

national security: the Roberts Commission on Pearl Harbor (1941–42); the Rockefeller Commission on the CIA's domestic activities (1975); the Scowcroft Commission on MX missile deployment (1983); the Tower Commission on Iran-contra (1986–87); and the 9/11 Commission (2002–04). Four of the five (the exception being the Scowcroft Commission) came into being in response to catastrophes or apparent scandals, and were ostensibly established to uncover what happened, who was to blame, and how recurrences might be avoided.

Kitts makes a solid attempt to draw back the curtain of mystery behind which these commissions typically operate.

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He rightly emphasizes the paramount importance of who is selected to serve on them, and provides many insights into the political intrigue behind the scenes. His sketches of the members of the

Roberts Commission investigating Pearl Harbor—four military men and a Supreme Court justice—demonstrate that the panel was congenitally flawed. Major General Frank McCoy, for example, was compromised by his friendship with Secretary of War Henry Stimson; and the panel's chairman, Justice Owen Roberts, was notable for an almost childlike naiveté.

Some of Kitts's omissions are curious, though. For example, he notes that the Tower Commission on Iran-contra portrayed President Reagan as confused and out of the loop, a president who had allowed National Security Council aides to run amok and cross-wire two covert operations (arms to Tehran in exchange for American hostages and cash, with the cash then diverted to the Nicaraguan contras). By contrast, two separate investigations, one by a joint congressional committee and another by independent counsel Lawrence Walsh, found that Reagan, in Kitts's words, "had actively presided over an illegal and politically unsound policy." Kitts seems inclined

toward the latter explanation, though he brings no new information to bear either way. Could President Reagan's Alzheimer's disease, unrecognized at the time, help account for the disparate accounts? Kitts doesn't even mention the possibility.

The outlier here is the Scowcroft Commission, which came into being because President Reagan wanted blue-ribbon sanction for his plan to deploy a new land-based missile. Though commissions are frequently convened to legitimize precooked decisions, Kitts would have been wise to dispense with this one and devote more of his relatively short book to mining the history of the other, more controversial panels.

Kitts concludes that in appointing these commissions, presidents tend to be concerned more with protecting their own interests than with ferreting out the facts. At the very least, commissions buy time until their reports come out and establish one axis for debate. That's true enough, though congressional investigations—which Kitts generally takes at face value—are no less tainted by self-interest and political agendas. Still, and despite its limitations, *Presidential Commissions & National Security* succeeds in turning a spotlight on a phenomenon that deserves scrutiny: the efforts of temporary panels, their life spans measured in months, to investigate the permanent government and its failings.

—Max Holland

Soldiers Who Made France

THE REMARKABLE feature of French history in the last 30 years is that it has ceased to hinge upon soldiers. French politics in the first two-thirds of the 20th

century were very largely defined by Captain Alfred Dreyfus, Marshal Henri Pétain, and General Charles de Gaulle, and the intense loyalties and hostility they variously inspired. The importance of these three soldiers reflected the extraor-

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dinary role that the French army, known as the school of the nation, played in the popular imagination and political life. Conscription meant that the army became the great shared experience of Frenchmen, the institution in which Bretons and Provençals and Parisians learned a common language and culture.

The false accusations of espionage against Dreyfus starting in 1894 were only on the most visible level about injustice and anti-Semitism. The Dreyfus case also represented another outbreak of the argument that had divided France since the Revolution of 1789. Was the army the custodian of the nation, timeless and Roman Catholic and resting atop a deep monarchical tradition, or of the Republic, secular and modern and democratic? Soon after Dreyfus was cleared of all charges in 1906 came the Republic's revenge. The ministry of war began keeping secret dossiers on each officer's religious beliefs and practices. A Mass-going officer would find his promotions blocked, whereas a staunch and anti-clerical republican could rise through the ranks.



After World War II, Charles de Gaulle (1890–1970) carefully stoked the myth of a widespread French Resistance to the Nazi occupation, with himself as *de facto* leader.

Purged and divided, this political punching bag of an army then faced the industrialized slaughter of World War I, in which Pétain made his name defending Verdun. The troops held on, just. But even America's entry into the war in April 1917 could not avert the sullen mutinies of that summer by an exhausted army that could no longer sustain the monstrous losses of doomed attacks, and Pétain again saved France and her army, this time by suspending offensives for the rest of the year and allowing morale to recover. The consequent status of national hero brought him out of retirement when the Germans returned in 1940—but after France's defeat, Pétain became the figurehead of the puppet Vichy regime, a role that proved curiously congenial to the deeply conservative old man. He relished the Vichy slogan “Family, Country, Work,” chosen in deliberate opposition to the “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” of the Republic.

