The French Revolution is widely regarded as a crucial milestone in the birth of the modern world and its immediate and enduring impact on Europe has attracted considerable scholarly attention. However, research on the international reception of its church reforms (the Civil Constitution of the Clergy) has long been a desideratum and has become a particularly pertinent topic due to the present renaissance of interest in the Catholic Enlightenment. Building upon his previous monograph on south Germany’s communications landscape in the late 18th century, Jochen Krenz’s study assesses the responses of this region’s theological journals to the Civil Constitution. It covers various editorial perspectives: enlightened Catholic (Freiburg; Mainz; Vienna; Salzburg; Würzburg; Banz) and Protestant (Marburg; Wolfenbüttel); counter-enlightened Catholic (Augsburg; Mainz) and Protestant (Weimar; Giessen); and revolutionary Catholic (Strasburg). It is thus impressive for its use of neglected sources and for its considerable thematic and geographical scope.

Krenz provides a meticulous discussion of the different responses of each journal, whilst concurrently charting the cross-confessional enlightenment and counter-enlightenment topos and lines of argument. His study explores how German Aufklärer and Gegenaufklärer used the debate on France’s church reforms to pursue their own agendas. It emphasizes the essential role of editors and translators in mediating and manipulating information: texts were purposely abridged, misdated, ignored, and cited out of context. It further reveals the substantial amount of German translations of French texts that were printed in the 1790s; their extent having been only hitherto surmised. It also explores the wider print culture, as these journals devoted substantial space to book reviews, and notes some rare examples of reversed cultural transference; for instance, a report which the theological faculty at Freiburg University had issued in defence of the Constitutional Church in 1798 was translated into French and published by Henri-Baptiste Grégoire (the Constitutional Bishop of Blois).

Krenz shows that Catholic and Protestant Aufklärer defended the anti-papal and Erastian facets of the Civil Constitution throughout the 1790s; they attributed the massive rejection of the reforms by the...
French clergy to their poor theological education, financial resentment, and lack of enlightenment. Yet the radicalization of the revolution, the outbreak of war, tighter censorship, and less sympathetic governments made it much more difficult for Catholic Aufklärer to express their views and three key enlightened journals (based in Mainz, Vienna, and Freiburg) were forced to cease publication between 1791 and 1793. There was more scope for free discourse after 1795, but France’s separation of church and state led German Aufklärer, as exponents of Erastianism, to take less interest in the Constitutional Church. However, Salzburg’s »Oberdeutsche, allgemeine Litteraturzeitung« still held that the Civil Constitution had restored the Gallican Church to the purity of the early church.

Hermann Goldhagen (the editor of the counter-enlightened »Religions-Journal«) turned this claim on its head by arguing that it was the persecution of a heathen republic that had reduced the Gallican Church to the state of the early church. The Gegenaufklärer claimed that the revolution was a vast conspiracy that had been carried out by an unholy alliance of philosophes, Freemasons, Illuminati, Jansenists, and (to varying degrees) Protestants and Jews. Krenz shows how the counter-enlightenment journals also used their counter-revolutionary rhetoric to denounce the »Feind im Innern« (S. 310) – the Aufklärer. Through misrepresentation, denunciation, and demonization, the Gegenaufklä rer sought to discredit their German opponents as Jacobin sympathizers and as a real threat to the established order of throne and altar. In this regard, Krenz convincingly argues that these counter-enlightenment journals appear »unglaublich modern« (S. 517) in their use of smear and spin.

Krenz argues that the writings of the Gegenaufklärer proved more effective than the gunpowder of the French revolutionary armies in silencing the Catholic Enlightenment after 1789. The Gegenaufklärer themselves claimed that they had brought about the major setbacks that their opponents faced during the 1790s; yet this claim should not, perhaps, be accepted at face value. Their journals contributed to a broad counter-revolutionary political culture and were widely read by the bourgeoisie and the lower-clergy, but it remains uncertain what direct influence they actually had upon the policy makers who tightened censorship, dismissed Aufklärer, and closed journals. While their contemporary influence remains an area for further research, Krenz effectively demonstrates that in the long-run the counter-enlightenment’s narrative of the revolution as a crusade against Christianity succeeded in dominating German historical writing from the 1840s until the 1950s.

Krenz indicates that the Catholic Enlightenment was overshadowed and side-lined, but never totally silenced (as implied by the book’s title) after 1789. It survived in Würzburg and Salzburg throughout the 1790s and was revived in Bavaria after 1800. But by examining the variegated German Catholic response to the Civil Constitution in the public sphere, Krenz’s path-breaking monograph has not only expanded our knowledge of where and when Catholics turned against the Enlightenment, but has also deepened our understanding of how and why the French Revolution had such profound consequences for the German Catholic Enlightenment. Indeed, he persuasively argues that scholars have
underestimated how crucial religion was in determining how Germans of all confessional and philosophic persuasions perceived France’s revolutionary reforms and has thereby posited a much more complex and nuanced interpretation of Germany’s intellectual landscape during the 1790s.

Krenz’s study is a mine of new information and its detailed footnotes, contents pages, appendices, and indexes allow the reader to focus easily upon a particular journal, controversy, or period. It will thus prove an invaluable resource and essential reading for researchers working on the burgeoning fields of the Catholic Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment.