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Rendez Donc A Cesar, Problemes Avec Les Mots De Dieu: Land and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790-1791

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RENDEZ DONC À CÉSAR, PROBLÈMES AVEC LES MOTS DE DIEU: LAND AND
THE CIVIL CONSTITUTION OF THE CLERGY OF 1790-1791

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
History

by
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Accepted by:
Dr. Alan Grubb, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the state's sale of Church lands and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution. The Civil Constitution has been seen as a turning point in the era's progression; it created very sharp divisions in revolutionary ideals by forcing clergy members to take an oath to the state that was condemned by the pope. These divisions helped feed Jacobin extremism and an era of Christian suppression and the Terror eventually ensued.

Despite these problems, the struggling country under the Old Regime was desperate for Church reform that the Civil Constitution provided. The prohibition of the tithe and an overhaul of clerical pay helped many people in the nation. Despite its merits, many laws reflecting the spirit of 1789 such as the election of curés, the suppression of monasticism, and the oath had negative effects on the opinions of sects of clergy and sects of the public. I investigate these opinions (positive and negative) through the use of pamphlets, newspapers, and letters, and through secondary sources to question if these legislative moves were too extreme for an extreme time.

DEDICATION

For Charles Perry Monroe

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INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution was a momentous series of events that changed the course of world history. Thrusting liberalism into Europe, the Revolution diffused the idea of democracy which eventually came to supplant monarchy in most European countries over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the great legacy of the French Revolution is still playing itself out in the form of democratic and nationalist revolutions, its impact on France in the late 1700s was abrupt and penetrating. Life in France, for all of its residents, was drastically changed: Nobles either fled the country or renounced their titles; many took up the revolutionary cause and murdered thousands of their own; conservatives fought it tooth and nail in the Vendée; and the Revolution forced men of the cloth to examine their loyalties.

On August 4, 1789, many moderate and liberal-minded nobles renounced their feudal rights. This happening had a snowball effect. The National Constituent Assembly, which from 1789 until 1791 made up one half of a constitutional monarchy, enacted reforms such as grouping regions into departments which rapidly furthered France toward a unified identity. The reorganization of France into departments, specifically, moved toward ending the feuds between regions and helped to create a national feeling.¹ The Assembly also attempted to reform the Church. On November 2, 1789, the National Assembly confiscated Church lands to combat the national deficit. In February of 1790, the revolutionary government outlawed all monastic vows and forced

¹ Jules Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, translated by Charles Cocks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 340.

dissenting monks and nuns who refused the provisions to retire.² That July, it moved further toward its takeover of the Church in France by means of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which along with the nationalization of Church lands, comprises the topic of this study. This legislation had many clauses. Notably, it redrew parish lines to correspond with the new department structure and allowed the appointment to benefices only through elections by citizens.³ Two of the largest issues that arose with the proposed legislation were the right of the state to interfere with clerical practices such as the appointment of Church officials and what relationship the new state would have with the pope. The latter, although decided by the pope's condemnation of the Revolutionary government and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, caused great turmoil when the National Constituent Assembly required each clergyman to accept the Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791. The oath required a declaration of faithfulness "to the nation, to the law, and to the king, and to maintain with all their power the constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the King."⁴ The papal condemnation of the new measures incited a schism within the French Church by way of the Papal Bull *Charitas*. It condemned the reform package, and the requirement of the oath, although not an oath officially sworn to the Civil Constitution, became an oath of adherence to its new measures and caused horrible backlash in some provincial towns. Meanwhile, in Paris, priests were urged to take the oath. Indicative of this problem, the succession of revolutionary governments failed in enforcing this requirement and was forced to accept

² National Constituent Assembly, *Decree Prohibiting Monastic Vows in France*, 1790, Trans. John H. Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 168-169.

³ *Civil Constitution of the Clergy: Titles I and II*, 1790. Ibid, 169-181.

⁴ *Decree Requiring the Clerical Oath*, 1790. Trans. John H. Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 182.

the existence of two churches: one of Constitutional or juring priests, the other of refractory clergy or nonjuring clergy. This conflict persisted through the revolutionary period until Napoleon.

The Enlightenment

When discussing the origins of the Revolution, it is impossible to ignore the Enlightenment. Despite occasional efforts by the French crown to censure controversial writers, the 18th century saw an unprecedented amount of writing directed against the Catholic Church and other institutions of the Old Regime, the monarchy notwithstanding. Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert compiled a massive amount of essays collectively called *L'Encyclopédie*. Many essays had an anti-clerical tenor while Jean-Jacques Rousseau declared against monarchy in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* that “man was born free and everywhere he is in chains.” Their dissent, however, came with the threat of royal retaliation which proved to be very real when Diderot spent time in the Bastille and Rousseau and Voltaire resigned themselves to exile.

But these *philosophes* were not the only people reading and writing. There was significant growth in literacy in Western Europe in the 18th century. An analysis of parish marriage registers shows that in France, between the years 1686 and 1690, twenty-nine percent of men and 14 percent of women could sign their names to the registries. In the years 1786 through 1790, forty-eight percent of men and twenty-seven percent of

women could sign their names in these registries.⁵ This growth was accompanied by a significant importance of the role of lending libraries in the mid-eighteenth century due to a sharp rise in the price of books.⁶ By 1789, the reading public had been exposed to the “lights,” but the relationship between the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution inspires ongoing debate. As for the start of the Revolution, French Enlightenment thinkers had inveighed against the country’s problems long before the start of the Revolution and exposed these problems to the public. On the other hand, and depending on one’s location, one hardly needed to read Voltaire in order to pay the dreaded salt tax or recognize that the tithe was an added burden to peasants, many of whom could ill-afford to pay it. Truly, there would not have been a revolution in 1789 were it not for a financial crisis.

The year 1791 may best mark the start of the tumultuous years of the Revolution. The papal condemnation of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy engendered a schism between “patriots” and “counter-revolutionaries” that would not be reconciled in the democratic revolution. As the Revolution progressed, it took a turn toward excessive enthusiasm. May of 1793 marked the decline of the more moderate Girondins due in part to their attempts to spare Louis XVI’s life after his attempted flight to Varenne for the purpose of using the Austrian army to restore order in France. The demise of the Girondins and the execution of the king left the radical Montagnards—the more extreme Jacobin sect—unchecked in Paris and the Church was left without a champion.

⁵ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

Catholicism gave way to a cult of reason and the Montagnards sought out to erase the incumbent's last vestiges in a period called de-Christianization. The ruling revolutionaries established a French Era to supplant the Common Era and instead of what had honored the Roman world, the Convention changed the names of the months to correspond to the weather. Additionally, the more extreme revolutionaries converted Catholic churches into Temples of Reason. In these years, the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Revolution become clearer. Robespierre and other leaders employed Enlightenment ideas, such as Rousseau's theory of the General Will, to carry out the Terror.⁷

So as the Jacobins shouted for blood and echoed Rousseau's anti-monarchical cries that sustained him in a life of exile, it is clear that the *philosophes* had been heard. Voltaire's body was moved to the Pantheon and Rousseau had returned to France if only in spirit. But it is doubtful that even he, in his obscurity and familial callousness, could have believed or approved of the Terror. In 1793 and the subsequent tumultuous years, the French Revolution took a sharp turn toward radicalism and it lost its patience for the needed delicate reform of the Church that had always been too crude. In the period of de-Christianization, one would witness the intense persecution of both the refractory and juring clergy until Napoleon rose to power and in 1801 bridged the chasm between Rome and France by signing the Concordat which reestablished Catholicism as France's religion.

Historiography

⁷ John Hardman, *Robespierre* (Essex, England: Pearson Education, 1999), 14-16.

Marxist historians had long dominated the French Revolution. These scholars best represented by Georges Lefebvre and Albert Soboul believed that the Revolution was based on an economic class struggle and a proto-proletariat rose against the ruling elite. Soboul, in his book printed in 1965, *La Revolution Francaise*, writes, “That the bourgeoisie has led the Revolution, it is now obvious truth.”⁸ For Soboul, born in 1874 and having lived through the Bolshevik Revolution to the days of Stalin, it was obvious truth that the bourgeoisie led the French Revolution. By the time of his death in 1959, the Soviet Union was at the height of its power.

In 1964, Alfred Cobban challenged the Marxist incumbency on the French Revolution in his seminal work, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*. Questioning the modern vocabulary of historians of the era, Cobban shows that Marxist theory is strained at best. His arguments stand on the idea that there has never been a consensus on the meaning of ‘feudalism’ and that it was mostly seigniorial rights and not the nobility with which the bourgeoisie contended.⁹ Detail oriented, Cobban examines the reality of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, finding that different economic states existed for both groups. Nobles could be exorbitant and landed or could be in a state so meager that the only distinction between the poor peasantry and themselves was a title. That the Revolution was about the rise of the bourgeoisie against the nobility is a myth for Cobban. In fact, he has shown how the peddling of seigniorial rights to the *non noblesse* was in the best economic interests of the *tiers*’ elite due to increased

⁸ Albert Soboul, *La Revolution Francaise*, (Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1965), 14.

⁹ Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 25, 33-35.

employment for lawyers, procurers, and other professionals who managed these rights and their sales. On this note, Cobban offers that a significant reason for the bourgeois-written August Fourth Decrees which commenced in suppressing ‘feudalism’ was because of the peasantry and possibly due to its reaction to an increased amount of capitalization for due to the growing amount of industry in the countryside, the peasantry was subjected to the increased burden in earning a living which, the deputies feared, would inspire rebellion.¹⁰

His criticism is not limited to the validity of Marxist theory and extends to its historians. At the time of *The Social Interpretation*, Marxist theory was so prevalent that it could even be considered historical canon and even so prevalent that some forced facts into the ‘straightjacket’ of Marxist theory and some even regarded the Estates General as messianic and deterministic.¹¹ Cobban is not alone in his criticism of Marxist application to the Revolution. Editors of *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf, contribute to Cobban by claiming that the Revolution only inaugurated a tension between rich and poor instead of eliminating the aristocracy. Furet and Ozouf agree that the element of class struggle has a legitimate place in French Revolution historiography. Their contention, however, is that the historians who write Marxist histories tend to minimize the diversity of the Revolution.¹²

The religious aspects of the Revolution have also been treated differently through time. One of the most impactful debates surrounding French anti-clericalism is its

¹⁰ Ibid., 43-49, 52-53.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Francois Furet and Mona Ozouf, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), xiii.

origins. There is a trend among historians of the 19th and early 20th centuries to focus on the origins of the Civil Constitution as a product of the *philosophes* and the increased secularization that they inspired with their writings. Eyes, again, shift to *L'Encyclopédie*. Its series of articles gave theology derisive attention. Jules Michelet, writing in 1847, about the dilemma of lower clergymen to the Civil Constitution's acceptance, writes that any ideas the Revolution possessed came from Voltaire and Rousseau and refers to "The Social Contract" and Rousseau's idea that Christian's cannot be citizens.¹³

Additionally, William Sloane, author of *The French Revolution and Religious Reform* writes,

Voltaire was the prophet of the Constituents and Girondists, Rousseau of the Robespierrists. The former cared for nothing but emancipation from theology and ecclesiasticism using their Deism as a means to an end; the latter were stanch, convinced Deists, anxious for the stability of their Utopia, which they felt had no foundation except in their faith.¹⁴

Many scholars have focused on the origins of the French Revolution whether from an Enlightenment standpoint or an economic standpoint. Dale Van Kley focuses on the religious seeds that sprouted the Revolution in his 1996 work *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution*. Focusing on as far back as the Protestant Reformation, Van Kley puts his emphasis on Jansenist influence through early modernity to the Revolution. He has highlighted the struggle of the Jansenist-Parlement coalition to hold Gallican liberties against the ultramontane and absolutist factions. One can already see the same kind of fracture that came as a result of the Civil Constitution, when in the pre-

¹³ Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, 417.

¹⁴ William Sloane, *The French Revolution and Religious Reform*, (New York: NY, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 5.

Revolutionary 18th century, priests were required to swear an oath to *Unigenitus*, the papal bull that suppressed Jansenism. Van Kley emphasizes the blow to sacral absolutism when uproar emerged as a result of a dying priest being denied his final rights for refusing to swear loyalty to *Unigenitus*. In short, the Jansenist-backed Parlement of Paris won the support of the people on the issue that would soon lead to the repeal of the papal bull.¹⁵

Van Kley also remarks on the suppression of the Jesuits, the traditional enemies of the Jansenists on theological, philosophical, and authoritative lines. Looking to the ruling that Jesuits had no legal status in France, he remarks that “The revolutionary Left would need to look no further than to the precedents of the 1760s in order to dissolve all contemplative religious orders as well as the clergy as a propertied corps.”¹⁶ These are the kinds of connections that Van Kley draws between *La Fronde*—the Jansenist struggle—and the French Revolution. Dealing directly with the Revolutionary period, he has made the case that Jansenist history is responsible for the official start of the Revolution when the Third Estate refused to leave the chamber by arguing that Camus, a Jansenist, “knew a disguised lit de justice assembly [a parliamentary occurrence] when he saw one” and proposed to keep legislating instead of remonstrating or protesting.¹⁷ The assembly agreed and the king eventually broke down and ordered the other estates to join with the third to form the *Assemblée Nationale*. Van Kley’s arguments—while overly

¹⁵ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: from Calvin to the Civil Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 135.

¹⁶ Dale Van Kley, “The Religious Origins of the French Revolution,” in *From Deficit to Deluge* eds. Thomas E. Kaiser and Dale Van Kley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 129-130.

¹⁷ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins*, 304.

intricate and sometimes unclear—are overall convincing and provide a needed depth to the study of the Revolution.

Like Van Kley, David Sorkin has focused on religion and the origins of the Revolution. Sorkin aims in *The Religious Enlightenment* to present religious reform in eighteenth-century Europe as a pan-European movement. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish reformers shared common goals and methods. In a secularizing world, these reformers took a liberal approach to proselytization through beliefs and methods. Sorkin's treatment of religious reform shows that these Enlightened reformers shared common beliefs and purpose: they searched for religion grounded in the belief of natural religion (the belief in a god, not necessarily the Christian God) and accommodation (God accommodates or condescends to man's limited understanding); they adopted a toleration based on natural law; they recognized that the public sphere was central to gaining influence; and they all advocated a state church.¹⁸

Sorkin sees the French failure to achieve the Enlightened religious reform that other countries achieved as a product of the ecclesiastical turmoil between Jansenists and Jesuits. It was not until Louis XVI that the monarchy's attempts to suppress any religious reform ceased. This polarization prevented the state from supporting a Reform Catholicism program. By the time the Edict of Toleration was signed in 1787, Sorkin notes, France was behind the rest of Europe and close to the Revolution leaving little time for growth to occur before the Civil Constitution.

¹⁸ David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 13-16.

Sorkin's study of religious reform puts the Civil Constitution within the larger framework of European religious reform; it was influenced. The reorganization of diocese and parishes to conform to population needs was predated by the reforms of Joseph II as was the National Assembly's appropriation of Church lands.¹⁹ The success of the German reform and the failure of its French disciple may have been dependent on position on the world stage. Van Kley remarks that the failure of the Civil Constitution was its optimism in papal relations. The difference between Joseph II and the National Assembly was that the pope did not approve of democracy.²⁰

Alphonse Aulard, writing in the early 20th century, has argued that it was the growing incredulity among Frenchmen that made de-Christianization possible. Having put a spin on the traditional view of the *philosophes*' contributions to the Enlightenment and to the Revolution, he has speculated that it was their audience's incredulity that allowed them to inveigh against religion and not their writings that made their audience incredulous. This disbelief in God, or at least indifference, writes Aulard, was transformed into patriotic religion. While the Revolution certainly took on a cultish character, Aulard further substantiates his view by declaring that patriotic ceremonies in which the people of the young nation took their civil oaths, had imbibed Catholicism to make it merely a part, an addition (and an unnecessary one at that) of the new, civic sensation.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 286.

²⁰ Dale Van Kley, "Catholic Conciliar Reform in an age of Catholic Revolution: France, Italy, and the Netherlands, 1758-1801," in *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. James Bradley and Dale Van Kley, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 50.

²¹ Alphonse Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, translated by Lady Frazer (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 32, 64-68.

The history of the French Revolution and indeed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy has gravitated around Paris due to its important locus of political activity. On the other hand, this focus is not telling of what other locales experienced which could differ vastly. Timothy Tackett takes a statistical approach to the oath associated with the Civil Constitution. Building on the work of Philip Sagnac who in the 19th century attempted to compile the oath taking records from France's municipalities, Tackett has added to the record and has sought to answer why various demographics and regions accepted or rejected the oath. Taking into account seemingly every variable, he stresses certain trends. For example, young priests who had only recently acquired their positions and those who were paid on the meager *portion congrue*, found it very difficult to refuse the oath and compromise their new positions or the prospect of a higher salary. Regional culture, however, is Tackett's main focus and he has presented a number of trends for entire regions to accept or reject the requirement including a region's proximity to Paris, its traditions of ultramontanist and Gallicanism, as well as its clerical density to form a religious community that was regarded by the laity and itself as independent of secular forces.²² Often times, Tackett shows, regional culture can be a more persuasive factor over the decision to take the oath than demographics. Age, for instance, was not a factor in western France. In a ten province sample, forty-eight percent of the clergy members who rejected the oath were under 40 years old.²³ Underlying the study are the long term

²² Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 287-291.

