

**“On the Need for a Protestant Reformation:  
Constant, Sismondi, Guizot & Laboulaye”**

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Selected Publications

*Books*

- *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ideas in Context, #46, 1997).
- *Liberal Values: Benjamin Constant and the Politics of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ideas in Context, #92, 2008).
- (Editor) *The Cambridge Companion to Constant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

*Articles*

- ‘[On the “Misogyny” of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the Letter to d’Alembert in Historical Perspective](#)’, *French Historical Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Winter, 2002), pp. 91-114.
- ‘Reinterpreting *Adolphe*: the Sexual Politics of Benjamin Constant’, *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* (Winter, 2002), pp. 341-360.
- ‘[Why Constant? A Critical Overview of the Constant Revival](#)’, *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 1, no. 3 (2004), pp. 439-453.
- ‘[On the Intellectual Sources of Laïcité: Rousseau, Constant, and the Debates about a National Religion](#)’, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Winter 2007), pp. 1-18.
- ‘[Rousseau’s Gift to Geneva](#)’, *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 3, no. 1 (2006), pp. 65-73.

## Introduction to the Paper

In her two major works, *Rousseau and Geneva* and *Liberal Values*, Helena Rosenblatt has presented original studies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) and Benjamin Constant (1767-1830). Both were Swiss authors, obviously enough, from Geneva and Lausanne respectively, and their writing careers were more or less oriented towards intellectual life in France, though both also lived outside that country for significant periods in their adult lives: Rousseau in Switzerland and England in 1762-7, for example, and Constant in Germany, 1811-14.

Something else that these two often quite dissimilar figures had in common, related to their Swiss background, and that marked them out as unusual in the French context, was their Protestantism, for both were Calvinists. Although Rousseau abandoned the faith for Catholicism when he met Mme de Warens in 1728, he returned to the Calvinist fold in a ceremony in Geneva in 1754, and while his religion became increasingly idiosyncratic thereafter, he never formally abandoned the church. Constant's adherence to Protestantism was more, well, constant, and what Rosenblatt shows in *Liberal Values* is the extent to which his entire career can be plausibly read as a single extended meditation on religion and its role in modern politics and society, culminating in the publication of his multi-volume study, *De la religion*, both towards the end of his life and posthumously (1824-31).

In this paper, Rosenblatt extends her examination of Constant's Protestantism through much of the later nineteenth century, arguing against scholars like Pierre Manent and Marcel Gauchet that the character of French liberalism has been systematically misunderstood by writers who have treated it as an essentially secular or "postreligious" doctrine. French liberals may have been anti-Catholic, often enough, but they were not anti-religious or anti-Christian at all. Indeed, Rosenblatt shows clearly the extent to which French liberalism in the nineteenth century was often deeply intertwined with certain kinds of Protestantism, and with hopes for some kind of "Protestant Reformation" in post-Revolutionary France.

## Further Reading

Annelien de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ideas in Context, #89, 2008).

Bryan Garsten, '[Constant on the religious spirit of liberalism](#)', in Rosenblatt, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Constant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

George Armstrong Kelly, *The Humane Comedy: Constant, Tocqueville and French Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Sheryl T. Kroen, '[Revolutionizing Religious Politics during the Restoration](#)', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter, 1998), pp. 27-53.