So, having saved France in 1917, Pétain betrayed her in 1940—this was the first of the myths established by France's next essential soldier, de Gaulle. Like his myth of a widespread and self-generated Resistance, it was only partly true. The old division between a France for and against the Revolution, for and against Dreyfus, revived under Pétain. At least until late 1943, when the Nazis began losing the war, the Vichy regime was rather more popular, and the Resistance very much more marginal (and very much more dependent on British arms and inspiration) than de Gaulle later insisted.

In peacetime, de Gaulle saved a kind of democracy by becoming a kind of dictator. He sought to reconcile those deep French divisions by inventing a new constitution for his Fifth Republic, one that combined republican form and monarchical powers. He preferred plebiscites to elections and abjured political parties. And, aside from the dreadful Algerian War, he was lucky. His presidency, lasting from 1958 to 1969, overlapped with *les trente glorieuses*, 30 years of economic growth. His successors have labored instead under *les trente piteuses*, 30 years of relative stagnation.

Rod Kedward is a leading historian of the Resistance, and his book comes trailing almost worshipful reviews in Britain. A skillful chronicler of Dreyfus, Pétain, and de Gaulle, he is also marvelous on social change and intellectual life. He is splendid, too, on the selective and delayed French memory, and the ways that the collaborations of Vichy and the torture of Algeria have recently returned to haunt a chastened France. He presents a France torn and yet also defined by competing identities and differing narratives and realms of memory, an approach that leans on historian Pierre Nora's celebrated divisions among the traditions of the Republic, the Nation, and *les France*, the last an almost untranslatable notion of a single France composed of many different elements.

Kedward concludes that "the identity sought by France within Europe had long become inseparable from attitudes to the global market economy," which is to say that one way or another, France's future as a nation is increasingly being subordinated to the grander narratives of Europe and of globalization. But at least the soldiers finally seem to have faded from the picture, and President Jacques Chirac's recent decision to end conscription is taking the army from the central role in national life that it has enjoyed and endured since Napoleon.

—Martin Walker

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Seeing God's Hand in Evolution

THE MOST DANGEROUS place to be on any battlefield is smack in the middle, between the opposing forces. So one can only imagine the scorn likely to be heaped on this mild and eloquent book as it seeks to appeal to both sides in a war that seems endless. Francis S. Collins is a noted genetic scientist who chaired the Human Genome Project, and a self-described evangelical

Christian. His topic here is evolution, and he wants to reach out not only to the scientists who, as he does, embrace and study it, but also to the evangelicals who spurn it. If both sides dismiss him as insufficiently doctrinaire—he rebukes atheists as illogical while imploring his fellow Christians to reconsider their antievolution orthodoxies—then both will be the poorer for it.

Collins is hardly the only scientist with religious convictions. As he notes, some 40 percent of biologists, physicists, and mathematicians say that they believe "in a God who actively communicates with humankind and to whom one may pray in expectation of receiving an answer," a proportion that hasn't changed significantly over the years. But Collins is one of the few such scientists who habitually and publicly use the language of faith in talking about science. Appearing alongside President Clinton in 2000 to announce the first complete draft of the human genome—the DNA sequence in each of our cells that holds the building blocks of life—Collins took the podium to remark that he was awed to catch "the first glimpse of our own instruction book, previously known only to God." And he's one of the few in this polarized debate with the nerve to point to the elegance of the evolutionary mechanism, and the splendor of its results, as evidence of God's hand in the world.

This book does more than just review the voluminous evidence for evolution, though the author's intimate acquaintance with the genome makes him ideally situated to do so. Collins's aims are broader, more ambassadorial. Seeking to give nonreligious readers some sense of the religious mindset, he offers a narrative of his own conversion in young adulthood, quoting at length from the writings of C. S. Lewis and St. Augustine that influenced him. He challenges his fellow Christians to see the dangers posed to faith both by young earth creationism (the doctrine that all life was created in its current form several thousand years ago) and by intelligent design, which he calls a "God of the gaps" theology—one that's dependent for reverence on the puzzles in nature that we do not yet understand. And he

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A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief.

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