²³ *Ibid.*, 79.

implications of the oath, that it helped to form the political geography of France lasting even into the 20th century.

John McManners has also focused on locales. The town of Angers is the focus of his study, *Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Regime*. The contrast between the Parisian political climate and the ecclesiastical climate was striking. Angers had neither significant *philosophe* nor protestant influence in the Old Regime. It was a town of religious orthodoxy aside from the small, yet somewhat influential Jansenist population. McManners presents a town beleaguered by excessive and inefficient clericalism; its many religious orders abusive of their wealth and the unorganized layout of its parishes, too burdensome to some curés while others were underused, are two among many worthy examples.

Despite clerical excess and the failure of the National Assembly in Church matters, McManners takes a faithful view of the Civil Constitution by offering that the men of the Assembly were sincere in their belief that the legislation would successfully reform the Church that they regarded as so precious and necessary to the country. In Angers and many locales elsewhere, however, the Civil Constitution was rejected, but as McManners suggests, at least in Angers, it was not the implementation of the Civil Constitution that was rejected, for the suppression of monasteries and the redrawing of parochial lines went over smoothly. Instead, it was the oath, which he feels meant that to reject it was to reject the Revolution.²⁴ Even with a Richerist presence in Angers, whose adherents pushed for the rights of the lower clergy including more pay and a synodal

²⁴ John McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society under the Ancien Régime: A Study of Angers in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1960), 265.

Church, “to fight for the independent status of Curés *vis-à-vis* bishops,” writes McManners, “was one thing, “and to make both parties equally dependent on the common run of voting citizens was another.”²⁵

Arguments

The above historians have given valuable insights as to the character of the times and the people involved with the Revolution and the Civil Constitution. The split feeling of France’s clergy over the oath and the previous measure of selling church lands begs for more answers. On the surface, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy seems extreme. It represented an unprecedented, but not unwanted, complete break with Rome. Despite the extremity, Tackett and McManners have shown the fervor was not just in Paris where revolutionary passions reigned, but widespread. Moreover, despite the eventual acceptance of a refractory clergy, the acceptance was only partial. That roughly half of the clergy was juring indicates a large amount of acceptance of the new measures, but not nearly enough to ensure their successes. With such an even split over the reform package, few historians have written in-depth examinations of why a cleric would accept or reject the oath and why a layperson might support one side or the other. Answering these questions comprise the bulk of this study. Some responses are more obvious such as a priest’s desire for more pay. Others, however, are more nuanced, such as a priest’s refusal of the oath because of his relationship with his parishioners.

In answering these questions, I have come to disagree with popular perceptions of the Civil Constitution. One, for example, is that to reject the oath was to reject the

²⁵ Ibid., 271.

Revolution. I have come to find that the decision to reject or accept the oath could be a burdensome decision. Some who rejected the oath were not against the Revolution, but merely the Assembly's interference in Church matters. It is this issue of authority that perhaps inspired the most amount of writings.

This study is done in three chapters. The first chapter traces France and the Church on the Eve of the Revolution and aims to show the need for reform of the Gallican Church. The country's financial problems led to a series of limited reforms. However, the lack of negotiations between notables and the crown made these reforms ineffective to the point where the king was forced—to the delight of the people—to call the Estates-General. The *Cahiers de Doléances* are central to the development of the Civil Constitution as they were the first recognized complaints by the crown. They serve as an excellent, but imperfect indicator of public opinion. The excesses of the Church were no secret. Higher clergy lived in decadence that was contrary to the needs of France's financial problems and this issue is strongly evident in the *cahiers*. Also present in these documents is the uneven distribution of Church wealth from higher to lower clergy and the abuse of Church lands. Many of these requests for reforms were not in vain. The revolutionary governments took up the causes of these grievances and enacted legislation based on the people's requests. Incidentally, these reforms regarding the distribution of wealth comprised the least problematic measures of the new legislation regarding the Church. I will demonstrate how the new government acted on the *cahiers* with their relation to the selling of Church lands and the Civil Constitution.

The second chapter is written in two parts. In reverse chronology, I address the two major restructurings of the Gallican Church by the Revolutionary government: the reforms of 1790-91 collectively known as the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and the nationalization of Church lands starting in 1789. In both sections I examine some of the Revolutionary literature surrounding the respective issues. Most of the consulted writings are pamphlets for I find they offer a nuanced representation of opinion. To a lesser extent, I use newspapers. I draw heavily on the findings of John McManners, Timothy Tackett, and Dale Van Kley among other scholars because each offers a unique perspective on the ecclesiastical revolution. Armed with these sources, I identify areas of consent and areas where consent is lacking surrounding these larger reforms. I see this work as a large expansion on a small section in Tackett's *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*. Where Tackett does well in briefly reviewing the reasons to accept or reject the oath evident in Revolutionary pamphlets, the study is only a small portion of a much larger work. Those wishing to explore this topic somewhat more in-depth may benefit from my second chapter.

In the concluding chapter, I detail the real effects of the Civil Constitution on France and on the refractory clergy. They were met with a considerable amount of persecution but they exhibited a strong degree of militancy as well. While the revolutionary governments may have been the de facto rulers during the Revolution, I highlight the relationship between these assemblies, the king, and the pope. Dale Van Kley has rightly correlated the bolstering of the French monarchy by way of religious association in the 16th century with the beating it took in the 18th century. He sees the

same religious associations as having turned into burdens instead of the fortifying substances they were at their originations; burdens that allowed the monarchy to topple. I have somewhat altered this idea and I contend in this concluding chapter that, for better or for worse, the monarchy played its role with these associations and had a religious mandate; one that was coveted by the succession of Revolutionary governments. The National Constituent Assembly failed in assuming this religious mandate which died with the king in 1793 and the Church remained in disarray until 1801.

This work is admittedly dominated by the Civil Constitution and less attention is given to the nationalization of Church property and it is because the former is what derailed the promising, early Revolution. But that the National Assembly usurped Church lands with the accord of much of the traditionally Catholic nation is curious and deserves attention. Nigel Aston has demonstrated how French prelates, to discourage the conceived notions of greed surrounding the Church, refused to respond too negatively to their loss of property. There is truly a mixed bag of responses to nationalization, but it seems that this measure is in keeping with the early, promising Revolution.

CHAPTER 1

THE CHURCH UNDER THE OLD REGIME

Would there have been a French Revolution if the country's economy was thriving? Possibly, but it would not have started in 1789. As prevalent as liberal philosophy was, it could not have brought about a revolution had France not been in dire financial need. The principles of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* rode on the coattails of economic turmoil.

The power of the French king had grown significantly since 1066 when his vassal, William, Duke of Normandy, conquered England to become the French crown's most threatening rival in the person of William and what would become its most ancient rival in the body of England. On the eve of the Revolution, the king was more than the first among equals confined to a small kingdom centered in Paris. His power extended to every corner of the country and by 1715, he controlled 400,000 soldiers; this was an unprecedented force in European history thanks to, none other than, Louis XIV, the paragon of absolutism.²⁶ France was in a position to be the foremost power in Europe, but power comes with, quite literally, a price in this case.

The eighteenth century, in particular, was fiscally burdensome for the French monarchy. France performed poorly in the Seven Years War (1756-1763) and suffered staggering losses at the hands of Prussia under Frederick the Great. Tantamount to their longstanding rivalry with England, the French, in the next decade, allied with many of the same soldiers they fought against in the French and Indian War. Much of the glory

²⁶ Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History of the French Revolution* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2006), 4.

earned in the American Revolution belonged to the French, but glory does not pay bills. The expenses of these two wars coupled with a staggering rise in population over the course of the eighteenth century created hard financial times for the crown and the people.²⁷

Poverty was widespread even before the wars. The price of bread, the French staple, had gone up making the cost of living even more difficult for the citizenry. Feelings of discontent and the seeds of revolution could be felt even in the early parts of the century. Bread riots became the norm. A baker who sought to make a little extra money at the expense of his patrons might have discovered that extra means does not justify the end which he might find. One account of a 1725 bread riot tells how when a Saint-Antoine baker tried to increase the price of bread from 30 *sous* to 34 *sous* in the same day, a woman roused the community into riot. The malcontents raided the baker's house, showing their outrage by throwing flour and dough down gutters. The town guard was met with a shower of rocks and the only means of dispersing the crowd was to fire shots into the air.²⁸

Merchants were not the only group looking to squeeze money from the people. The crown charged its people with paying the most hated of taxes, the salt tax, or *la grande gabelle*. The Bourbons would have done well to unify the country by

²⁷ Historians dispute the numbers, but a consensus shows that the population of France at the start of the 18th century was numbered around 20 million people. By the end of the 18th century, it numbered 28-30 million people. "Social Causes of the Revolution," *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap1a.html> accessed November 5, 2013.

²⁸E. J. F. Barbier, *Chronique de la regence et du regne de Louis XV ou Journal de Barbier*, vol. 1 (Paris: G. Charpentier et Cie., 1857), 350–51, 399–403, excerpted in *Liberty, Equality Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/359/>, accessed January 27, 2013.

standardizing this tax, but as it was, Brittany was exempt while Berry paid the most.²⁹ The uneven distribution of this tax is very telling of the feeling of inequality that ran through France. The social structure itself best displays this feeling. Emerging from the medieval period were the three estates. The clergy and the nobility comprised the first and second estates while the third was the remainder of the population. The first estate was exempt from many taxes due to their communion with God. This privileged status seems more justified in a perhaps decreasingly, yet still pious, society, than the exemption of the second estate. The nobility often avoided taxes due to their erstwhile, feudal service as the warriors of the kingdom. Even Louis XIV would be hard-pressed to find 400,000 nobles to come to arms. Thus, by default, the third estate bore most of the taxes.

Even this small sampling of the problems that faced France might be enough to envision revolution. But to add the inequality of, and the inequalities within, the Church, does more to complete the picture. The Church, on the eve of the Revolution was decadent and landed. A Constituent Protestant, Rabaut Saint-Etienne, declared the Church to own 20 percent of France's land.³⁰ A more recent estimate—free of contemporary bias—holds that the Church owned ten percent or a bit more.³¹ Much of this acreage came from private donations during the medieval period when it was popular for wealthy lords and ladies to give plots of land to the Church for the care of their souls. Some even established monasteries to house and occupy their daughters.

²⁹ Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History*, 9; The First Estate of Bourges, *Cahier de Doléances*, 1789, excerpted in Philip Dwyer and Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

³⁰ Alphonse Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, 29.

³¹ Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Short History*, 9.

There was a time when the Church needed this land for charitable acts. In the middle ages, before a strong, central government, the clergy was responsible for acts of social welfare such as teaching and aid for the poor. Vast amounts of land helped with these responsibilities as moneys and crops collected in rent could be converted into alms for the needy. As the central government grew stronger, it was the role of the king to take on these and other social welfare tasks.³² The Church, however, did not stop with these services as the modern period began. A country priest around Nantes tells of his experience in *Le Grand Hiver* of 1709—a particularly devastating winter. He writes that the worst of the frost was not the animals dying but the damage done to the wheat and the vines. The poor flocked to the cities for charity only to be ordered to return to the countryside. When the government could not help,

there soon appeared the most beautiful edicts in the world to help them, which, however, served only to increase their misfortune. Each parish was supposed to feed its own poor; but for this it would have been necessary for the poor to feed the poor.³³

Even if the Church was wealthy, the fact remains that one cannot eat gold.

This source is a testament to the dedication of the parish priest. In the face of Enlightenment anti-clericalism, the Church still served an important, charitable, role. Admittedly, the high point of the Enlightenment came later than 1709, but this assertion is supported by the legislation of the Constituent Assembly. After the decision to sell Church lands, the Assembly transitioned the clergy by suppressing clerical orders except

³² Ibid., 4-5.

³³ “Journal of a country priest,” Jeffrey Kaplow, ed., *France on the Eve of Revolution: A Book of Readings* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 9–12 excerpted in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/353/>, accessed November 5, 2013.

those who taught or made charity a central focus.³⁴ Yet even despite its commitment to facets of social well-being, even some members of the clergy could not deny the Church's excesses and the inequalities within it. A hierarchy existed within the Church which also fostered the same spirit of inequality that was felt by the third estate.

A good sense of the prominence of the Gallican Church might come in its numbers. In the Old Regime, the Church consisted of 170 thousand clergymen and women. Sixty thousand served in the parishes, while 81.5 thousand served in monasteries. There were about 26.5 thousand monks and the remainder, nuns. The other 28.5 thousand was comprised of an assortment of other clerics.³⁵ Despite the diversity of clerical members, they faced the critique that the clergy did not deserve their benefits. The merit of some parish priests and regulars was overlooked in the midst of extravagant and worldly bishops like Talleyrand.

Parish clergy played a central role in French life. They baptized at birth and gave last rites at death. In between, they managed parish registers and officiated over marriages. Laymen would have encountered the clergy in school. The Church had almost full control over primary education.³⁶ Monastics often took on the role of education. There were a multitude of convent schools and men often learned from the Jesuits before their suppression. The clergy, especially the convent order, the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, had a monopoly on nursing.³⁷

³⁴ Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution: From its Origins to 1793*, trans. Elizabeth Moss Evanson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 160.

³⁵ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³⁷ John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 7-8.

In the countryside, it was the job of the parish priest to combat peasant superstitions that remained from the medieval period. The impact of the forefathers of the priesthood could still be felt in the French countryside. Those early medieval priests who had so successfully appropriated pagan traditions to associate Christian meaning with them, created a culture that burdened their 18th century heirs. When the historian Alphonse Aulard (1849-1928) travelled the French countryside and remarked that France was never thoroughly converted to Christianity, he may have been right.³⁸ Superstition was still prevalent among some peasants. They still believed that ringing church bells could prevent a hail storm and young couples still leapt over embers as a rite of fertility. Much of this superstition was centered on early saints who had been believed to have performed miracles. There still existed this pagan brand of Christianity and it displeased the modern Church. As Peter Jones puts it, “popular religion in France can be summed up as an unholy mixture of paganism, peasant magic and half-baked Christian doctrine.”³⁹ To combat this superstition, these priests tried to replace old saints with Reformation saints and dressed indelible statues of saints in clerical garb.⁴⁰ This was the mission of the institutional church, but not all priests cared to, or had the means to “convert” the countryside. Many country priests came from the same peasant class to whom they preached and therefore encountered personal dilemmas.⁴¹

These clerics—the teachers, the parish priests, the nurses, and the “missionaries”—had responsibilities but were largely overshadowed by their educated or

³⁸ Alphonse Aulard *Christianity and the French Revolution*, 34.

³⁹ P. M. Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 193.

⁴⁰ Gibson, *A Social History*, 18-19.

⁴¹ Jones, *The Peasantry*, 192-194.

“enlightened,” negative, contemporaries’ thoughts on monasticism. Voltaire, for example, wrote, “what does he [a monk] do for a living? Nothing, except to bind himself by an inviolable oath to be a slave and a fool and to live at the expense of other people.” John McManners thinks that this quotation represents the contemporary feeling of the laity toward the regulars (at least those not in teaching or charitable orders). He shows that the *cahiers* written by the laity often favored some reform of monasticism.⁴² In a 202 *cahiers* sample conducted by Timothy Tackett, there were eight mentions of abolishing regular clergy.⁴³ Negative feelings toward monastic life might have also resulted from internal orchestration. Alphonse Aulard has accused monastic organizations of letting morals slack and failing in recruitment.⁴⁴ The sentiment certainly goes beyond the elite, Enlightenment, circle. Augustin Sicard believes that even the regulars themselves were eager to leave the monasteries and that the exodus was precipitated by the financial excesses of the clergy and interaction with the secular world.⁴⁵ Mary Robinson accuses this standpoint of being oversimplified. Through the study of the Monastery of Saint-Maur, Robinson is able to show the devotion of these monks to their monastery. These regulars argued against the measure in the above mentioned *cahiers* and petitioned local authorities after the Assembly passed the legislation.⁴⁶ Despite this attempt at self-preservation, the anti-monastic feeling was

⁴² McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 9.

⁴³ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 13.

⁴⁴ Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, 28.

⁴⁵ Augustin Sicard, *Le Clergé de France Pendant la Revolution* cited in Mary K. Robinson, *Regulars in the Secular Realm: The Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint-Maur in Upper Normandy During the Eighteenth Century and the French Revolution* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1974), xiv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, xiv-xvi.

strong enough to prevail. Parochial clergy and the laity alike directed resentment toward the regulars but these feelings also extended to the hierarchy.

