

even though the sexual revolution has hit a brick wall in the eighties, the liberal Catholic wing in America is still furious that the church remains the only major institutional bulwark against further carnage.

Weigel sees the American misunderstanding of John Paul II as part of a wider tension that has always existed between America and Roman Catholicism. America is the laboratory of modernity; the chief project of modernity is "autonomous man" (perhaps best grasped not by abstract definition but by Rilke's image of a panther silently gazing from its cage); and the church has always been at odds with this aspect of the Enlightenment. Moreover, since it claims infallibility in matters of faith and morals, the church has been less than enthusiastic about a pluralistic culture that treats religion like any other consumer commodity.

But, Weigel argues, we are now seeing the dissolution of the Enlightenment. If the Catholic Church can keep its "theological nerve," it will play a major role in setting the post-modern agenda. But if the church in America succumbs instead to leftist fashion, it can expect to evaporate as quickly as mainline Protestantism, whose political accommodations have emptied its churches. On the other hand—and this is less likely—if the church were to retreat back to the triumphalist barricades to suit the wishes of a hardened minority, it can also look forward to a rapid marginalization.

In looking for points of convergence between Rome and Cicero, Illinois, Weigel sides with those historians who see the American experiment as grounded not so much in the radical individualism of Locke as in the Christian idea of community, the "city upon a hill," whose roots can be traced back to the Catholic middle ages. (Weigel refers to Thomas Aquinas as the "first Whig.") He rejects the notion that the Founders conceived merely a "procedural" republic of clashing interests; they aimed instead at a liberty ordered by civic virtues whose taproot is religion. Catholicism, argues Weigel, should find this kind of polity congenial and, with its natural law approach to moral reasoning, should be in a strong position to help guide the republic back to moral common sense.

But as Weigel acknowledges, the church today does not find in America this ideal sort of pluralism—"one with a transcendent horizon"—but rather the "naked public square" that Pastor Neuhaus writes about. Secularists have been at work for decades to rid public policy of all religious referents. Their

instrument has been the establishment clause of the First Amendment. But the Founding Fathers never wanted an impenetrable wall between church and state, and if we are to avoid complete moral anarchy, such a wall is out of the question. Weigel's train of thought here mirrors that of Wilmoore Kendall, the late Yale political theorist, who should be consulted more often by conservatives on this particular issue. Kendall argued that the Constitution should be read in the spirit with which Americans have always instinctively handled the problem of religious penetration of the civil order:

Maintain a wall; celebrate it in myth and song even as the Great Wall of China was celebrated in myth and song; celebrate it, indeed, as a wall that cannot and must not be breached. But let the wall be porous; and if now and then, here or there, some moisture seeps through from one side of the wall to the other, that is, from religion to government (though not the other way 'round), use some common sense, of which we expect you to have some, in deciding how excited to get about it.

In the last part of his book, Weigel addresses specific issues—the economy, abortion, nuclear policy, and so forth. He has performed a service in explaining John Paul II's social thinking, especially the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which exercised so many conservatives when it came out two years ago. No, the Pope was not committing "moral equivalency" when addressing the two power blocs—any more than Saul Bellow was when he remarked that it's our "soft nihilism" versus their "hard nihilism." And the encyclical was quite clear about its endorsement of private enterprise, so long as the profit motive is guided by higher values. The Pope's social thinking should upset no conservatives other than libertarians who think that the key to happiness is getting one's utility preference curve to incline at just the right angle.

Weigel's book is a valuable contribution; still, I cannot help but think that all such books should have a warning sticker addressed to both the practicing Catholic and anyone else who happens to open it. True, as Romano Guardini said, the church does not stand in metaphysical remoteness, but in time, and as such there will always be "issues." But the interior life, so to speak, of the church, which has remained intact for two millennia, has little to do with being right or wrong about most contemporary issues. To define being a Catholic around a menu of positions (which, let me hasten to say, Weigel does not do) is to entirely miss how the church has always understood herself. □

THE CROSSWINDS OF FREEDOM:
THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT, VOL. III
James MacGregor Burns/Alfred A. Knopf/864 pp. \$35

Victor Gold

Of the mandarin historians of the American left, few suffer the ongoing angst of James MacGregor Burns; or, at least, the torment visited upon him during this past decade of the Reagan terror. True, there is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., with his hang-dog nostalgia for Camelot and his embarrassing insistence that no matter how bad things look, there's a liberal cycle just around the corner. But Burns takes the cake. As a Democratic party activist in Massachusetts, he fears for the future of the Republic, having long since concluded that "the system" is so rigged that even if an ideologically pure liberal were to move into the White House, he would be "thwarted by political forces acting through the marvelous contrivances devised by the Framers and elaborated by their successors to balk comprehensive and forthright government action . . ."

