

political victory of 1787.

Although the New Jersey's delegation to the Constitutional Convention arrived without him, Witherspoon was nonetheless there in spirit. Five of his Princeton students, including James Madison, were present. A sixth founder, Alexander Hamilton, was not a Princeton student, but he came to rely on Witherspoon nonetheless in the area of political economy. Morrison explains that Hamilton asked Witherspoon's input prior to writing his "Report Relative to a Provision for the Support of Public Credit" in 1790. Witherspoon responded, and his ideas made their way into Hamilton's report. Unfortunately, Morrison does not provide much detail about what Hamilton borrowed, though he does discuss Witherspoon's defense of hard currency against paper money. Morrison discusses more fully the debt of the authors of the *Federalist* to Witherspoon, noting general influences as well as specific phrasings from papers by Madison and Hamilton that echo Witherspoon.

As "the prototype of the political parson," Witherspoon's understanding of the connections between civil society and religious faith reflected the way in which he synthesized his Enlightenment and Reformed backgrounds within the new American context. He did not advocate what we now term "establishment," but nor did he adopt the anachronistic "separation" between church and state. He was rather solidly in the mainstream of American founding thought in believing that a religious people fostered civic virtue. He was quite convinced, as the author of government-sponsored Thanksgiving prayers perhaps should be, that America owed its existence to the Creator who bestowed self-evident truths upon humanity. Nevertheless, because of his fluency with the many intellectual traditions coursing through the founding era, Witherspoon was quite capable of speaking with sensitivity to audiences beyond

his own Protestant fold. In his respect for the civil opinions of others, without compromising on the larger truths of the American experiment, Witherspoon was a prototypical American.

With this book, Morrison has engaged in an act of recovery. Getting to know Witherspoon helps us know aright the other founders and gives us a deeper understanding of the world that created a new nation.

### ***New Maistre Studies***

*Cara Camcastle*

**Joseph de Maistre's Life, Thought, and Influence: Selected Studies**, edited by Richard Lebrun, *Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. 338 pp.*

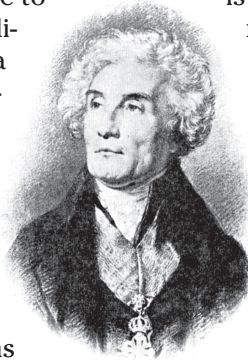
In *Joseph de Maistre's Life, Thought and Influence* Maistre is the focal point of analysis, in contrast with general works on conservatism where, perhaps because some of his critics held the view that his opinions were immoderate, he has been relegated to brief mention. Some writers in this collection see Maistre in a new light, instead of through the filter of reiterated unsubstantiated charges of previous interpreters who held that he was the extremist of legend, fascinated with violence "like Sade." Many of the essays were previously published in *Revue des études maistriennes*. Translation in this collection by the editor Richard Lebrun of essays that were written in French makes

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them available to an Anglophone audience. Some of Maistre's unpublished correspondence and notebooks donated after 1995 by his descendants to the departmental archives of Savoy in Chambéry are considered.

The invasion of Piedmont by the French Revolutionary army had a great effect on Maistre's personal life. He chose to leave his home and precious library, rather than live under a French revolutionary government of occupation, and devoted energy and money to assist victims of the Revolution. His most important political work *Considerations on France* that gained him a reputation in Europe was counter-revolutionary. A theme that runs through most of the essays in this collection is the influence of the Revolution on his writings. Why was this senator and magistrate transformed into a counter-revolutionary? Utilizing comments from Maistre's diaries, Jean-Louis Darcel recreates Maistre's response to the Revolution and his experiences in exile to provide an answer. Critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Sainte-Beuve depicted Maistre as a reactionary who opposed the French Revolution, because he wanted to maintain the *ancien régime* and legitimize that centralized and undemocratic political system. Through excellent analysis of archival material, Darcel is able to show that Maistre criticized harshly and repeatedly the policy of the decadent government of his homeland, Piedmont. His well-deserved criticism of the absolutist House of Savoie and the French Revolutionary governments indicates that accusations by some previous critics that he was a reactionary extremist are unjustified. Baron des Étoles, a friend with whom he had an intimate correspondence, had become Intendant General of the province of Savoy but resigned his seat in



protest to the centralized policies of King Victor-Amadeus. "He busied himself addressing reports designed to enlighten the king on the deterioration of the situation and emergency measures to take, just as Joseph de Maistre was doing." (38) Maistre is a reformer not a reactionary. In a letter to Baron des Étoles, he said that it is impossible to return to the old regime. "The project to put all the water of Lake Geneva into bottles is much less crazy than to re-establish things precisely on the same footing where they were before the Revolution." (58) Maistre was also critical of the French Revolution, because he had witnessed that the promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity was a utopia that never materialized. The opposite had actually occurred: oppression of minorities, civil war, and a war of conquest.

On the other hand, Maistre claimed that the Revolution was not a completely negative phenomenon. Its violent acts on guilty and innocent alike had a purging, redemptive force. The chapter by Owen Bradley summarizes the thesis of his recent book on Maistre. Bradley argued that Maistre was fascinated with how nonrational, nonutilitarian aspects of social existence are essential to the maintenance of society. A strength of Bradley's interpretation is that he was not misled, unlike many of Maistre's critics, to the conclusion that Maistre's lifelong interest in the violence and irrationality of human beings demonstrated his warped mind and love of cruelty. "Rather, it was part of a general sociological account of sacrifice, which placed the Terror within a global history of ritual violence." (79) Violence was not the preferred means to achieve an improved system of government and well being of the people. The opposition of two terms "enlightenment" and "sacrifice" in the title of Maistre's