Clerics aspired to be among the 130 bishops. The position came with a lifelong tenure and relative autonomy in running a diocese. Archbishops, for their part, were fearful of the encroachments of the administrative space of their powerful subordinates. The bishops' position expanded from the diocese to the national level. Bishops held roughly one third of the seats in the General Assembly of the Clergy of France and the other two thirds were held by other high-ranking officials. The Assembly met every five years to discuss problems facing the Church such as Protestantism, the dangerous influence of the Enlightenment, and to vote the *don gratuit*, its subsidy to the state. Nigel Aston remarks that prestige came with being a member of the one representative forum that was allowed in France.⁴⁷ The coveted position of bishop, however, was rarely obtained by members of the third estate. In 1787, 100 of the 130 bishops came from the old nobility and 25 came from the new aristocracy.⁴⁸

As with normal clerics, a prelate's behavior depended on his piety. Some bishops lived in a splendor befitting their aristocratic status but not to the purity of their offices. La font de Savine was known for throwing all-night parties while Cheylus was infamous for his gambling habits. Other bishops, however, actually took care of their own souls and lived modestly while zealously carrying out the duties of their offices. Pretz de Pressy, for example, suppressed religious festivals that had become too carousing and

⁴⁷ Nigel Aston, *The End of an Elite: French Bishops and the Coming of the Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

was intent on censuring *philosophes* and censure he must because they had only too well exposed the excesses of the Church's grandeur. Take, for example, Diderot's and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. Enjoying an audience of many noble and bourgeois readers, these men, along with their many contributors, further revealed the excesses of the ecclesia in their many articles. For example, we get a great sense of clerical privilege in one entry entitled "Clergy" by E.F. Mallet. Mallet takes a jab at the clergy by devoting almost the whole article to explaining its privileges and powers and the lengths it goes to defend them. To name a few privileges of the First Estate, the clergy enjoys exemption from many taxes, the ownership of much property, and reserves the right to speak first at the formerly latent Estates-General. In order to protect these privileges, Mallet writes, bishops have been known to excommunicate those who threatened them and punish whole towns for the infractions of secular authorities such as when two clerks were imprisoned in Nantes and the whole town was placed under interdict until their release.⁴⁹

Bishops could be truly powerful, but if ordinary clerics aspired to be bishops, the latter sought to become archbishops. A number of 18th century archbishops stood on the shoulders of Mazarin and Richelieu, the most notable being Lomenie de Brienne who enjoyed influence in the administration of finance minister Jean-Jacques Necker. Louis XVI initially dismissed Brienne as not much more than an atheist. But through courting

⁴⁹ Edme-François Mallet. "Clergy." The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project. Translated by Richard W. J. Michaelis. Ann Arbor: MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, 2003. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.045> (accessed August 14, 2013). Originally published as "Clergé," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 3:527–529 (Paris, 1753).

the favor of Marie Antoinette, he found his way into the position of chief minister and the Archbishopric of Sens, the wealthiest see in France.⁵⁰

Curés exhibited resentment for abbots while lower patronage contributed to more internal strife. As a result of the Concordat of Bologna (1516) which strengthened Gallican rights, the king had the power to appoint abbots who received their incomes from the Church but who were not burdened with any responsibility. This clause functioned as a way to ensure that the king had the power to choose who ran the Gallican Church, as opposed to previously elected positions, and became another office coveted and held by the nobility. The Revolution had its share of contributing abbots. For instance, *l'Abbé Grégoire* championed the Civil Constitution and advocated Jewish rights under the law. Perhaps the most famous abbot of the Revolutionary period was Sieyès who so convincingly inspired moderate and progressive France to be steadfast in pushing for the popular vote, or vote by head at the Estates-General in his pamphlet, "*Qu'est que la Tiers Etat?*" It was not merely prelates, regulars, and abbots who had privileges within the Church. The practice of *resignatio infavorem* allowed retiring parish priests to name their own successors. The practice was intended to maintain talent in the corps but eventually it became another way for the connected to acquire the most coveted parish appointments, and possibly as many as one-fifth of the parish priests exercised this power.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Aston, *End of an Elite*, 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

In addition to the power they enjoyed, prelates received pay which was greatly out of proportion to that of the lower clergy. Often times, the high ranking members were recruited from the second estate.⁵² Prelates, therefore, were wealthy men. Rohan, bishop of Stroudsbouurg, made 400,000 *livres* per year. Even for a bishop of a small diocese, a smaller income could be supplemented by holding a monastic house *in commendam* from the king.⁵³

Standards in contrast to this wealth were the meager livelihoods of the curés and the vicars. Alphonse Aulard writes that many did not even receive the *portion congrue*, the minimum stipend allowed by the crown which was raised to 700 *livres* in 1768.⁵⁴ Timothy Tackett, writing much more recently has found that pay varied greatly depending on the province and the *portion congrue* was characteristic of mostly southeastern France and that in most of the country, salaries ranged from a meager 700 *livres* to a substantial 3,000 *livres* per year.⁵⁵ John McManners has found that the curé of St. Michel de Tertre, a popular church in Angers, made over 1,000 *livres* a year and that St. Pierre was worth 900 *livres* a year.⁵⁶ What is certain is that the concern of inequality in pay was very real among the clergy and this is shown in their *cahiers de doléances*.

The king along with a series of ministers (Necker, Turgot, Brienne, and Calonne) attempted to fix the country's problems. In 1787, Calonne, who asked a lot of the people in taxation but who kept a generous stipend for himself, was replaced by Lomenie de Brienne. The issue facing both ministers was the aristocratic revolt over efforts to deal

⁵² Popkin, *A Short History*, 9.

⁵³ Aston, *The End of an Elite*, 8.

⁵⁴ Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, 30; Gibson, *A Social History*, 32.

⁵⁵ Tackett, *Religion and Regional Culture*, 89-90.

⁵⁶ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 140.

with the financial situation. In an effort to rake in more money to the state, Calonne tried to end tax exemptions for the nobility. On a Venn diagram of estates, it was that intersection between the first and second who brought the revolt to a new, more dignified, level than the sole purpose of keeping their exemptions. As absolutism waned in the face of France's dire problems, the Parlements had resisted the tax reforms of the king which led to their dismissal by Brienne. The strategy adopted by the noble clergy was to severely limit the tax reform proposed by Brienne offering only 1.8 million livres to the minister's eight million in subsidies. This strategy aimed to remind the king and his ministers that subsidies could only be levied with the consent of the people by way of the Parlements and the consent of the Estates-General to which Louis finally relented.⁵⁷

The Estates-General was a medieval assembly that had not been seen in France since 1614. In a sort of proto-republicanism, the three estates voted to resolve issues facing the country. However, because of an agreement accepted by the king in 1484, the selecting of representatives shifted from being chosen by royal summons to being elected by *bailliage*, or electoral districts. A tradition of *baillages* supplying their representatives with instructions known as the *cahiers de doléances*, solidified through the years and despite the Estates-General's absence in the absolutist period, the art of writing *cahiers* now recommenced.⁵⁸

Sanctioned by the king and coupled with Lomenie de Brienne having repealed all censorship laws, the *cahiers*, both by estate and locality, represent a good sense—but

⁵⁷ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London: S-P-C-K, 1969), 1-3.

⁵⁸ Beatrice Hyslop, *French Nationalism in 1789 According to the General Cahiers* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 3-4.

only a sense—of what the public, at least the notable, literate public, had in mind in the way of reforms. Beatrice Hyslop has done extensive study into the *cahiers* and published her findings in a highly regarded 1968 work. In her extensive study, however, she has identified limitations to the *cahiers* starting with the circumstances in which they were written. These documents, written for two months in 1789 for a common purpose, do not present the full view of French public opinion. Many of the proposals for reform do not give explanations or justifications for the reforms proposed. Additionally, many proposals outlined in the preliminary *cahier* (somewhat of a rough draft), did not make the cut for the general *cahiers* adopted by the assemblies. Other limitations include the relative unreliability of 27 of these letters out of 532, due to tampering or the clear influence of a strong faction. One limitation that particularly stands out concerns the objectivity of the *cahier*. Hyslop notes the importance of philosophy in the eighteenth century and argues that it homogenized the issues in these documents as they related to issues in the national conscience.⁵⁹

With these restrictions in mind, Hyslop, however, also notes that the *cahiers* are unique:

Neither the writings of eighteenth-century philosophers, the large number of election pamphlets, the official *Gazette de France*, the *Mercure*, nor other publications of the era reveal the mind of the French masses. Court records, correspondence of French administrative agents, personal letters, and diaries are similarly inadequate for a complete picture of popular opinion. In contrast with all the other sources of the period, we possess a nearly complete series of documents representing the collective opinion of groups all over France.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9-14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

As this quotation suggests, no single document can give a perfect picture of every aspect of a time, but the *cahiers* are invaluable as sources of public opinion, probably the best we have. They speak to many issues facing the nation and significantly to the strength of the notion of “Frenchness.” One of Hyslop’s findings shows that a national feeling was prevalent among the nobility. A small number of the general *cahiers*, in fact, actually expressed what their writers believed to be the qualities of the French people: generosity, devotion to public welfare, humanitarianism, and sensibility.⁶¹

Other subjects addressed in the *cahiers* are less idealistic but address problems that are very real in the lives of contemporary French. The *cahier* of the Third Estate of Dourdan expressed the desire and need for uniform weights and measures in France so that trade could be as fair as possible, and also that *la gabelle* be eliminated if possible or regulated if not.⁶² The third estate of the bailliage of Aval called for the incessant reform of civil and criminal codes as well as of existing customs and ordinances concerning waters and forests.⁶³ Something worth noting speaks to Hyslop’s criticism that these documents concern issues on the national conscience; the issues are not dictated by the estates. In other words, the Third Estate might be very keen on an issue that more closely relates to the First or Second Estate. For instance, the Third Estate of Aval has more to speak of than water and forest ordinances. Along with 16 other suggestions on finance, it calls for the reform brought about by Necker of making royal finance records public and

⁶¹ Ibid., 31-32.

⁶² *The Cahier of the Third Estate of Dourdan* (Dourdan, 1789), translated in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey of the French Revolution*, 76-84.

⁶³ *Cahier General et Reduit du Bailliage D’Aval en France-Compte Contenant ses Voeux et Doléances*, published in Beatrice Hyslop, *A Guide to the General Cahier of 1789* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 209.

permanent so that they “Will be printed and made public each year by the state including pensions, such as finance and revenues of the kingdom, exemptions, expenses, liabilities, and depreciating funds.”⁶⁴

A striking feature of the general *cahiers* is the concern expressed by the Second and Third Estates on ecclesiastical issues. One issue that serves as an excellent indicator of French character is the country’s concerns for morals and education. The third estate of Dourdan proposed that in every *bailliage*, there be established a school “where young citizens would be brought up on the principles of religion. . .”⁶⁵

Some of the most prevalent complaints concern the disparity of pay in the Church, its general excesses, and the abuse of Church lands. The nobles of Bourmont call for “the reduction in the excessive salary for some bishops and archbishops to a sum judged sufficient for honest prelates.”⁶⁶ This same clause calls for the surplus in profit to go to those making the *portion congrue*.⁶⁷ The third estate of the Baillage of Etain is even more specific and calls for all surplus of the Church to benefit the country, noting that after each high-paid cleric has been economically fulfilled according to the dignity of *his* state, he should work toward the betterment of *the* state and help the lower-paid clergy so that no clergyman will be paid less than twelve hundred *livres*.⁶⁸

Some groups concerned themselves with the papal relations of the Church. The nobles of Longwy proposed that everything paid to Rome should instead be put in the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 5.4.

⁶⁵ *Cahier of the Third Estate of Dourdan*, in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 83.

⁶⁶ *Cahier of the Nobles of the Baillage of Bourmont* (1789), published in Hyslop, *A Guide*, 234.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Cahier of the Third Estate of the Baillage of Etain*, printed in Hyslop *A Guide*, 299.

charge of the French people.⁶⁹ Both the third and first estates contested *casuel* fees: payments for weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc. Tackett's 202 *cahiers* study of the Third Estate reveals that these fees were mentioned in ninety-five letters of grievances. The Third Estate resented these fees for the essential and basic ceremonies of religious rite. The First Estate favored the abolition of these fees in favor of a raised *portion congrue*.⁷⁰ In general, Church finance reforms were sought. In this same sampling, forty-seven percent advocated some reform of the tithe, twenty-seven percent favored the sale of at least some Church land, and eleven percent called for the reduction of the wealth of bishops.⁷¹

The *cahiers* of the first estate are very much in line with those of the third in the desire to reform the Church with regard to hierarchy and pay. The clergy of Bourmont asked for the *portion congrue* to be raised to 1,500 *livres*.⁷² Clergy from certain bailiwicks also supported the third estate in its attempt to gain equal standing in taxation. The lower clergy of the Diocese of Nantes petitioned for the equal tax obligation for all three estates.⁷³ The same *bailliage* asked for sufficient representation of the clergy and of the Third Estate in the Estates-General.⁷⁴ Their views diverged from each other, however. Ralph Gibson recognizes the importance of the clergy's solidarity with the third estate to the trajectory of the Revolution. However, he argues that conjunction of the lower clergy's hard line agenda with that of the *Tiers* would not have worked. There

⁶⁹ *Cahier of the Nobles of Longwy*, Published in Hyslop, *A Guide*, 329.

⁷⁰ Ralph Gibson, *A Social History*, 33.

⁷¹ Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 13.

⁷² *Clergy of the Baillage of Bourmont*, Published in Hyslop, *A Guide*, 226.

⁷³ *Demandes et Remontrances de l'Assemblée Diocésaine de Nantes, pour les Etats-Généraux de 1789*, published in Hyslop, *A Guide*, 375.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 376.

was a clerical movement to take power out of the hands of bishops and put it into the hands of the curés. Henri Reymond's *Cahier des curé de Dauphiné* was influential, especially in the diocese of Gap. It called for a complete restructuring of wealth and the Church hierarchy. The Third Estate was sympathetic to this idea but its agenda diverges on the issue of curé power. Lower clergymen wanted to create a priestly utopia in which every diocese was run by a synod of curés to curtail the power of the bishops. Some reform advocates such as Reymond wanted the corps of curés to be able to punish their parishioners for sins such as prostitution.⁷⁵ This was further than the Third Estate wanted to go. Reymond did not achieve his utopia but the voices of all the curés and vicars who envisioned the restructuring of Church hierarchy and pay were heard.

Acting on the Cahier

The early governing bodies of the Revolution, such as the Constituent Assembly and the Legislative Assembly, had many failures such as their inability to draft a successful, enduring, constitution. The Constituent Assembly was dissolved in 1791 and the Legislative Assembly was overthrown in the August 10th Insurrection (1792) when the king used his suspensive veto to protect the refractory clergy and the Assembly yielded to the National Convention. Nevertheless, they did achieve some enduring accomplishments and in their legislative decisions made use of the suggestions in the *cahier* to mold their agendas.

Centralized government was unfavorably mentioned in these early grievances. The decree of December 14th, 1789 granted significant powers to municipalities,

⁷⁵ Gibson, *A Social History*, 32-33.

including the rights to levy and collect taxes and maintain public order. France was also restructured into the department system and each department received a general council, a directory or executive body, and a *procureur-general-syndic* who was charged with enforcing laws. The deputies' intentions were better than the legislation itself and many lost interest due to time-consuming meetings and mandatory presence in accepting nomination to office.⁷⁶

The Assembly addressed some economic concerns mentioned in the *cahiers* as well, either to the delight and horror of different sects of citizenry. For instance, it abolished *la gabelle*, one of the most urgent demands of the *cahiers*, and it sold Church lands to pay off France's debt (the topic of a following section).

The *cahiers* are not to be mistaken as expressing the views of only reform-minded or liberal Frenchmen. Conservatives expressed their voices as well. After two-hundred years, the Protestant Reformation was still playing out to the extent that it influenced the French Revolution. In 1787, Louis XVI had passed the Edict of Toleration which gave limited rights to Calvinists, such as property ownership, the right to pursue commerce without disturbance, and equal marriage under the law. It still prevented the public worship of any non-Roman Catholic, though prohibition ceased. The language in the *cahier* of the Clergy of Dourdan is clear in opposition to such concessions to Protestants. The writers petition that non-Catholics be prohibited from holding public worship or giving instruction.⁷⁷ The Constituent Assembly, however, acted on the Protestant issue

⁷⁶ Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution from its Origins to 1793*, 154-55.