Re-examine that last quote to comprehend the "marvelous" extent of Professor Burns's dolor. The man—despite all the honors heaped upon him in over four decades of pedagogic flackery on behalf of liberal candidates and causes—simply doesn't know whether he's coming or going. Does he approve or disapprove of the work of the Framers? Hard to tell. On one hand, given the right-wing spirit of the times, he fears the prospect of another constitutional convention. On the other, he is persuaded, as he once told his soulmate-in-angst Bill Moyers, that the existing Constitution props up "an anti-leadership system, making it difficult to govern . . . terribly difficult for men to rise to their stature by rising above brokerage, rising above what I call transactional leadership."

Or what others would call democracy. Not that Burns the Democrat isn't for democracy. Only that he fantasizes a lot about Leadership; specifically, the sort of Leadership the country had during the reigns of Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy; and might have had, but for the elaborate contrivance called popular election, under President Ted Kennedy.

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This is the third and final volume of Burns's mislabeled "history" of America; actually, an overextended ruminative essay that ought to be titled *The World According to James MacGregor Burns*. It is Burns's sixteenth book in all. Of that sixteen, four have been dutifully, at times slavishly, devoted to FDR and the Kennedys. That includes *John Kennedy: A Political Profile*, the semi-official biography used by the Kennedy presidential campaign in 1960 to persuade Democratic liberals that JFK, though Joe Kennedy's son, was one of their own. Published in the early stages of that campaign, the book provided a crucial service to the Kennedy camp, coming as it did when other liberal doyens (notably, Schlesinger) were still carrying the torch for Adlai Stevenson.

Sixteen years later, in 1976—by odd coincidence, another campaign year—Burns published *Edward Kennedy and the Camelot Legacy*, a book that might have served a Ted Kennedy campaign had there been one. But that was the year, alas, when Ted Kennedy decided

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that family obligations precluded his rising to the call of Leadership; a horrendous lapse which, in Burns's world, led directly to the Carter malaise and the awful advent of Reagan-Bushism.

"Liberals were in no mood to celebrate as they came to the end of their worst decade, the 1970s," writes Burns. "During the final forlorn weeks of the Carter Administration, as they watched conservatives move into the new presidency, into a newly Republican Senate, and into the cultural and economic decision-making centers of Washington, liberals could reflect once again that nothing fails like success. Looking back over the liberal and Democratic dominance of the past five decades, they asked what had gone

wrong—what had really gone wrong?"

Burns asks this question, or rather, puts it into the mouths of his fellow liberals, on page 629 of this sprawling jeremiad, then spends some 235 pages navel-picking the liberal dilemma; which he, of course, perceives as the nation's, indeed the planet's dilemma. "The leadership gap that afflicts us today," he writes, "could be rather simply explained: our leaders were shot down."

That passage, preceding a ritual incantation of Yeats ("Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold . . ."), fairly depicts the author's distraught condition as a liberal polemicist writing in a post-liberal environment. *How long, O Lord, how long, until young Joe is ready?* □

CITIZENS:
A CHRONICLE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Simon Schama/Alfred A. Knopf/948 pp. \$29.95

Maurice Cranston

This "chronicle" of the French Revolution became an instant bestseller throughout the English-speaking world, and it deserves to be, because it takes that revolution out of the hands of sociologists, miniaturists, and historical determinists to tell the story as one of political and personal experience, and to tell it extremely well. Professor Schama begins by refuting the familiar theory that the Revolution marked the painful transition of France from a feudal, bankrupt Old Regime to capitalist, bourgeois modernity. There was nothing structurally wrong with the Old Regime, he argues; France was as sound economically as England; feudal lords were already turning into modern landlords; capitalism, with as much noble as bourgeois participation in its enterprises, was already in place; and far from there being any class struggle between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, individuals and groups within every estate in the nation were at odds with their co-equals. Even royalty was divided, with Louis XVI's two brothers being squarely counter-revolutionary while his cousin Philippe d'Orleans (who changed his name to Philippe Egalité) was so pro-revolutionary that he voted for the execution of a king who dithered between supporting the Revolution and opposing it.

Schama's general explanation of the

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collapse of the Old Regime is that while Louis was sincerely eager to introduce reform, his government was unable to create representative institutions that could execute its program of reform. The Revolution, in its constitutionalist phase between 1789 and the flight of the King to Varennes in 1791, was no more successful in setting up the institutions that would put into practice the ideas it had taken from Montesquieu. After Varennes, revolutionary passion took over from revolutionary reason.

And passion, according to Schama, is what distinguished the French Revolution from those that took place in England in 1688 and America in 1776. Late eighteenth-century France was in the grip of romanticism. Feelings were let loose, as it were, on principle and the restraints of reason felt to be intolerable burdens. Rousseau is a name that occurs often in this book, and there can be no denying that that tormented philosopher did much to inspire both the popular contempt for the Old Regime and the popular fervor for the republican innovations that developed in France.