work *Enlightenment on Sacrifice* creates an oxymoron. With its juxtaposition of reason and ritual slaughter, the title was probably intended to challenge the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Maistre believed that force alone, even if aided by the strength of a coalition of European monarchical powers, would not reconquer France for the heirs to the monarchy. Unlike the bellicose émigré princes, he stated that there was a need to produce counter-propaganda. Attempts to immolate the revolutionaries would be pointless if their opinions continued to circulate. The ideas of the revolutionaries had taken hold among citizens to the point that it was impossible for a monarchy to govern without changing public opinion. Benjamin Thurston's essay in the collection draws attention to how Maistre expertly analyzed the language of the revolutionaries in order to create a counter-revolutionary discourse in his pamphlets. He stressed the abstract character and empty dogma that bore the stamp of the idealism of the revolutionary discourse. He highlighted "the hypocrisy and dissimulation of revolutionary language, the smokescreen of metaphysical verbiage, which hid all manner of vice and cruelty." (114) For Maistre, the method used to reform the political system should be one circumscribed in reality by history, by the realities of constitutional law, and the needs of human beings.

Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre are well-known for their counter-revolutionary writing and are often mentioned together. Richard Lebrun's chapter in the collection makes a useful contribution to studies in conservatism by providing an in-depth comparison of the two thinkers. Despite similarities in their assessment of the Revolution and in their views on politics and religion in general, an important difference between these two conservatives is often overlooked. Although Burke is the more widely read and well-known of the two thinkers, Lebrun rightly points

out that "Maistre seems to have been much more aware than Burke of fundamental philosophical (and theological) questions and more ready and able to wrestle with these issues." Maistre wrote a systematic critique of Rousseau's ideas on the state of nature and popular sovereignty while Burke never went beyond some critical comments. Maistre's attack on the ideas of the Enlightenment was more thorough than Burke's: Maistre wrote an entire volume on eighteenth-century scientism and the ideas of Francis Bacon, and the *St. Petersburg Dialogues* contains a substantial critique of John Locke's sensationalist psychology. Consequently, reading Maistre's works in addition to Burke's would provide a better understanding of the Counter-Enlightenment.

W. Jay Reedy's essay claims that Maistre was "anti-scientistic," (187) while Bonald used the deductivism and rationalist analysis of Enlightenment philosophers and was "fighting Enlightenment rationalists on their own turf." (186) He overlooks that Maistre's preference for empirical analysis is responsible for unique contributions to counter-revolutionary discourse. Reedy downplays one of Maistre's significant insights, which is similar to Vico's idea regarding cultural pluralism. "He [Maistre] may have been only marginally more appreciative than Bonald of political variety and cultural 'difference' throughout the world." (185) On the contrary, his analysis of factual experience leads Maistre to reject Bonald's claim that the monarchy is the ideal institution in every circumstance. Although Maistre admired English institutions, he showed that these would not be compatible with the culture, the size of the population, and land area of France. The American constitution was based on the powers Americans received from their ancestors, and "not at all on a *tabula rasa*, like the French." (*Considerations*) The French Revolutionary case showed that

merely writing a constitution would not promote liberty. The seeds of liberty exist in the particular natural unwritten constitution, in the culture, and in the mores of a nation.

Charlotte Muret and Harold Laski claimed that Bonald and Maistre rejected any rights for individuals or particular classes in society, since they believed that this would threaten social unity. Any type of pluralism, in the sense of competing institutions, should also be avoided for the same reason. The essay by Jean-Yves Pranchère iterates this century-old interpretation of Maistre's political thought. His comparison of the political and religious thought of Maistre and Bonald has overlooked important differences in the political sphere among Maistre, Bonald, and the physiocrats. Pranchère concluded "Exactly like the physiocrats, Maistre and Bonald think that it is the essence of sovereignty not to be able to be judged or controlled by independent bodies that could oppose it as a counterpower." (203) To the contrary, Maistre opposed the legal despotism of the physiocrats and preferred a tempered monarchy. "One of the sacred laws," Maistre states in his *Study on Sovereignty*, "is the right of subjects by the means of certain bodies, councils, or assemblies differently composed, to instruct the king of their needs, to denounce abuses, and legally to pass their grievances and their very humble remonstrances to him." Pranchère ignored that in Maistre's political system, unlike the one of Bonald or the physiocrats, authority is never completely concentrated in the person of the king. Maistre feared that if power were concentrated in one institution, probably there would be abuses.

The king is not only required to observe the fundamental laws of the constitution, but even more importantly, he is required to heed the judgments of other bodies. The physiocrats criticized the idea of countervailing forces and saw no purpose for a *parlement* that Maistre stressed was an essential ingredient of a monarchy. For Maistre, sovereignty does reside in the person of the king, but to paint an accurate complete picture of Maistre's ideal political system one must include the other bodies, such as the hereditary magistrates in the *parlements* not appointed by the king; they also play an influential role. Darcel's chapter on Maistre and the House of Savoy and Pranchère's interpretation conflict. Through a study of Maistre's unpublished correspondence, Darcel found that Maistre was hardly submissive to political authority. "This man, whose culture was vast and whose erudition was truly encyclopedic, always proclaimed his right to criticize and to remonstrate when confronted by power; this by character, but also by his concept of the advisory role that intermediate bodies were naturally led to play with respect to the sovereign." (48) Maistre was himself a member of the Senate of Piedmont. He deplored the fact that the Senate had become merely ceremonial and the appointees of the King had obtained the actual power. During the time when Maistre's father was President of the Senate, both the king of Piedmont and the king of France had to listen to remonstrances and advice from their respective Senate. The essays of some of the contributors to this book reveal, in contrast to the doldrums of the preceding two hundred years, how the pace of Maistrian studies is quickening.