⁷⁷ *Cahier of the Clergy of Dourdan*, in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 57.

by making Protestants full citizens and refusing to make Roman Catholicism France's official religion.⁷⁸

Another religious answer to the *cahiers* which predated the reforms of 1791 was the tithe. This tax to the Church which adversely affected the peasantry was abolished by the Constituent Assembly in 1789. In the *bailliage* of Amont, 100 *cahiers* (nearly 25 percent) of the parishes petitioned for the abolition of the tithe.⁷⁹ Like *la gabelle* and the *portion congrue*, this tax was not evenly collected from the different regions. In some places, a peasant gave two percent of his harvest to the Church while other localities required ten percent.⁸⁰ The abolition of the tithe inspired a fiery debate among liberal, conservative, and moderate deputies. Even abbé Sieyès struggled to maintain it. Michelet's response in his account of the debate might well have come from a deputy to the far left. In response to Sieyès' assertion that the tithe was legal property, he sardonically remarked,

How so? By their having been at first a voluntary gift, a valid donation. To which they were able to rely in the terms of law, that a donation is revocable *for cause of ingratitude*, for the forgetting or neglecting the end for which it was given; that end was the instruction of the people, so long abandoned by the clergy.⁸¹

Despite Michelet's much later response, the opposing concern was not unwarranted. This Assembly had to find other means of supplementing the income derived from the tithe which was estimated to be over 100 million *livres*. The Revolution was diverging too fast in its reforms for moderates like the Sieyès.

⁷⁸ National Constituent Assembly, *Decree Prohibiting Monastic Vows in France*, translated in John H. Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 168.

⁷⁹ Jones, *The Peasantry*, 95.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸¹ Michelet, *History of the French Revolution*, 251.

The deputies of the Constituent Assembly let the *cahiers* guide them. Although their efforts were imperfect, they quickly answered some of the direst demands of the French people. The financial reforms were urgent, and the selling of ecclesiastical land was to combat an exorbitant debt. The abolition of the tithe was only enforced when the land sales had been settled. In 1791, the Assembly's last year, it tried to answer many of the other religious grievances displayed in the *cahiers*. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was the Constituent's answer.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy

A series of conflicts came to surround this legislation which overshadowed its merit. Many of its clauses were intended to remedy the grievances of both clergy and lay as expressed in the *cahiers*. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy is written in three sections that respectively restructured the spatial organization of the Gallican Church while simultaneously bringing the Church under the direct power of the citizenry and redistributing salaries among higher and lower clergy to diminish the gross disparity in the ranks.

If the organizational structure of France was to be reformed for more efficient governance, it was only logical that the ecclesiastical structure should correspond to the changes. John McManners offers a useful critique in his study of Angers in the Old Regime. Angers was a very religious town with an abundance of churches. This abundance, however, was inconvenient to the curés and vicars from a practical standpoint. St. Maurille and St. Michel du Tertre adequately served the center of town but to the northwest, La Trinité was overworked. Some churches dating from the

medieval period were much decayed and served only a handful of people. Some parishes needed to be fused to evenly distribute the worshipers. The clergy of Angers, therefore, called for the reform of the parochial structure.⁸²

Article one of the Civil Constitution demanded that every department have one diocese. Both department and diocese were to have the same geographical bounds and limits.⁸³ Further division established the departments into metropolitan districts with each district containing a metropolitan see.⁸⁴ The restructuring of the parishes was left to the diocesan bishop and the district administrations.⁸⁵

Some of the clauses in this first section were intended to combat Church hierarchy. As part of the spatial restructure, every diocese was to preserve or create one seminary to be run by one supervising vicar and three directing vicars.⁸⁶ Bishops, whenever acting in regard to the seminaries, had to have had the approval of these vicars and those of cathedrals which constituted the bishop's council. The bishop was empowered only to enact provisional ordinances without the council's approval.⁸⁷

The election of clergymen was the most curious reform. Since the Church was no longer its own corporate body and came under the authority of the state, it stands to reason—or so it seemed—that they became civil servants and therefore were elected. Its novelty does not preclude worth. The clauses in this section were pragmatic and designed to promote elections based on merit. Article seven under title two requires that

⁸² McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 132.

⁸³ National Constituent Assembly, *The Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, I, cl. 1, trans. Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 169-181.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I, cl. 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, I, cl. 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I cl. 10, I, cl. 12.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I, cl. 14.

all men seeking a bishopric must have spent 15 years serving “in the capacity of curé, officiating minister or vicar, or as superior or directing vicar of the seminary.”⁸⁸ By authority of the Concordat of 1516, the crown had the authority to appoint bishops until this ruling.⁸⁹ Men without high connections could therefore not hope to achieve this highly coveted position with lifelong tenure in the Old Regime.⁹⁰ Appointments based on patronage and nepotism would be no more. In the same vein, if a bishop felt that a curé-elect was not suitable or worthy, with the approval of his council, he might petition the civil authorities to act and deny the curé position.⁹¹

Title three of the Civil Constitution concerns the restructuring of pay for clergymen. This issue was a favorite among *cahier* writers. The Constituent set out to remedy this problem. They increased the *portion congrue*, but this salary was still not universal. Rather, the minimum stipend depended on the priest’s location. Parisian curés received 6,000 *livres* while their counterparts in other large cities of fifty thousand residents or more received 4,000 *livres*. Those in towns that numbered greater than ten-thousand residents received 3,000 *livres* and those in towns with less received 2,400 *livres*.⁹² Similar reforms applied to the stipends of vicars and vicars of cathedrals. Stipends of bishops were also standardized. The bishop of Paris made 50,000 *livres* and bishops in departments of at least fifty thousand residents received 20,000 *livres*. Other bishops received 12,000 *livres*.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid., II, cl. 7.

⁸⁹ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 5.

⁹⁰ Aston, *The End of an Elite*, 5.

⁹¹ The Civil Constitution, Title II, cl. 36.

⁹² Ibid., Title III, cl. 5.

⁹³ Ibid., Title III, cl. 3.

Many clauses sent a clear message that the state had authority over the Church. The Civil Constitution prohibited bishops from being confirmed by the Pope but merely acknowledged him as the “Visible Head of the Universal Church.”⁹⁴ Similarly, proclamations of newly elected clergymen were to be made by the president of the electoral assembly.⁹⁵ The *proces-verbal* of the proclamation was then sent to the king via the president of the assembly of electors.⁹⁶

The Civil Constitution, for all of its much needed reforms, aroused enormous turmoil in the ecclesiastical and lay worlds, alike. There was certainly resentment among the clergy. It did, after all, alter the lifestyles of bishops, curés, and vicars. The tenure of bishops and other well-established churchmen was eliminated in favor of regular elections. Like other legislation under the Constituent, these measures created a divide. True divergence, however, came with the oath that was required of all churchmen and the Civil Constitution and possibly the entire Revolution may have continued on a successful trajectory had it not been for this requirement. The next chapter is dedicated to examining clerical and lay responses to the oath and the nationalization of Church lands.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Title II, cl.19.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Title II, cl. 14.

⁹⁶The Civil Constitution, Title II, cl. 15.

CHAPTER 2

ARGUMENTS THE OATH

This chapter details the response of the clergy and Catholics to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and its required oath along with the confiscation of Church property. To take the oath officially meant that a cleric supported the constitutional monarchy and it was intended to be functional as well as symbolic. The new legislation was too extreme for conservatives. However, bishops who did not support the particular measures of the Civil Constitution could refuse to issue marriage dispensations as well as refuse recognition of elected churchmen and so in order to enforce the new legislation, the National Assembly required all clerics to take the oath. The requirement presented the clergy with a dilemma that went deeper than a decision as to whether to throw in their lot with the new government structure or remain in support of the Old Regime. However, some of the justifications among the clergy for rejecting the oath point to this choice. Some like Julien Hays proudly rejected “any oath contrary to the well-being of the Capetian and Bourbon monarchs, our legitimate kings and masters.”⁹⁷ Many justifications, however, were of a religious and personal nature. The Constituent Assembly regarded the failure to take the oath as a statement of resignation⁹⁸ and those who would have otherwise rejected the oath lacked the clairvoyance to know that the enforcement of the pledge would fizzle to allow for a Refractory Church to exist, however strained its existence may have been. The Vatican’s response had similar

⁹⁷Maurice Giraud, *Essai sur l’Histoire religieuse dans la Sarthe de 1789 à l’an IV* (Paris, 1920), 250-51, cited in Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 64.

⁹⁸National Constituent Assembly, *Decree Requiring Clerical Oath*, November 28, 1790 (Paris: 1790), trans. Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 183.

consequences. The papal bull *Charitas* effectively voided the authority of all those who took the oath in the eyes of the Catholic world.⁹⁹ So as it was, circumstances forced individual clergymen to choose which option was, for them, the lesser of two evils. The livelihood of certain curés and vicars was at stake and without taking the oath, there was no promise of a financial safety net. More upsetting to some clerics were their previous allegiances to the Revolution to which, up until this point, they had held steadfast. Those who grudgingly accepted the oath may not have all been ultramontanes, but that is not to say that juring priests were without their qualms about a power shift from the pope to the new government. Others, however, had fully imbibed the spirit of '89 and saw nothing wrong in taking the oath. This section explores the reasoning behind the rejection or acceptance of the oath and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy by individual clergy members.¹⁰⁰

Extant sources reveal the gravity of the oath ceremonies. Claude Jacqueau and the vicar of Aubenas both broke into tears of despair while attempting to recite *le serment*. Some accounts even tell of priests' hair turning white while facing what they viewed as a moral dilemma.¹⁰¹ But like Julien Haye, many churchmen formulated definite reasons for their rejection of the requirement. Many clergymen were curtly against the Revolution or its trajectory. Like Haye, some supported the king who had supported the old hierarchal Church. Louis XVI was strong armed into giving his

⁹⁹ Pius VI, *Charitas*: 8, April 13, 1791. For an English translation, see <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius06/p6charit.htm>.

¹⁰⁰ The sheer volume of primary source literature makes it impossible to know every sentiment regarding the Civil Constitution. What is shown here is merely a sample. Despite the limited number of sources used, many justifications overlap which suggests their prominence in the eyes of contemporary France.

¹⁰¹ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 65.

grudging acceptance and forced to ratify the document containing its infamous measures in 1791, a year after its first drafting, only to receive the pope's condemnation of the bill one day later after painstakingly slow deliberation of the Vatican. So in wanting to repeal his ratification in a Parisian climate that was becoming increasingly revolutionary, the king bided his time. The end of the monarchy would, in some regard, come down to Louis' support of hierarchical Catholicism. Tensions between representative government and monarchy came to a head when the royal family attempted to flee to Varenne only to be captured by revolutionary authorities. The king had evidently left behind documents indicating that he planned to restore the Catholicism of the Old Regime.¹⁰²

In addition to support of an autonomous monarchy, the papal rejection of the Civil Constitution further split the priesthood between juring and refractory clergy. Again, the language of the legislation was specific in that it called for the pope to be merely a figurehead, or the visible head of the universal Church.¹⁰³ His powers stripped in France, the pope condemned the edict and all those who took the oath. The diminution of the pope necessarily raises the question of his authority and of authority generally. Prior to this legislation, the Constituent had asserted its dominance over the clergy by denying Dom Gerle's insistence that Catholicism be recognized as the official religion of France, arguing that the Assembly could not interfere with beliefs.¹⁰⁴ The Civil Constitution suggested the same dominance by the National Assembly. If the pope could no longer

¹⁰² Gibson, *A Social History*, 41.

¹⁰³ National Constituent Assembly, *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, 2:19

¹⁰⁴ Gibson, *A Social History*, 36.

ordain bishops in France, then it was a legitimate response to believe that the state was interfering with spiritual issues.

The most significant point of conflict truly was this question of authority. In short, what were the boundaries of temporal authority and what was reserved for the spiritual authority? It is this distinction between temporal and spiritual authority that inspired copious amounts of contemporary literature. Dale Van Kley, an authority on the tedious Jansenist controversy, has insisted that the National Assembly justified giving itself the right to reform the Gallican Church based on Jansenist principle and premises. One justification is that the state's acquisition of Church lands left the clergy dependent on state pay. More to the point, the state alone had the power to govern everything public, exterior, and temporal. This left the Church completely within what reform proponents deemed the spiritual realm.¹⁰⁵ Not so surprisingly, some opponents of the Civil Constitution did not disagree with the assertion that the authority of the Church ends at the spiritual realm. It is, however, the interpretation of what is spiritual that became the source of conflict. Opponents of the Civil Constitution, in general, argued that the measures contained in the new legislation challenged Catholic dogma in the areas of hierarchy, parochial bounds, and papal authority. Its proponents, on the other hand, challenge the claim that the Church ever had the legitimate rights to decide on these measures. Both sides employ practical historical and theological arguments to support their respective positions.

¹⁰⁵ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 335.

Promoters and supporters of the Civil Constitution argued that the new legislation was not anti-Catholic, but rather that it was in the best interest of Catholicism. In their view it would restore the values of the early Church by submitting it to the temporal authority just as the early Church had submitted to the Romans, Germanic Tribes, etc. This argument was, indeed, very prevalent among proponents of the Civil Constitution. Based on their position on Augustinian theology, these revolutionaries took to heart (or at least they pretended to for the sake of what they would deem progress) the belief in separate realms and authorities. Among others, French Jansenists served as champions of this belief. This Catholic sect was in many ways akin to Calvinism, for in addition to their shared emphasis on Augustinian theology, both groups put their faith in predestination. As Robert Palmer describes them,

The Jansenists were the Puritans of the Catholic Church. They were morally aristocratic, exclusive and severe. The better to exalt the greatness of God, they abased the powers of man. They attributed their virtues to God, their vices to themselves. They loaded themselves with responsibility, but denied that they could win any merit.¹⁰⁶

Based on this description, it comes as no surprise that the Jansenists fought against what they saw as the lavish, financial excesses of the Church and its hierarchy. Despite their championing the futility of the earthly realm, it is an oversimplification to believe that all Jansenists had no qualms with the Assembly's diocesan restructuring. Two Jansenists, Jabineau and Pierre Lambert, argued that dioceses could not be changed without spiritual authority. This argument, however, was political in response to the

¹⁰⁶ Robert Palmer, *Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 29.

Assembly's failure to consult the Church on the measures of the Civil Constitution, a point raised even by clerical advocates of the legislation.¹⁰⁷

Dale Van Kley's case for the Jansenist role in the bill holds that it was Jansenist principles that gave the legislation its philosophical justifications. Jansenist puritanical virtues held that Christian perfection was in the early Church. If there was a champion of the new legislation it was Armond-Gaston Camus, a deputy from Paris. Camus sat on the rather homogenous second ecclesiastical committee which proposed the ecclesiastical reforms. As a Jansenist, he supported the defense of the traditional Gallican liberties of the French Church, such as the king's right to appoint bishops, and as a lawyer he was able to defend the new measures with historical proofs. David Miller notes that Camus' deep religious convictions led him to prefer reading theologians like Augustine instead of Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire.¹⁰⁸ Theologically and historically armed, he thus made a formidable opponent to those sitting on the right when it came to ecclesiastical reform. In a session of the National Assembly on May 31, 1790, Camus gave a tediously researched defense of the Civil Constitution. He argued, among other points, that the temporal authority has the right to designate religious jurisdictions citing St. Paul's writings that disciples should preach in their towns whose bounds had previously been established by non-Christian authorities. Indeed, many of the provinces which came to comprise the dioceses were established by the pre-Christian Romans. Therefore, he

¹⁰⁷ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 41.

¹⁰⁸ David C. Miller, "A.-G. Camus and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy," *The Catholic Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1990), 488.

argued, the civil authority has the power to redraw parochial lines.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, this session was not Camus' finest hour. Having been beleaguered by papal condemnations and having worked tirelessly to refute them, Camus gave an "a la carte" defense of the Civil Constitution, meaning he only addressed what was useful to his argument. His principal argument was that Papal jurisdiction should be limited to the diocese of Rome. To support his position, he brought forth evidence from the Council of Sardica and from the early African Church, while he ignored the Tridentine decrees of the 1500s which had strengthened papal and episcopal jurisdiction.¹¹⁰ Although his reputation would be somewhat marred by his selectivity, Camus' "historical proofs," notes Miller, are in keeping with the empirical nature of the Enlightenment¹¹¹; a refreshing counter to the frequent overgeneralization that a polarity existed between religion and the Enlightenment.

Like Camus, Treilhart, another Jansenist, alluded to the Council of Jerusalem which voted to replace Judas with Matthias as the twelfth apostle, which he and others argued was a precedent for the election of Church officials. Among other examples used was the Council of Chalcedon which structured diocesan boundaries to fit the civil geography of the Roman Empire; a precedent for redrawing ecclesiastical bounds.¹¹² Similarly, Pierre Joseph Denis Guillaume Faure writes that the teachings of Jesus are unwavering and that the kingdom of God is in the spiritual world and not in earthly kingdoms, implying the legitimacy of redrawing diocesan bounds and saying that in

¹⁰⁹ Armond Gaston Camus, *Opinion de M. Camus dans le Séance du 31 Mai 1790, sur le Plan de Constitution du Clergé* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1790), 6-7.

¹¹⁰ Miller, "Camus and the Civil Constitution," 498.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 483.

¹¹² Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 356.

Christianity's first centuries, when the temporal authorities persecuted the followers of the new faith, Christians "were completely estranged from Church hierarchy."¹¹³ Therefore, parochial and parish restructuring should not be a point of contention among France's churchmen because "If only spiritual objects are essential to the jurisdiction of spiritual power, then how can one pretend that this applies to the territory of bishops? A division of territory is certainly not a purely spiritual thing."¹¹⁴

In the eyes of many on the other side, the threat to end Church hierarchy was heretical in that hierarchy was considered dogma. P. -G. Debiche de Reignefort, who writes against the Civil Constitution, responds to the rhetoric of the advocates. Contesting the assertion that the legislation neither attacks religion nor alters Christian dogma, he offers a conservative response based on the legitimacy and authority of Church hierarchy. For Reignefort and like-minded thinkers, the Civil Constitution was in ways too democratic. Part of his objection is to the clause (Title 1:14) which made bishops answerable to a council and to another (Title 2:19) which prohibited the pope from confirming French bishops. In Reignefort's mind, an end to hierarchy was heretical and that the incumbent structure in which the pope has primacy in jurisdiction and not just honor, and in which priests are answerable to bishops and not vice versa, is "of the faith."¹¹⁵ Clearly, Church hierarchy as Catholic dogma was a very real concern for politically conservative churchmen and their parishioners.

¹¹³ Pierre Denis Faure, *Consultation sur une Question Importante, Relative à l'Article 1 du Rapport du Comité Écclésiastique sur la Constitution du Clergé* (Paris, 1790), 14.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁵ Pierre-Gregoire Debiche de Reignefort, *Objections et Responses sur la Religion Constitutionnelle*, (Paris, 1791). 4-5.

The challenge to Catholic hierarchy as dogma revisits the dilemma over jurisdiction. An anonymous priest observed that the state's control of the Church would not end with the institution of the electoral paradigm. The Civil Constitution calls for the vicar of the cathedral church to replace a deceased bishop in functions not requiring episcopal authority and the acting bishop is still answerable to his council. It is this clause that the priest viewed as dogmatically heretical and he justified accusing the National Assembly of attempting to usurp "all the authority of the pope and the universal church."¹¹⁶ This argument might seem somewhat incongruous in that the National Assembly only gave itself the power to assign a default authority and not to appoint specific bishops as kings and the pope did in the Old Regime. But the fear that the Revolutionary government would try to interfere with Church dogma and papal jurisdiction, however, as events proved was certainly legitimate.

The most visible reason its opponents gave to reject the Civil Constitution was its reassignment of parishes. The plan to overlap French parishes with the new department system called for the elimination of offices which included over fifty bishoprics and archbishoprics.¹¹⁷ Any diocese that was not assigned to one of the 83 departments was suppressed. In addition to these "layoffs," the edict redrew the boundaries of the remaining dioceses. The bishop of La Rochelle, writes John McManners, refused to relinquish his old parishes and distributed circulars to his old jurisdiction.¹¹⁸ Considering all the measures of the Civil Constitution, this redistribution was certainly one of the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

¹¹⁷ Jones, *The Peasantry in the French Revolution*, 197.

¹¹⁸ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 260.

most needed and even had the support of some who otherwise opposed the legislation as a whole. The curé, Gruget of Angers, for example, an ardent opponent of the Civil Constitution, admitted to the necessity of this measure.¹¹⁹ Peter Jones has noted that the Church leadership had the mind to restructure dioceses and parishes before the Revolution but would not for fear of a peasant retaliation and wanted to preserve the traditions of their ancestors who feared that attending mass might become more arduous if they had to travel to a more distant church.¹²⁰

Opponents of the Civil Constitution reacted to the claim of its proponents that it would revive Christianity to its ancient glory by pointing out the challenges to the Church raised by other Revolutionary legislation. Noting the equality given to non-Catholics, Reignefort, for example, asserted,

Jews, Protestants, Jansenists, scandalous priests, men who have decried their morals, these are the pretended reformers of the Church. Did not Luther, Calvin, and Zuingle make attractive promises for their heresies? . . . virtuous pastors replaced by the scum of the clergy, the priesthood degraded, religion turned to derision, are these the means of giving the Church back its primitive beauty?¹²¹

Some opponents realized that the pristine Church was simply unobtainable. One man writing anonymously to Abbé Lecoq (who would eventually be elected a Constitutional bishop), employs the same logic as Reignefort. While he accepted the notion that the early Church was a pristine entity he pragmatically argued that the era had come and gone. Elections, he insisted, may have worked in the ancient era of fasting saints and

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 259.

¹²⁰ Jones, *The Peasantry*, 202-203.

¹²¹ Reignefort, *Objections et Responses sur la Religion Constitutionnelle*. 5-6.

martyrs, but the Church now existed under different conditions.¹²² Similarly, Jacquemart, curé of Brissarthe, spoke out against the measure in an assembly, urging France to “put away chimerical dreams, let us cease building castles in the air. Times have changed. By all means let us look back with regretful admiration to the virtues of the apostolic age, but let us not flatter ourselves that we will see them revive again in our midst.”¹²³

The measure of electing priests, bishops, and vicars was not just designed to return the Church to its landless, “beautiful age.” In addition to returning France to its pristine Church, the clause was designed with the new ideas of the nation and of democracy in mind. By turning ecclesiastics into civil servants, they were required to serve their parishioners who, despite some being protestants and Jews, were patriots, thus priests would be forced to serve the whole nation and not just the faithful. Elections of these officials also put the civil authorities over canonical authorities. For instance, Mary Robinson has explored oath ceremonies in her study on the Benedictines of Saint-Maur. The civil authorities designed the ceremony of the monk turned parish priest, Dom Trémauville, to emphasize the clear jurisdiction of temporal power over religious authority by reading first the town proclamation of his election and then the bishop’s canonical institution. As symbolic as Napoleon’s refusal to be crowned by the pope, it was the municipal authorities who issued Trémauville the keys to his residence after the ceremony.¹²⁴ Perhaps the idea of the pristine Church and the idea of nation were meant to be synonymous. Elections of officials necessarily prevented the patronage of prelates

¹²² *Lettre à M. l’Abbe Lecoz: Principal du Collège de Quimper; sur son Processus Contre l’Église.* (Paris: Bureau L’Ami du Roi, 1791), 17.

¹²³ Jean-Paul Marat, *Moniteur* no. 161, p. 657; no 167, p. 683 cited in McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 261-62.

¹²⁴ Mary K. Robinson, *Regulars and the Secular Realm*, 85.

and the elevation of well-connected priests which was a major complaint by those who longed to see the Church return to its early days. The theological problem with the election of churchmen was, of course, ordination. In the old regime, the priestly candidate received investiture from the Church hierarchy that transitively came from the pope through Jesus. Now that the pope was stripped of his authority in France, Constitutional candidates could not receive ordination from the Vatican. This problem, coupled with the pope's condemnation of the Civil Constitution, contributed to the legislation's wild unpopularity with the clergy and laity.

Despite the conflicts brought about by the bill, some clerics, perhaps, wished to be non-juring citizens meaning that their qualms with the Revolution were engendered mostly by the Civil Constitution, and that given their way, the Revolution would progress without the radical reform of the Church. Up until 1791, it was not the confiscation and sale of ecclesiastical lands or the institution of new taxes that sent the Revolution on its wavering course. This development is usually said by historians to be a result of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and more specifically, its requirement of the oath. John McManners has suggested that the problems that arose were not necessarily due to the decrees put into practice. For example, the suppression of monastic chapters went over smoothly in Angers.¹²⁵ Other than the thorny question of authority, many ecclesiastics and lay alike still believed in the Revolution. J. A. Baude, for example, stated that,

I am happy and I even promise to watch over as well as one possibly can the faithful of this parish who are entrusted to me, to be true to the nation and the king and to observe the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and sanctioned by the king in all that is within the competence of his power, in all that belongs to

¹²⁵ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 256-57.

him in the order of purely civil and political matters, but where the government and the laws of the Church are concerned, I recognize no superior and other legislators than the pope and the bishops.¹²⁶

In his call to reject the oath, Baude expresses the feeling of many refractory priests when he affirms that, “This will be an example for any of you who may lose your possessions, your fortune, and even your life if necessary, rather than abandon your faith, your religion and offend your God.”¹²⁷ Carefully phrased oaths like Baude’s, in which some element or elements of the official oath had been omitted, are called restrictive oaths. These oaths, although few as extreme as Baude’s which can be seen as a refusal, were actually accepted in some areas out of pure frustration and desperation by revolutionary authorities.

Prelates shared the same sentiments as Baude. Even though as a whole, the prelates rejected the Civil Constitution it was not necessarily out of hatred for the Revolution. Nigel Aston argues that many bishops were, in fact, moderate and open to revolutionary reform and shows that bishops did not reject the notion of restoring French Catholicism to its primitive origins. The difference revolved around the means to achieve this goal. These prelates shared the mind of many who did not want the state to have control over the Church.¹²⁸ The sentiment of the majority of bishops is best expressed in the *Exposition* (1790), a clerical edict drafted by the moderate, Archbishop of Tours, Boisgelin. Through this edict, high ranking men of the Church not only demanded that the Assembly must accept canonical form, they insisted that clerical deputies must be

¹²⁶ J. A. Baude, *The Declaration of a Parish Priest*, January 1791, in Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee eds., *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 48-49.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁸ Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution*, 68-69; Aston, *The End of an Élite*, 231.

approved by Rome and that a clerical National Council be summoned to determine the precise rights of the new lay power. In short, they argued that civil power cannot alter the Church's constitution and that that power is reserved for the pope.¹²⁹ Aston sums up the prelates' stance on the larger issue of authority with his statement that "It was pointless for the Assembly to hector them, or threaten them with loss of office, since they derived their titles and jurisdiction from the Church, which alone could annul them."¹³⁰

Despite the objections of these prelates, the revolutionaries proceeded anyway. It has already been explained how some, like Faure, challenged the opposition to diocesan restructure. Jean-Paul Marat, the radical Montagnard and subsequent revolutionary "martyr" and head of the left wing newspaper, *L'ami du peuple*, responded by asserting that counter-revolutionaries consisting of the king, administrators, and conspirators, incited legislative prevarication concerning the Civil Constitution.¹³¹ Marat's assertion that these prelates effectively hampered the Civil Constitution is consistent with Aston's view that their refusal to accept the legislation indeed gained them a new respect among the curés. Despite their diminution in status brought on by the Revolution and the eventual failure of the *Exposition*, they still served as leaders for wavering clerics.¹³² Prelatic leadership was clearly revealed when on January 4, 1791, *Abbé* Gregoire delivered a speech to the ecclesiastical deputies, in the hope of convincing them to take the oath. He told the former First Estate that he cared not for their personal, internal objections to the principles brought on by the Civil Constitution, but only their adherence

¹²⁹ Ibid., 238.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Jean-Paul Marat, *L'ami du Peuple* (435): Paris, April 21, 1791.

¹³² Aston, *The End of an Élite*, 238.

to the law. Gregoire's speech reveals the desperation of the circumstances. He tried to convince them that an apparent allegiance to the Constitution, as opposed to genuinely felt allegiance was the wisest course of action. It would obviously preserve Gregoire's vision of the Revolution and his political reputation, but from a broader standpoint, it would keep the Revolution progressing along a successful track, at least in regard to religion. Regardless of his intentions, he and the other supporters of the new Constitutional Church felt only disappointment after the false hope that the Bishop of Poitiers brought when he rose to the tribune. Refusing the oath, he stated only that in the spirit of penitence would he meet his fate.¹³³

Bishops also gave instructions to their subordinates to refuse the oath. In a circular, the Bishop of Langres clearly expressed the Church's stance on spiritual versus temporal authority when after inveighing against the National Assembly he reminded his underlings that strength came in numbers. The situation was so urgent that in addition to asking his priests and vicars to refuse the oath, he expressed the necessity that they stay in their parishes. Further, he said, if met by violence, they were to find another town in their jurisdiction recalling Jesus' instructions to the apostles, "When they persecute you in one town, flee to another."¹³⁴ Pastoral letters like this inspired a controversy of their own. Some of these letters, moreover, urged the clergy not to follow or recognize the

¹³³ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 47.

¹³⁴ C.G. Guerbart, *Instruction Donnée par M. l'Évêque de Langres, aux Curés, Vicaires et autres Ecclésiastiques de son Diocese, qui n'ont pas Prêté le Serment Ordonné par l'Assemblée Nationale*, March 15, 1791, Langres, S.N. 3-6.

new Constitutional bishops. This conflict rose to the point where civil authorities actually confiscated the circulars of the refractory bishops.¹³⁵

In the midst of this schism, the king, the country's traditional leader, had his hands tied. While he was personally opposed to the Revolution, he had to sanction the new religious reforms and thus incurred the resentment of those he would otherwise support. Writing to the king to inform him of his disapproval, his own chaplain accused him of heresy for sanctioning the Civil Constitution. He had, the chaplain said, by sanctioning the law, reversed the order of Church hierarchy established by Jesus himself and had failed in his oath as king to protect.¹³⁶

Although most prelates supported the Church of the Old Regime, a few dissented and put their faith in the sweeping reforms. The most infamous of these bishops was Talleyrand who would later make his way into American history books as a corrupt player in the XYZ Affair. Talleyrand ordained the new Constitutional bishops even after he had resigned from the Church and been excommunicated by the Pope. This action stood to show the power of the Revolutionary mindset over the Vatican. Talleyrand was one of five bishops who were publically condemned in the papal encyclical *Charitas*.¹³⁷ In 1790, De Lorry, Bishop of Angers, urged all secular and regular clergy in his diocese to take the oath on the justification that the apostles followed Jesus without any distinctions of wealth or land. To celebrate the coming of the new Church, de Lorry mandated the *Te Deum* be sung at the Cathedral Church as a symbolic gesture

¹³⁵ Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 296.

¹³⁶ Writer identifies himself as B. D. L.; B. D. L., *Lettre au Roi Par un des Aumôniers de Sa Majesté*. (Paris: Imperimerie de Crapart, n.d), 5.

¹³⁷ Pius VI, *Charitas*, sec. 9.

commemorating some of the earliest practices of the religion.¹³⁸ His enthusiasm for the Revolution would wane, however, with the announcement brought about by the Civil Constitution that the redrawing of dioceses would lead to the elimination of some bishoprics.¹³⁹

The Civil Constitution can be explained as a product of Reform Catholicism, a movement that came about under the influence of the Enlightenment. Revolutionary clerics such as Adrienne Lamourette, Claude Fauchet, and Abbé Grégoire expressed the idealist character of the Revolution in regard to religion and equality. David Sorkin has viewed European religious reform movements of the 18th century as directly resulting from the Enlightenment. Exploring the beliefs of Lamourette, a Constitutional bishop, Sorkin is able to show how the Enlightenment influenced this theologian in his attempt to reconcile Catholicism with the idea of nation and liberty. Religious reform in the 18th century was successful in many different European polities including Austria which benefited from the reforms of Joseph II. According to Sorkin, however, where France differed from other religious reform movements was in the balance between absolute rule and religious liberty. The absolute monarchs of France regarded any deviation from orthodox Catholicism as an affront to sacral monarchy and as attempts at revitalizing the Fronde, which had sought to challenge absolute rule. Among those who would contest this rule were Jansenists, the jurists influenced by them in the parlements, and *philosophes*. And while the goals of these factions may seem similar, the religious

¹³⁸ Michel Francois Couet de Viviers de Lorry, *Mandement de Monseigneur L'Eveque d'Angers*, (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1790), 5-7.

¹³⁹ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 260.

element put forth by the Jansenists became too mystical for the more empirical *philosophes*, therefore polarizing essential elements of French religion and French Enlightenment, a reality that would deny Catholicism the proper, balanced, temperament. An alliance between the three camps may have reconciled the spiritual aspects of the organized religion with the need to reform its practices. But as it was, these philosophical powers in France clashed too much to pursue and carry out reform until the Revolution.¹⁴⁰

Lamourette, while initially a royalist and a papist, supported a constitutional monarchy and while he was no *philosophe*, nor a Jansenist, and certainly not a Jesuit, he put forth a theology that incorporated what he regarded as the best aspects of all of these standpoints while avoiding their most extreme facets. His philosophy was actually anti-*philosophe* but not without their influence on him as he incorporated their ideas of natural law, natural religion, and toleration into his belief system. Lamourette preached a brand of theology that became compatible with the Revolution. His message of toleration was well-suited to the idea of liberty and he came to endorse full citizenship for Jews and Protestants following Gregoire.¹⁴¹

Having come from a Lazarist chapter, the former Constitutional bishop embraced the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790 partly due to its promise of a return to the primitive, landless, Church. He championed those who were convicted by the idea of pure devotion and denied worldly excess. Additionally, his adherence to natural law—which he equated with God’s law— allowed him to believe that the state should be the

¹⁴⁰ Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 264-66.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 274-76, 284-85.

steward of the Church in its civil relations.¹⁴² His faith in monarchy changed from the days leading up to the Revolution and he eventually came to fully endorse the Revolution even to the point of becoming anti-monarchical and even to see the Revolution as messianic. He believed that the landless Church brought on by the sale of Church property and the adherence to civil law brought on by the Civil Constitution, was prophetic. Preaching a revolutionary theology, he taught that Jesus Himself brought about the ideas of fraternity and liberty against the tyranny of Rome. It was this idea that perhaps best explains his unique passion for Church reform. While other supporters adhered to the idea that the temporal power should rule, with his characterization of Jesus, he went so far as to advocate a full democracy because despite Jesus' demand to obey pagan authorities, the demand does not apply to tyranny because He gave His life to fight it.¹⁴³

If supporting deputies were to ensure the success of the Civil Constitution, it was first necessary to implement a perspective that was not contrary to Catholic dogma. In May of 1791, Lamourette gave a defense of the Civil Constitution to combat what he perceived as libel against him. The new bishop argued along the exact same lines as Camus and other supporters including Faure. Arguing in support of the primitive Church by claiming that since bishops are not bound by temporal lines and receive their authority from Jesus Christ, their assigned jurisdictions are merely secondary and only necessary to ecclesiastical economy.¹⁴⁴ Lamourette was not to survive the Revolution.