Violence thus emerged early in the proceedings. The storming of the Bastille and the lynching of its governor by the Paris mob on July 14, 1789, began a cycle of violence that ended, as Schama puts it, "in the forest of guillotines." And not only guillotines, for the *rasoir national* was a relatively humane instrument which in Paris, at any rate, terminated the lives of almost

as many revolutionists (including Philippe Egalité as well as Robespierre, Danton, Hébert, Desmoulins, and so on) as of antirevolutionaries. It was in the provinces that the violence was most atrocious, and Schama brings to light something liberal historians have always tried to veil, namely the extent of the repression against "federalists," or citizens who opposed the dictatorship of Paris, in places such as Lyons, where the guillotine could not kill enough dissidents, even at the rate of twelve heads every five minutes, and where groups of as many as sixty were roped together and shot at with cannon; the survivors being finished off with bayonets and rifles.

Of some 2,000 Lyonnaise thus liquidated, only a handful were of the upper classes; more were ordinary people, as were the victims of the Terror in the region of the Vendée in western France, where Catholic country folk, opposed to the de-Christianizing vandalism of the Paris regime, rebelled in substantial numbers. Again, as opposed to the liberal textbook myth of an ordinary civil war in the Vendée, Schama shows that the Vendean resistance was not merely suppressed but answered with systematic genocide, whole populations being cruelly exterminated and their villages, crops, and forests razed in the names of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Such rebels did not enjoy what Robespierre called the "merciful solicitude" of the guillotine.

Violence in action went together with violence in words. The freedom of the press (while it lasted) was rather more abused than used. Hébert, for example, prepared the way for the trial of the more celebrated prisoners of the Revolution, and notably of the Queen, with such scurrilous and obscene character assassination as to make the "fair trial" promised in the Declaration of the Rights of Man—the Revolution's most sacred text—a sickly farce. When Hébert's own turn came to mount the scaffold, he exhibited all the hysterical fear and cowardice he had attributed in print to the "aristos," who had in fact faced death with exemplary dignity.

Schama is particularly good at describing such scenes as these: he has a marvelous sense of the dramatic. While he clearly disapproves of romanticism, he himself brings out the theatrical and colorful features of the Revolution as vividly as a novelist. The flight of the King to Varennes, for example, is not simply discerned as a turning point, when all hope of the Revolution maintaining some vestige of moderation was lost and the initiative passed to the Jacobins and the mobs: Professor Schama narrates it as a personal story, even a personal tragedy for an all-too-

human king and queen for whom bad luck seemed to assume the form of a hostile fate. Schama also gives a thrilling account of Charlotte Corday's assassination of the odious Marat, one of the few acts of violence in the Revolution that was redeemed by courage, indeed nobility. It is ironical that a young girl should have been the Brutus of a revolution that did so little for women.

The book is an unusually long one, but the reader can only wish there were more of it, for it stops short at the end of the Terror in 1794, leaving several more years of revolutionary (if admittedly more orderly) government to come. Of the year 1799, which witnessed the ascendancy of Napoleon and a completed decade of revolutionary government, Schama briefly observes that it found the rural poor no better off than they had been under the Old Regime, while the "fat cats," as he calls the rich, were fatter than ever—despite the fact that all the progress in industry and commerce that had developed under the Old Regime was halted by the Revolution. The most substantial change he notices is psychological: the national self-image had been revolutionized. French people had ceased to think of themselves as subjects, and henceforth thought of themselves as citizens. Even when Philippe Egalité's son was put on the throne as Louis-Philippe in 1830, he was required to swear allegiance to the "sovereignty of the nation." The title of *Citizens* for Professor Schama's "chronicle" is well chosen.

The book is not, however, without its imperfections. The author is sometimes carried away by his admiration for the character he delineates. His idol, Malessherbes, for example, was undoubtedly a staunch defender of the King at his trial as well as the cause of freedom in general, but it is evident from the researches of his biographer Grosclaude that Malessherbes was not, as Schama claims, "virtually incapable of insincerity": he was utterly deceitful, for example, over the publication of *Emile*. Generally, Schama is apt to be overlenient toward the sophisticated, toward men such as Mirabeau and Talleyrand, who were as urbane as they were unprincipled; and to be correspondingly impatient with the naive, such as Lafayette, and the oafish, such as Thomas Paine.

Moreover, there are rather too many careless mistakes. *Curés* (vicars), for example, are muddled up with curates (*vicaires*); Julie de Lespinasse, the real-life (platonic) mistress of d'Alembert is confused with Julie d'Etange, the fictional (and less platonic) mistress of St-Preux; and there are faults in the