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Book Review of:

Carl Theodor von Dalberg: Staatsmann und Kirchenfürst im Schatten Napoleons. By Hömig, Herbert. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011.

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The name Dalberg seems to be inherently tied to the history of Catholic liberalism. Not only was Lord John Dalberg-Acton involved in reforming his church through the means of modernity, but his distant relative, Prince Bishop Carl Theodor von Dalberg, also made a contribution. It is the life of the latter that is treated in this detailed biography. Dalberg's first assignment as chief administrator of the Mainz Archbishop in Erfurt was followed by his appointment to coadjutor bishop of Mainz, Worms, and Constance (1787-1802), prince-bishop of Constance, and finally elector/archbishop of Mainz and later Regensburg, and arch-chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire. In all of his offices, Dalberg proved to be a volatile, enlightened politician and intellectual. In Erfurt he affiliated with the masons and the Illuminati, and among his friends and correspondents were Goethe, Schiller, Herder, Mendelssohn, and many others. His involvement in social reforms in Erfurt and Mainz gained

him wide respect among reformers, and his defense of religious toleration—without ever compromising the superiority of Catholicism—secured the disdain of religious fanatics. His philosophical and theological works were certainly not comparable with those produced by his famous friends, but they were undoubtedly the most sophisticated dialogue with Enlightenment thought any Catholic bishop of the empire had ever articulated. While the political and ecclesiastical life of Dalberg (for example, his plans for a concordat of the empire with the papacy, his musings and admiration for Napoleon, and his involvement in the Febronianist controversy) are clearly and coherently presented, at the end of the book the question about the personality of this extraordinary man remains unanswered. This is nevertheless a major achievement of German historiography, not least because it attempts to place Dalberg in the context of European politics.