¹⁴² Ibid., 289.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 289-91.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 299.

As a reform Catholic theologian, Lamourette was joined by who would become the future bishop of Calvados, Claude Fauchet, another theologian who attempted to reconcile the ideas of the nation and democracy with Catholicism. Benjamin Thurston, who has also explored the polemics over the Civil Constitution, has studied Fauchet's necessarily unorthodox theology. According to Thurston, Fauchet's influential sermon endeavored to reconcile Catholicism with the Rousseauist theory of the general will and in doing so saw God to have been the author of the Revolution. The French, he declared, should "recognize His law in ours, and His eternal will in our general will."¹⁴⁵ Like some Marxist historians of the 20th century, this contemporary theologian saw the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* as messianic.¹⁴⁶ Like Lamourette, Fauchet did not survive the revolution either. After participating in a Lyon rebellion against Jacobin rule as part of the Federalist Revolt, Lamourette found himself imprisoned in Paris sharing a cell with Fauchet. They were both guillotined.

Clearly, the ideas of both Lamourette and Fauchet as well as the Jansenist influence exhibited by Camus and Treilhard must show that the Civil Constitution was seen as more than anti-Catholic, if unorthodox. Their piety and devotion to the integrity of the Church to the point that they had hands in creating and sponsoring the controversial reforms, must show that they did not regard the Civil Constitution as anti-Catholic. Still, the French had a history of fighting against those influences, like

¹⁴⁵ Claude Fauchet, *Sermon sur l'Accord de la Religion et de la Liberté, Prononce dans la Métropole de Paris, le 4 Février 1791, pour la Solemnité Critique des Anciens Représentans de la Commune, en Mémoire de ce qu'à Pareil Jour, le Roi vint à l'Assemblée Nationale, Reconnoiter la Souveraineté du Peuple*, excerpted in Benjamin Thurston, "'Comme des brebis au milieu des loups': Biblical Ideas and Imagery in the Sermons and Pastoral Letters of the French Clergy, 1790-91," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review* 66, no. 3 (2012): 307.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

Protestantism, that challenged its orthodoxy even if it shared similarities. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy can be understood in the context of the Protestant Reformation. Roughly 300 years after the split, the *cahiers* and the Civil Constitution which they brought about, echo in some way Martin Luther's petitions against the contemporary practices of Catholicism. Indulgences may not have been the great clerical concern of the Revolutionary period, but the *cahiers* do exhibit a limited anti-papal character. As the drafters of these petitions pushed to ban fees to Rome, so did Luther. In a 1520 letter to the nobility of the German states, he proposed the prohibition of annates to all subjects of German lords to counter the financial excesses and patronage of the Church, and to promote the wellbeing of Germans.¹⁴⁷ While the general French complaint criticizes Church wealth, so does Luther when he writes that, "The pope should not allow his court to surpass in pomp and extravagance the courts of all kings. . ."¹⁴⁸ Luther's contention with Church wealth went further than Christianity's portrayal as a religion for the meek; he saw wealth as interfering with matters of faith and the study of religion.¹⁴⁹

Both the Revolutionary, Church reformers like Lamourette and the second Ecclesiastical Committee, and Martin Luther sought a more spiritual leadership. But more important than a shared perspective on Church practice is the heuristic concerning jurisdiction between religion and government that was proposed by Luther and carried out by the French Revolutionary government almost three hundred years later. He had

¹⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom*, 1520, trans. Bertram L. Woolf, *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther*, vol. 1, *The Basis of the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 141.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

much to say to the ruling class of Germany and suggests this stance on religion and state that, “government is spiritual in status, although it discharges a secular duty. It should operate, freely and unhindered, upon all members of the entire corpus, should punish or compel where guilt deserves or necessity requires in spite of pope, bishops, and priests.”¹⁵⁰ The Revolutionary government denied its own spiritual status by denying Dom Gerle’s request that Catholicism should be France’s official religion. It would, however, ignore the spite of the clergy and operate completely unhindered during the Terror.

There are, however, stark contrasts between Luther’s revolt and the spiritual reformers of the Revolution and it would be a questionable leap to suggest that they shared the same beliefs even if their agendas seem similar. After all, France did not completely deny the pope before de-Christianization and its Catholic believers certainly never denied the spiritual and authoritative distinction between clergy and laity. If there is no direct influence from Luther to Revolutionary religious reformers, the similar complaints underlie the problems of the Church as an institution of the Old Regime.

Revolutionary pamphlets were written to be read, and indeed, to convince others to believe the same. The proliferation of this literary body underlies the importance of this dire issue which caused priests and secular pamphleteers alike, to express so passionately what they believe. An anonymous curé concludes an anti-constitutional pamphlet with the statement that, “it would pain me to have my name placed on the list of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 117.

ecclesiastics with pretended virtue. . . My spirit and my heart refuse such conduct.”¹⁵¹ Bravado’s like this underlie the desperation some clergymen felt which could lead to measures more tangible than pamphleteering. One pamphlet which presents itself as being the dialogue of the Electoral Assembly suggests that refractory bishops bribed clergymen to refuse the oath.¹⁵² More underhanded dealing, it was rumored, was done in Paris when the majority of ecclesiastical deputies refused the oath. In Paris, it was said, that ne’er-do-wells had been hired to dress as priests and publically take the oath to bolster support for the Civil Constitution after its supporters suffered the hard blow of these deputies’ rejection of it.¹⁵³ Furthermore, more revolutionary clerics simply regarded non-juring clerics as stubborn. Adrienne Lamourette wrote of such clerics that they have become, “opinionated, dogmatic, and facile reasoners” and promote “irreverence and blasphemy.”¹⁵⁴ The return of the Church’s primitive simplicity could certainly not come with the heated political climate.

The oath may have been just a conflict with the civil authority, but some saw in it also a conflict with their calling as churchmen and their responsibilities to their parishioners. The *curés* of Cambrai refused the oath based on reasons of a higher authority, believing that all authority was God’s and that “God puts the scepter in the hands of kings. . .” and that God had entrusted the pontiffs of the Church with the

¹⁵¹ *Dernier Examen du Curé de *** sur le Serment de la Constitution Civile du Clergé*, (Paris: Imprimerie de Chapart, 1791), 16.

¹⁵² *Le Retour des Electeurs de L’Assemblée Electorale, Dialogue*, (S.N., 1791), 5.

¹⁵³ McManners, *Ecclesiastical Society*, 271.

¹⁵⁴ Adrienne Lamourette, *Instruction Pastorale de M. L’Éveque du Department de Rhône et Loire. Métropolitain du Sud-Est, Á MM. les Curés, Vicaires et Fonctionnaires Ecclésiastiques de son Diocèse*, excerpted in Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 298.

enforcement of His will.¹⁵⁵ But it was also their obligation to their parishioners that they found pressing. These curés claimed, like Baude, that they had no qualms about the first part of the required oath to swear to keep the trust of their parishioners. It was for this reason, however, that they could not take the rest of the oath. It was the duty of the curés to judge and protect the good morals of the nation because “the best Christians are essentially the best citizens.”¹⁵⁶ But this nationalism was of a different breed than that of the Jansenists, the defenders of the rights of Gallican Catholicism, because in order for the citizenry to continue being children of the Church, “it is essential that they submit to a pastor, established by the Church and the same, a bishop who takes the mission of the Church, which is in perfect communion with the pope, the sovereign pontiff, the successor of Peter and through this quality the vicar of Jesus Christ. . .”¹⁵⁷ Unlike the Jansenists, they could not be convinced to deny the pope’s sweeping authority.

While they refused the requirement, they did, however, swear first to continue to be obedient to the Church and then, just as it had established them, it was only the Church who could dictate to them “where to extend or take away.” They swore also that if the temporal authority circumscribed the jurisdiction or removed it without the help of the Church, they would not recognize any lessening of Church jurisdiction. Finally, they would not abandon their flocks to the Constitutional Church.¹⁵⁸ Whether these affirmations came from true faith or rhetorical puffery, the parishioners were the primary concern for the curés. In many instances, it was the permanent relationship between

¹⁵⁵ A. J. Fèrez et al. *Profession de Foi des Curés de la Ville de Cambrai* (S.N., 1791), 4-5.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

parishioner and curé that gave parish priests, perhaps, the purest reasons to reject the oath. This sentiment is expressed well by an anonymous *curé* who inveighed against taking the oath because it would render him a “heretic in refusing to recognize a spiritual authority established by Jesus Christ,” and that he would be in a situation where he could not give to his parishioners the “securities they are entitled to enjoy of his ministry.”¹⁵⁹

Jurisdiction may have been the most prominent point of contention toward the enactment and meant drastic changes for France’s clergymen, but the Civil Constitution affected the lives of the laity as well. Minding the relationships that developed between countryside worshippers and parish priests, the peasantry necessarily reacted to the Civil Constitution and its adjoined oath. Two things worth considering are, as Peter Jones has noted, that *curés* were often elected to the office of mayor and in some departments, like the department of the Nord, peasants were very enthusiastic about voting for the clergy as their elected officials.¹⁶⁰ It seems that some aspects of the Revolution were very appealing to the peasantry. It also attests to the extremeness of the Civil Constitution that peasant populations would prefer not to see their curés take the oath. Historians Timothy Tackett and Peter Jones are of the opinion that the Civil Constitution was a product of bourgeois anti-clericalism intent on diminishing the clerical status.¹⁶¹ This seems likely considering that the second Ecclesiastical Committee which drafted the Civil Constitution was formed of all like-minded deputies. If this is the case, the committee did well in their intent and in doing so, brought new challenges to the peasantry. Among the reforms that

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, *The Peasantry*, 176; George Lefebvre, *Paysans du Nord pendant la Revolution Française*, 768, cited in Jones, *The Peasantry*, 177.

¹⁶¹ Tackett, “The West in France in 1789: The Religious Factor in the Origins of the Counter Revolution,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 54 (1982), 715-45, cited in Jones, *The Peasantry*, 199.

challenged their culture, peasants resented and rejected the measure of parochial reorganization due to its suppression of smaller parishes. This peasant population feared that with the new reforms there would be no nearby place to worship and therefore no place for socializing. Peter Jones has shown how this fear was realized in the west when the number of refractory priests was dwindling after expulsions and Constitutional priests were far too few.¹⁶² Coupled with the suppression of parishes which would deny peasant access to their cemeteries where their ancestors rested,¹⁶³ resentment must have been the feeling in parts of the countryside. This negativity, however, is generalized. Jones has also noted how in some areas the peasantry would submit to Constitutional priests as long as the parishes remained intact.¹⁶⁴ In other words, the reactions elicited by the religious reforms depended on what Timothy Tackett has so painstakingly explored—religious regional culture.

The Revolution as well affected the lives of the female population. While black, Jewish, and Protestant men gained citizenship and the right to join the National Assembly, women enjoyed in many ways less agency than they had had in the Old Regime. Nevertheless, this observation should not eclipse the contributions made by women to the Revolution. For example, the October Days, in which ten thousand women marched on Versailles, was a female orchestration. Women, moved by the grain crisis, demanded that the royal family return to Paris to witness and resolve the suffering engendered by the famine. As a whole, however, opportunities for women were

¹⁶² Ibid., 201.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 203.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 203-204.

diminished and it is a testament to the character or position of Marie Antoinette, Madame Tussaud, Charlotte Corday, and other standout women, both Revolutionary protagonists and antagonists, that they are noted. Instead of the image of the strong *citoyenne* personified by Mme. Taillien, male Revolutionary authorities propagated the notion of republican women as patriotically inspiring wives and mothers.¹⁶⁵ This depiction shows the multiple facets of the Enlightenment of Rousseau's domestic idealization as contrast to the Enlightenment's saloniere who discussed ideas on an equal footing with men.

Concerning the Civil Constitution, women played important roles on both sides, especially in the battle to persuade the laity. Sometimes the struggle could become very heated and even violent. In Les M^ontiers, in the coastal Loire region, women threatened to hang officials attempting to administer the oath whereas juring women in heavily constitutional areas adorned themselves in tricolored ribbons and took the same oath taken by the priests. In Strasbourg, 250 women tried to convince soldiers in a local barracks to join the refractory side. The soldiers, however, remained strongly committed to the Constitutional Church.¹⁶⁶

Women of the convent were of course more drastically affected. To paraphrase John McManners, the spirit of Freedom brought on by the Enlightenment did not allow for the freedom to cloister oneself in puritanical devotion.¹⁶⁷ The fates of both the women and men who left the convents and monasteries deserve more attention, but not all were dismissed and not all remained silent. A nun who remained in one of the

¹⁶⁵ Amy Freund, "The Citoyenne Taillien: Women, Politics, and Portraiture during the French Revolution," *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 3 (2011): 325

¹⁶⁶ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 173-74.

¹⁶⁷ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 31-32.

preserved nursing and teaching nunneries spoke out against the National Assembly in a valuable pamphlet written from a female and conservative perspective. Timothy Tackett has noted that nuns often proved more devoted to their vows than monks.¹⁶⁸ This anonymous nun brings forth her reasons for opposing the oath and it was a matter of authority. Like so many others on the right, this nun abhors the loss of papal authority, but she gives equal expression to the diminution of the king's power to the extent of accusing the National Assembly of designing a plot to dethrone the king, which in fact came to pass.¹⁶⁹

The institution of an omnipotent, popular, democracy was a dreadful thought for this nun because,

Already, you [National Assembly] have seized our sacred temples. . .[and] tolerate the enterprises of unbelievers, but refuse to tolerate the truly faithful.¹⁷⁰ You have tossed away all obligations to the ecclesiastics, the monks, pious women, who are consecrated and practiced in all virtue. You have emancipated their wishes, you have permitted them to reenter the world, you have allowed them to contract a marriage, and you wish them the right to divorce.¹⁷¹

In her mind, this could only lead to political and social upheaval.

With this much contempt for the National Assembly, and its contributions to the degradation of the Church, the oath would not suffice for this woman. For a conservative, both France and the Church were seen in disarray—"How messieurs," she asked, "can we contribute to this great disorder and adopt a constitution that is anti-Catholic? We would be permitted to swear before God and at that point, be obliged to

¹⁶⁸ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 174-75.

¹⁶⁹ *À Messieurs les Deputés de l'Assemblée Nationale: Adresse d'une Soeur de l'Institution Chrétienne sur le Serment Exigé des Personnes Religieuses, Chargées du Service des Pauvres Malades, et de l'Education de la Jeunesse*. (Paris: Imprimerie de Crapart, n.d.) 11.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

violate all the practices of piety that we have promised to observe with great fidelity.”¹⁷²

In caring for the sick and teaching the young, she had sheltered herself from want and excess and had always submitted to the needs of others. Indeed, humility is her leitmotif.

¹⁷³ This letter is a valuable source but does not, of course, tell of the entire female experience.

A woman in the Ville d’Aire, located in southwestern France, praised the Civil Constitution and tried to convince other women of the town to do the same. Her down-to-earth tone is worth noting. Allowing no excuses pursuant with the contemporarily expected passive conduct of women, she exclaimed to her audience that they had all read the great theologians like Chrysostom, Athanasius, Augustine, and Cyril and are capable of discussing the proposed reforms for the Church.¹⁷⁴

She commenced with more of a reproach than a discussion on the Civil Constitution, accusing her cohorts of using the rhetoric of others without knowledge of their meanings and attempting to assuage their fears of heresy echoed by the curés of Cambrai, that all authority comes from God, but with opposite purpose. Pamphlets seldom argue for or against the Church reforms as being pro-monarchal or anti-monarchal,¹⁷⁵ but the anonymous *écrivainne* was clearly enamored by the early years of the Revolution when the king was still regarded as patriarch, thus her line of reasoning was that the king, who sanctioned the Civil Constitution, was ordained by God, and

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁷⁴ *Réflexions d’une Patriote Dévote de la Ville D’Aire, Á ses Concitoyennes, au Sujet du Serment Ordonné par le Décret du 27 Novembre, Sanctionné par le Roi*, Pamphlet (S.N., 1790), 3-5.

