Cœuvre d'Orient*, which produced Orientalist scholarship and supported Catholic education and conversion in the Middle East and North Africa.

In 1866 one of the key figures in this group, Abbé Lavigerie, became bishop of Algiers, where he founded the White Fathers as a missionary arm. Although Lavigerie and the White Fathers are well known to historians, Peterson is able to demonstrate how they contributed to an increasingly racialized view of Arab Muslims whose goal was the uprooting of indigenous culture, largely through the establishment of orphanages for Algerian children left parentless after French-induced famines and colonial violence. After a few years in the field, the White Fathers and their allies back home came to support and disseminate the "Kabyle myth" which saw indigenous Berbers as

more “civilized” than the Arab population and therefore more amenable to Catholic conversion, a myth which brought Catholics into conformity with French rationalizations for continued colonial control.

The last chapter in the book focuses on a group of orphan boys sponsored by the White Fathers – Peterson never specifies how many – who were sent to France for seminary training, where they were often mistreated and many died. In tracing their fates, Peterson is able to show the racism that they faced in both France and Algeria, arguing that they “uncomfortably exposed the fictions and ambiguities beneath the racial thinking of the late nineteenth century” (197). The survivors, raised as Catholics, fluent in French, educated in France, in some cases engaged to Frenchwomen, nevertheless remained Algerian colonial subjects in the eyes of the administration. Despite their support for these converts, Peterson shows how the White Fathers also contributed to the racism that discriminated against them.

French colonial historians, with some notable exceptions, have often neglected the Catholic church and its personnel as significant players in the emergence of colonial ideology and institutionalized racism. This book does much to show how they shaped that ideology through continual dialogue with Catholics in France and military and governmental officials in Algeria. Much of this is done via his analysis of polemics written by influential Catholics. His discussion is most lively, however, when he is able to use real case studies to probe the lives of the colonized and demonstrate the contradictions in Catholic religious and racial thinking. Many historians aim to put metropole and colony in a single frame of reference; Peterson is one of the few to achieve it.

This book is a largely a male story – the main actors are priests, French military and administrative officials, Catholic thinkers, and Algerian boys. Given the gender dynamics of the nineteenth century, that is perhaps inevitable. But I do wish that Peterson had matched his in-depth research into the archives of the Jesuits and the White Fathers with one or more of the female congregations (for example, the Daughters of Charity, whose archives are now open to researchers), to see how they approached the complex problem of Muslim conversion in a French colony. How successful were they in walking the fine line between service and evangelization that bedeviled their male colleagues?

Nonetheless, this is a well-researched and fascinating book that stands as a model for how to incorporate Catholic missions into colonial history.

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***Cultures Colliding: American Missionaries, Chinese Resistance, and the Rise of Modern Institutions in China.* By John R. Haddad. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2023. viii + 335 pp. \$129.95 hardcover; \$39.95 paper.**

John R. Haddad provides a compelling and useful narrative in the writing of *Cultures Colliding: American Missionaries, Chinese Resistance, and the Rise of Modern*