¹⁷⁵ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 64.

therefore the Civil Constitution could not possibly be heretical.¹⁷⁶ Whether or not she knew that the king approved the Civil Constitution only under pressure from the new government is unclear. She may have been counting on the ignorance of others or was ignorant herself to the fact that was only substantiated after the king's flight to Varenne, that he disapproved of the new Church. Employing the same jurisdictional arguments expressed by so many enthusiasts and repeating the stance of the *cahiers* in order to make others, as she did, believe that the new measures were for the good of the state and Catholicism, she beseeches her friends to, "submit to a constitution that will forever annihilate the abuses that have, for too long, dishonored the Church."¹⁷⁷ It would only be fair to judge her as a product of the more progressive energies of the 18th century.

Besides having given reasoned and evidenced-based arguments similar to Camus' polemics, it was her condemnation of refractory-minded priests that highlights her declaration. Judging them as backward "farm boys" who still believe in ghosts, she implores "*bon Dieu*" to instead, "believe in the ghosts of the century of lights and reason."¹⁷⁸

Another pamphlet (ostensibly written by a woman) suggests a very different experience, this from an unknown *Parisienne* whose desire in writing of her journey was merely to express it publically. Instead of being cloistered in a convent, this woman was a layperson and was exposed to the Revolutionary energy running through Paris and initially in full support of the measures taken in the early Revolution. She too echoed

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

many of the concerns expressed in the *cahiers* about the state of French Catholicism: “People spoke of reforming the Church and I had more than once bemoaned its scandals,” she writes. “With my conscience delicate and tender, I feared the luxury of some bishops, the loosening of some monasteries, and the venality of some appointments . . . What I [would] give to see the Church in its ancient days?”¹⁷⁹

Her perception of the Revolution changed, however, as she saw what was happening to French Catholicism as a result of the Civil Constitution. Her great dilemma was which church to support. Desperately apologetic and regretful in tone, she admitted to having not actually read the measures presented by the Assembly.¹⁸⁰ Remaining loyal to the Revolution until she saw churches turned into political clubs, synagogues, and Protestant churches, and hearing Adrienne Lamourette preaching a new, yet in her mind, far too progressive, theology, and upon hearing of the far left’s triumphant announcements of priestly marriages, she let her faith in the Revolution wane.¹⁸¹

This perceived blasphemy was still not enough to turn her completely from the new religious reality, and to get more answers, she decided to visit a Constitutional church—“a church where men celebrate their offices”.¹⁸² What she saw there led her to denounce the new *culte* further. For while the parishioners seemed devout, it was only because of their pastors. Juring priests, she claims, did not know how to be priests. They

¹⁷⁹ *Histoire de la Conversion d’une Dame Parisienne*, Pamphlet (Paris: Lallemand, 1792), 4.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

married and would have priestly chastity abolished, their decadence was considered sensible, and in general, their mores were lessened.¹⁸³

One of the most interesting insights given by this woman regarding the new Church reform is the Church's function as a charitable entity. Describing the condition of the poor with the lack of religious houses, now abolished, she observed that the poor under this new system suffered and quietly died, while orphans were given to the authority of an abusive father or mother who believed in the Constitutional Church to disadvantage the child.¹⁸⁴ The described suffering was most likely due to the lapse in time from the system of the Old Regime where the Church had a diminishing, yet still important role in charity, to the state-run system of social welfare discussed in the next section of this chapter. Still, the suffering she observed affected her views of the new religious establishment.

Another point of conflict for her was the Revolution's adherence to the new philosophy. She feared that the Enlightenment in practice would eventually lead to disaster. Already, the leaders of the Revolution placed busts of Rousseau in the assemblies. She claimed that the ashes of Voltaire, "the scourge of Christianity," had been placed in the middle of a church.¹⁸⁵ Her support of a Church would come down to a choice between traditional, steadfast conceptions of salvation and Enlightenment reasoning. Faith and salvation were paramount to her, and so it comes as no surprise that

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 7.

it was a refractory priest who impressed her after she asked how he refused the oath only to be persecuted and live in a meager state.¹⁸⁶

The denouement of her story, consistent with her tone of religious conversion, echoes the story of St. Catherine of Sweden who convinced her husband to remain chaste. Her adherence to the Church of the Old Regime confirmed, she was able to persuade her ardently Revolutionary husband to support the refractory Church despite his initial, enraged, protest; persuasion, she says, that came through faith and feeling.¹⁸⁷ This document confirms (since those who opposed the Civil Constitution have largely been ignored) the traditional standpoint of historians that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy split the Revolution into irreconcilable camps and disillusioned many of those who otherwise supported the Revolution as a whole. For this previously ardent laywoman as for others, clergy and laity alike, it was the reality of the change forced upon the Church that first caused doubt and then the rejection of the Revolution.

NATIONALIZATION OF CHURCH LAND

Historians tend to lump the nationalization of Church lands and the Civil Constitution of the clergy together. This tendency is also evident in contemporary writings and is due to the event's chronological proximity and its characterization as Church reform. It is true that both actions by the National Assembly are crucial to the history of the French Revolution and this pairing is sometimes necessary to obtain a broader view of the role of the Catholic Church in the French Revolution. On the other

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 34-39.

hand, this conjoining of the two occurrences from the perspective of cultural opinion conceals the diversity of responses concerning the two happenings. In other words, those who supported the nationalization of Church lands may not have supported the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and vice versa.

The “nationalization” of Church lands, enacted on November 2, 1789 was intended to help the financial situation of the new government more than it was out of necessity to reform the Church. The debt from France’s many wars and famine, which had prompted the calling of the Estates General, had yet to be paid and was still rising. In 1789, the National Assembly levied a 25 percent tax on all persons, but this “patriotic contribution” – as Georges Lefebvre has called it—failed as it could not be successfully enforced by local municipalities. The situation was made worse by the lapse in older taxes. Even without this delay, the new tax could not have produced income fast enough. The democratic idea of merit additionally led to tax collectors being paid a salary instead of obtaining positions by purchase and keeping a portion of the income. Under this system of the Old Regime, advances in collections could be given to the crown in the form of rescriptions.¹⁸⁸ Because of the mounting debt and the Assembly’s inability to enforce new or old taxes, the only remedy was to “confiscate” Church lands. On December 19, 1789, the Constituent auctioned off 400 million *livres* worth of Church property in the form of *assignats*, which were essentially bonds that could later be

¹⁸⁸ Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, vol. 1, 158.

exchanged for land. Most of the land went to private citizens, including Jews; very little of it was maintained by the state.¹⁸⁹

This sequestration was a watershed in the social trajectory of the Revolution. The Assembly seized ecclesiastical property on the grounds that the French Catholic Church was no longer considered an estate and therefore had lost its status as a corporate body. John McManners has interpreted this event as a political threshold; an impasse blocking a retrograde trajectory.¹⁹⁰ The August 4th decrees, which had abolished the seigniorial rights of the first and second estates, had been completed. Additionally, Dale Van Kley adds a Jansenist-inspired twist in his interpretation of the nationalization measure by arguing that the land seizures were justified on Gallican principles backed by Jansenist presence in the National Assembly. One of these principles was that the Church was comprised of the “entire assembly of the faithful” and not just the clerics. This assembly, writes Van Kley, was interpreted to be the nation which the National Assembly reserves the right of advocacy. This was enough for the National Assembly to justify seizing Church property.¹⁹¹ The real reason, however, was debt.

The ending of this privileged order, besides undermining its economic independence, also resulted in an identity crisis for some churchmen and understandably so. The privileges they had first received centuries before their own time and those that had been added to their estate through time had suddenly become defunct. Donations of the faithful as acts of piety that the Gallican Church had received in the early and high

¹⁸⁹ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 27.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

¹⁹¹ Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 355.

middle ages had abruptly been assigned to strangers with no intimate connection to the Church. Parish priests, from then on paid on state salary, feared the instability of the new Revolutionary government who had already let old taxes dwindle and struggled to enforce new ones.¹⁹² Even with 400 million added *livres*, the state still struggled and the clergy, on edge, could only hope that they would receive their provisions that had been promised to them.

Even in the face of this uncertainty, the clergy eventually came to take the land seizures fairly well, although prelates opposed the legislation. Many of these high-ranking clergymen abandoned the National Assembly for the duration of the discussion. This left moderates in control of the former First Estate who sought to compromise, and it was Talleyrand who was the first to propose a solution to the state's fiscal difficulties when he suggested that one third of the Church's lands go to the state and argued that the measure would double the income of parish priests with state backing.¹⁹³ Other prelates followed Talleyrand's lead. Bishop Cartois de Balore suggested that the state should have control of all ecclesiastical estates providing that each parish receive a depository for all expenses. Still, the general stance of the prelates was to maintain their fleeting autonomy which was officially voided when the Assembly voted 568 to 346 in favor of seizing all ecclesiastical property.¹⁹⁴ A vast majority of bishops refused to respond too negatively to the seizure in order to avoid arousing an anti-clerical feeling.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Ibid., 27, Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, vol. 1, 158.

¹⁹³ It is worth noting that this bishop who was extremely constitutional did not initially back the complete transfer of property.

¹⁹⁴ Aston, *The End of an Elite*, 216-217.

¹⁹⁵ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 30.

Just as proponents of nationalization argued that the elimination of estates denied the priesthood a corporate status, its opponents insisted that the priesthood had a right to property ownership. And just as the proponents of the Civil Constitution rooted their arguments in history, so too did some of the opponents of nationalization. An anonymous writer, for example, invokes a long held myth, and going all the way back to the Carolingians, claims that the nation was formed when the Frankish conquerors and the clergy united to form the First and Second Estates, each with its own lands. These estates, the writer argues, voluntarily freed slaves who came to comprise the Third Estate which acquired lands through their labor. Therefore, he concluded, the nation never owned land and therefore had no right to take it from the clergy.¹⁹⁶

On the other hand, contemporary critics like Rangeard of Angers claimed that it was by scare tactics that the Church had been able to acquire land in the first place. Like Mallet, Rangeard claimed that the Church took advantage of the superstition and piety of the medieval laity and threatened to excommunicate those who stood in the way of their acquisitions. Like-minded critics saw the event therefore as a reclaiming of the nation's rightful land and it was the language of the Comte de Serrant, who offered that the Church simply held its lands in usufruct, quickly spread and was adopted by the National Assembly.¹⁹⁷ It was the same sentiment expressed by the Marquis de la Coste who proclaimed in the National Assembly that, "the moment has come for her [the nation] to claim them [lands], because the moment has come where this nation reenters the fullness

¹⁹⁶ *Problème: la Nation est-elle Propriétaire des Biens du Clergé?* (Place Unknown: Chez Garnary, 1789), 1-3.

¹⁹⁷ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 240-242.

of its rights.”¹⁹⁸ In addition to the nation’s right of stewardship of the ecclesiastical lands, La Coste notably motioned that the tithe be eliminated, that all clerics live only by the sums produced by their benefice, and that sisters of female orders receive pensions.¹⁹⁹

Support of the measure could also be strictly idealistic. A noblewoman expressed jubilation at the news that the National Assembly had finally acquired Church land, her argument revisiting the image of the primitive Church. Pious and patriotic, she sees the seizure of Church property as being good for religion and the nation. In her view, France should leave only enough bishops and priests needed to serve the country and do away with the excess in order to restore the morals of the nation and of religion.²⁰⁰ She is anti-clerical believing that the contemporary practice of Catholicism is unworldly by claiming that women in convents have been so cloistered that they have not even seen the convent garden in forty years. While she extolls the virtues of the lower clergy with praises of fidelity to the point of undeserved poverty, she condemns the prelates as “hornets to the simple tonsure” having usurped the good done by the lower clergy.

The Church of the Old Regime was not without spokesmen. Aside from the once influential Abbé Sieyès who defended the tithe, Abbé Maury, though unpopular, was a strong defender of the Church. Maury was conservative to the point where he could be considered a counter-revolutionary. He defended some of the banal practices of the old regime. For instance, he spoke out against the measures proposed by deputy Clermont-Tonnerre which aimed to extend the protection of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*

¹⁹⁸ Marquis de la Coste, *Motion de M. le Marquis de la Coste, sur les Biens Dits Écclésiastiques, faite dans l’Assemblée Nationale, ce 8 Août 1789*, August 8, 1789, (Versailles: Chez Baudouin, 1789), 2.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁰⁰ Mme. De Barone de V. V., *Gaieté sur les Biens du Clergé, Recouvrés par la Nation* (N. p., 1789), 1-2.

and Citizen to actors, executioners, Jews, and Protestants, populations who lacked enfranchisement in the Old Regime. Maury also defended the right of the Church to its own property. Although disliked, many must have listened when he brought up the idea of precedent. If the National Assembly could take the Church's lands, would they eventually usurp secular property? He chillingly warned to the non-ecclesiastic members of the Assembly that, "We were attacked today. . . Your turn will come."²⁰¹ His conservative positions coupled with his landed status hurt his public image. An anonymous revolutionary—likely an actor—poked fun at Abbé Maury, in a mocking skit. Speaking to Louis XVI, the Bishop of Autun and La Fayette, along with an assortment of deputies, this satire portrays Maury as a greedy aristocrat who does not want to lose his lands and incomes from the Church. Maury is quoted as saying, "my poor 800 farms, into what hands will you fall?" The Bishop of Autun retorts by saying that "they couldn't fall into worse hands."²⁰²

Anti-clerical or not, the selling off of Church lands would solidify the Revolution. In addition to revoking the clergy's "estatehood," there was the belief that the constitution would be confirmed by the nation that could now participate with vested interest because of their right and ability to own newly available property.²⁰³ The biggest beneficiaries of land nationalization (which also consisted of land formerly owned by the *émigrés*) should have been the peasantry. The seminal research of George Lefebvre has shown that peasants interested in buying newly available land had to vie with the

²⁰¹ *L'Economie de la Revolution Française* (Paris: Hachette, 1987), 91, cited in Popkin, *A Short History*, 50-51.

²⁰² Anonymous, *Messe du 14 Juillet 1790, Célébrée par l'Abbé Maury, de Fameise Mémoire*, Play (Paris: Chez Simon & Jacob Ston, 1790), 1.

²⁰³ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 243.

bourgeoisie. In some departments, the peasantry came together as a community to outbid any competitors. For instance, the peasantry, writes Peter Jones, had been very successful in Hainaut and the Cambrésis (department of the *Nord*) in organizing to outbid bourgeois speculators. In other areas, however, such as Flanders, the peasantry failed to organize in common purpose and had been outbid by the bourgeoisie.²⁰⁴ While some individual peasants managed to beat urban spectators at auction, it was typically this collective model that was successful.

But among the peasantry, sentiments differed concerning the nationalization of Church lands. The term ‘peasantry’ has been generalized to mean farmers in the countryside and often been misconstrued as meaning poor. In fact, there were enormous differences in economic circumstances among the peasantry and the nationalization of Church and *émigrés* property precipitated more dissent among the peasant population. For instance, wealthy citizens expanded their holdings through the purchase of land which disrupted the traditional parceling of small farmers’ tenures and often deprived them of work and wages on their previously farmed lands. Peasants pushed for laws of maximum holdings and had to wait for the relief of a slowly developed agrarian policy under the Montagnard Convention.²⁰⁵

With increased elimination of ecclesiastical property, welfare became a subject of debate. An unknown writer faulted the Revolution for worsening the condition of the poor and the clergy through the sale of Church lands, declaring that, “before this fatal era, there was never a town in the kingdom, nor a parish that did not collect each year, more

²⁰⁴ Jones, *The Peasantry*, 156-57.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 163-65.

or less abundantly, for the nourishment of the poor.” More than anyone else, it was the curés that had traditionally cared for the impoverished class in the areas of sustenance and security. This writer, in fact, sees charity as a right dating back to Gaul: “the poor have rights to the patrimony of the Church, and these rights to this point are sacred and established on the will of donators.”²⁰⁶ Arguing along the same lines as the Gallic myth that commerce and labor led to land ownership, he adds that the patrimony established by the medieval benefactors of the Church was stolen by the revolutionaries through bribery and deception of voters without any regard to humanity or the respect of the land holders.²⁰⁷

At this point in the early Revolution, agrarian policy that would help the peasant class was slow to develop, and it seems that when it came to nationalization, the revolutionary government vacillated between their credo of equality and the interest of the bourgeoisie. At least the revolutionary model of welfare—*bienfaisance*—was around the corner. On March 19, 1793, the National Convention decreed that the state should be responsible for public relief and acted centrally and through local authorities. This decree mandated that every man had a right to sustenance through work and would be assisted if he is incapable of working, but still favored merit by allowing the taxpaying population more relief than those who did not pay.²⁰⁸ One thing is for certain and is evident in this decree. Despite what would happen to the new lands, the succession of revolutionary governments from the first National Assembly to 1799 when Napoleon became the first

²⁰⁶ *Avis aux Pauvres sur la Revolution Présente, et sur les Biens du Clergé* (N. p., 1791), 4.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁰⁸ National Convention, *Decree on Public Relief*, March 19, 1793, in Stewart, *A Documentary Survey*, 438-39.

Consul of the Consulate, was not considering returning the lands to the Church. “The property of hospitals, foundations, and endowments for the poor,” reads one decree, “shall be sold in the manner regulated by the Committee of Alienation.”²⁰⁹

Issues surrounding rights of patrimony and the re-inheritance of the nation aside, some doubted that nationalization was the best way to eliminate the national debt. In October 1789, shortly before the Assembly’s decision to nationalize Church land, the Bishop of Uzès argued that a one-time gain from land sales was not fiscally responsible and would only create more debt. In disputing the measure, the bishop claimed that the money from the sales would eventually run out. In order to nationalize Church benefices, the state would have to enact a new tax and, “there will be nothing for following generations and possibly our own and the charge will never rest.”²¹⁰ Instead, the bishop insisted on the clergy’s utility in caring for the poor from the land from which they drew income. There could, he said, be no better proprietor of its traditional property. Evoking the new democratic spirit he further argued that under the revolutionary paradigm of the right to own property, the Church therefore had the right to keep it. “In the end,” he pleaded, “we are your co-citizens, your brothers, and the same law that protects you, we must protect. It is therefore completely unjust to violate in our hands the sacred right of property, the sole foundation of all humane societies . . .”²¹¹ Finally, desperate to maintain the Church’s traditional properties, the bishop protested that the land up for

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 439.

²¹⁰ Bishop of Uzès, *Opinion de M. L’Évêque D’Uzès sur la Propriété des Biens du Clergé, Prononcée dans la Séance de l’Assemblée Nationale du 23 Octobre 1789* (N. p., 1789), 6.

²¹¹ Ibid., 13.

auction would only pass from wealthy hands into other wealthy hands and would not actually help the lower classes.²¹²

The Assembly did not comply with the bishop's protests and for good reason. In addition to eliminating the national debt, nationalization led to development opportunities. If Tackett's 202 *cahiers* sampling is a good indicator, then few *cahiers* actually suggested seizing all ecclesiastical property.²¹³ If the measure of nationalizing Church lands was not popular before 1789, the idea became popular once it was suggested on the Assembly Floor. McManners has shown how lay Angevins yearned for development outside the ecclesiastical realm. The building and placement of factories, schools, libraries, courthouses, theaters, and gardens could all be realized with the new land opportunities in Angers,²¹⁴ and doubtless other towns striving to develop and undoubtedly some towns struggling to survive. Relieving the national debt was pressing, but the relief of municipalities was urgent. Agents from the National Assembly's committee on land expressed its desire to aid municipalities due to grain shortage and slowing commerce.²¹⁵ It becomes clear that in this early stage of the Revolution, the National Assembly would act quickly on what it saw as France's most pressing needs.

When it came to the actual seizure, the National Assembly decreed that religious jurisdictions send a letter which itemized their properties. The Order of Cluny, for example, wrote the National Assembly to officially relinquish its property and stated that

²¹² Ibid., 14.

²¹³ In a sampling of 202 general *cahiers*, seizing Church lands was only mentioned five times and in only two percent of *cahiers*. Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 13.

²¹⁴ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 240.

²¹⁵ Delley D'Agier, *Rapport Fait au Nom du Comité pour L'Aliénation des Biens Domaniaux et Ecclésiastiques, sur les Ventes de ces Biens*, May 14, (Paris: L'Imprimerie Nationale, 1790), 3.

only a small number of the order dissented. This letter itemizes all the lands of the order which valued itself at 900,000*l* which included land and effects.²¹⁶ Many sacred vessels and ornaments were melted down for gold, which must have been emotionally difficult for the former members of defunct orders and parishes to witness. Although after the promulgation of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, these artifacts were distributed to poor Constitutional parishes.²¹⁷

While the Order of Cluny may have been passive in their suppression, the closings elsewhere could lead to internal conflict within the orders. In 1789, the National Assembly was formulating a plan for religious reform and pondered redistributing regulars in order to close under-populated houses. Some brothers of Saint-Maur requested an all or nothing solution asking the Assembly to either let them live as they had or set them free, “do not allow us to be the only ones deprived of it [liberty].”²¹⁸ Others in the order asked to be preserved as a charitable chapter so that they could carry out their civic duties. The plea of some Norman Benedictines suggests that monastic life and patriotism need not conflict. Willing to abdicate their lands to relieve the national debt, these monks asked only that they be allowed to exist as an order.²¹⁹ This sacrifice further suggests for many clerics, that the loss of ecclesiastical land and wealth took a back seat to other priorities for ecclesiastics.

²¹⁶ Dom J. Ducoin et al., *Lettre de Religieux de St. Martin de Champs, à Paris, à L'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris: Chez Baudouin, 1789), 1-2.

²¹⁷ Mary K. Robinson, *Regulars and the Secular Realm*, 87-88.

²¹⁸ “Doms Placide Joseph Monthois, Jean Dominique Richer, and Phillipe Antoine Joseph Eigniot to the president and Deputies of the National Assembly,” October 7, 1789 cited in Mary K. Robinson, *Regulars and the Secular Realm*, 38.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

There are, then, many varying views and reactions inherent in the polemical and propaganda debates surrounding the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the nationalization of Church land. While the decision by the National Assembly to seize and auction off the Church's property was received with much less vehemence than the Civil Constitution, it was this very measure that gave the Assembly the right to enact the Civil Constitution. The promulgation of the 1790 legislation gave the state the right to interfere with the Church so invasively that it is a wonder that historians regard the Civil Constitution of the Clergy as the "separation" of Church and state, when in reality the Gallican Church was controlled by the civil authorities more than in the Old Regime. The responses of the writers of the discussed pamphlets, pastoral letters, and plays inspire significant questions concerning precedent, authority, the role of the Assembly, and the role of the king that will be explored in this next and concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RENDEZ DONC Á CÉSAR

Antoine de Baecque has described Revolutionary pamphlets, specifically those that proposed reforms, as being a gold mine for historians of ideas. The ideas “are always courteously offered” and “undeniably constructive but painfully earnest and, at times, tediously repetitive.”²²⁰ Although not constructive in the same way as de Baecque has noted—and often destructive—pamphlets regarding the Civil Constitution of the Clergy are exactly as de Baecque describes. It would take an ardent student of rhetoric to appreciate the paradox of the long and extraneous niceties of gentlemen belittling each another’s opinions. What is more is the tedious repetitiveness of their pamphleteering. In efforts to persuade or dissuade their audiences, writers such as Reignefort, Camus, various anonymous curés, etc., write long historical and theological proofs, often making the same exact points but with an array of different references. Furthermore, their reasoning is often unoriginal to the point where both sides have constructed what is really a body of derivative work.

Two conclusions come to mind concerning these characteristics. The first, as David Miller has noted, is that they show the empirical nature of the time. Despite Camus’ less-than-honest historical proofs, the culture of intellectual polemics was factually apologetic which negates the perceived chasm between Enlightenment logic and Catholicism. The second conclusion is more obvious. At least for the opponents of the

²²⁰ Antoine de Baecque, “Pamphlets: Libel and Political Mythology,” in *The Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800*, eds. Robert Darnton and Daniel Roche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 166.

Civil Constitution, their reasons to oppose and dissuade are clear.²²¹ The correlation suggests that the documented Civil Constitution of the Clergy speaks for itself. It was extreme! Prelates and priests, alike, were relegated to civil servant status and had to be elected by the public which included non-Catholics; parochial boundaries were redrawn to leave some priests and bishops flockless; bishops were answerable to councils of their inferiors; and the pope was left powerless in Gaul.

These are the reforms that put the Revolution on its wild trajectory and any measures that could do this had to be extreme. In retrospect, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy encompassed the boldest and some of the most extreme measures of the Revolution, outranked only by sanctioned regicide and the Terror. The nation that after almost two centuries of absolutist rule finally received representation, but still did not receive a listening ear. Almost half of the ecclesiastical population refused the oath, including the refractory members of the National Assembly who comprised two thirds of the ecclesiastical deputies.²²² Some remained in France where they were subjected to violence and ridicule while others became *émigrés*.

The Civil Constitution may have been a mistake as many historians have argued, but it may have worked had the Constituent Assembly been more moderate and focused on only what was necessary and not on ideal reforms of the Church, particularly fiscal reallocation. Again, restructuring of ecclesiastical pay was popular among the lower clergy, and not opposed by all prelates. The restructuring of parochial boundaries to fit

²²¹ As opposed to the proponents who could have truly believed in the reforms, been swept up in the Revolutionary spirit, been anti-clerical, or fit in a combination of these reasons.

²²² McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 47.

the new department system was also popular even though it interfered with what many regarded as Catholic dogma. It was this clash between temporal and spiritual authority that was a legislative gray area. In particular, what was the extent of the new government's power? The Assembly knew it should not interfere with spiritual jurisdiction, but even that, evidently, had been poorly defined through the centuries.

In the 1790 debates over the new legislation, members of the soon-to-be refractory clergy took up the call *Rendez donc à César ce qui est à César et à Dieu ce qui est à Dieu*. There could not have been a more fitting Bible verse for the turmoil that was about to erupt in France. There were problems with these words of God, however, and it was about to break the Revolution. As Timothy Tackett has stated, “The problem, of course, was to decide what things actually belonged to Caesar and what things belonged to God.”²²³ Additionally, the opponents did not have the sole claim on this biblical verse. The key argument for proponents of the Civil Constitution was that it would return Gallican Catholicism to the primitive Church of early Christianity. By their view, the Church would own no land and the pope would be relegated to his purest, active, title of Bishop of Rome and would leave the temporal authorities to govern their territories completely. A proponent of the new legislation could argue that this is what was actually meant by “render unto Caesar.” Heaven was the true spiritual realm and the Church was its niche on Earth but was to be governed by secular authorities in all but belief and rite.

Jules Michelet rightly remarked that the mistake of the National Assembly was its failure to consult the Church on the proposed reforms. *Il faut consulter l’Eglise* became a

²²³ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 63.

common plea of moderates like Boisgelin. The Assembly, however, was determined not to let the ecclesiastical council meet. John McManners has interpreted this refusal as an upholding of the Revolution for if the council met, then the Assembly would be forced to recognize the First Estate as a corporate order again.²²⁴ But even without papal consent to Church reform, there were already factions within the Church that advocated some very sensible alterations. The Richerists, for example, were a very pro-curate group who advocated elections of Church officials by Church officials. A Church run by synods of clerics would better ensure that lower clergymen would be financially protected which was one of the goals of Richerism and many Jansenists. A Jansenist reform advocate named Maulrot championed the rights of parish priests by arguing that they had equal rights as bishops to preach, say mass, and administer certain sacraments and could therefore enjoy these rights without prelatric interference. At the heart of his argument was the belief that as the bishops succeeded the apostles, priests equally succeeded the disciples and therefore enjoyed an equally rich heritage and right of position. If a peaceful reform of the Church was to be realized, however, Maulrot's spite for the prelatry could not accompany it. This reformer accused bishops of being like absolute monarchs. They were, to Maulrot, "episcopal despots" and required "blind obedience."²²⁵

What might have worked, however, was the synod run Gallican Church. This proposed reform, could have opened the Church to other problems, however. When playing fields are leveled new regimes often ride the currents of the former incumbents

²²⁴ McManners, *French Ecclesiastical Society*, 263.

²²⁵ Van Kley, *The Religious Origins*, 336-337.

and the Church then could have resulted in the same patronage and nepotism of the Old Regime under a new ecclesiastical aristocracy, but it seems more pragmatic than allowing Jews, Protestants, and professed atheists to have such a strong hand in governing a body that was not their own and so dear to others. It might have seemed logical to the deputies sponsoring the Civil Constitution that if the Church became a part of the state, then priests be relegated to civil servant status and therefore elected. It seems it was the failure of the Assembly to consult the Church that voided the merit of their logic. For whatever reasons—perhaps the new sense of liberty was too compelling and this liberty was stretched too far and allowed for public elections—the synod run Gallican Church was never realized. As Van Kley has noted, if the reform of the Church were left to the Jansenists, the new Church would not been nearly as different as it was with the reforms of the National Assembly. Jansenist activists pushed for the preservation of certain orders and, according to Van Kley, would not have nationalized all ecclesiastical property, nor would they have abolished the tithe without instituting some form of compensation. Additionally, the abbot Claude Jacquemart urged the Assembly to allow only for ecclesiastics to elect bishops and curés.²²⁶ The turmoil precipitated by public elections was a far cry from what many advocates of the Civil Constitution had in mind, for as McManners has written, “the clergy were troubled when they saw that the people politically organized was being equated with the *ecclesia* of primitive Christianity.”²²⁷

As has been seen in the documents, some of the most significant points of contention with the Civil Constitution relate to its democratic nature: it altered Church

²²⁶ Van Kley, *The Religious Origins*, 353-354.

²²⁷ McManners, *Ecclesiastical Society*, 261.

hierarchy so that bishops were answerable to a council and it allowed elections of its offices by citizens. The electoral aspect of democracy and its sister idea of checks and balances were incompatible with French Catholicism in the late 18th century. But was democracy the reason that nearly half of the clergy and the country rejected it? Clearly the pope did not approve of democracy. As for much of the citizenry, if this was one of their first encounters with democracy, then its honeymoon period had ended. Despite the praise it might have earned from many for abolishing seigniorial rights and unpopular taxes, the Assembly had failed utterly in its reform of the Church. Jeremy Popkin has noticed that the Civil Constitution was the first time the National Assembly was met with a large amount of resistance.²²⁸ Opponents like Abbé Maury asked the pertinent question: if the National Assembly could so imposingly interfere with the Church, what else it could it do?

Popkin has also written that to take the oath was “to endorse the Revolution and the nation; to refuse it was to challenge both.”²²⁹ But an all or nothing statement like this is too sweeping to describe how people really felt. Evidentially, it ignores the restrictive oaths such as that of J. A. Baude who would swear to recognize the National Assembly and the king, but who refused to accept the right of the Assembly to decide on Church matters. Another curé swore that he could not take the oath and betray his conscience, although he also could not betray his nation, the law, or his king in other aspects of being a citizen.²³⁰ Then there is, of course, the oath with the ultimate restrictive phrase, “as

²²⁸ Popkin, *A Short History*, 53.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²³⁰ Tackett, *Regional Culture*, 64.

long as it was agreeable to God.”²³¹ It is clear that there was a lot of doubt in the requirement of the oath, but ecclesiastics also showed some faith in the Revolution even if there was little in its ideas for Church reform. This faith, however, was not enough to save the Revolution.

Again, the ecclesiastical oath was not officially a requirement to adhere to the Civil Constitution, but the implication was obvious. Officially, the oath was an oath of adherence to the Constitution of 1791 which allowed for perhaps the most practical reason to reject the oath which had nothing to do with divisions of religious and temporal authority, but to swearing to endorse a constitution not yet written. The decree requiring the oath predated the finished Constitution by 10 months and to many, like the anonymous nun who opposed the oath, to swear to enigmatic laws seemed foolish because the laws of the constitution had been neither sanctioned nor published. “So,” she wrote, “can even a legitimate sovereign, by oath, force his citizens to observe laws that do not exist . . . ?”²³² Her question was, of course, rhetorical, but an answer lies in the strained relationship between her king and the Assembly.

That the Revolution occurred shows that the stability of the Old Regime had been exhausted; this crisis equally affected the Church. The task of the National Assembly was to overhaul the necessary institutions and annihilate those whose necessity and utility had been rendered defunct. The problem is evident in the Assembly’s self-perception. French kings had made strides in their control over the Gallican Church throughout the centuries and Louis XIV had even dismissed those rights as a statement of his absolute

²³¹ *Sermon by a Canon of Nevers* quoted in Tackett; *ibid.*, 65

²³² *À Messieurs les Députés de l’Assemblée Nationale*, 4.

status. Various agreements between crown and mitre and the superimposition of holy saints and symbols on French government, such as the designation of Joan of Arc as a national saint, had tightly intertwined Catholicism and royalty. Despite the king's waning power after being confined to Paris as a result of the October Days, it was still his sanction that the Assembly needed and while it had the people's mandate in municipal changes, it still lacked the king's mandate on religion, something it tried to mimic and eventually to usurp by its action. As McManners sees it, disobedience to the Vatican was an act of honor and legitimation for the Assembly as various European sovereigns had done the same under the Old Regime.²³³ But on religious reform matters, it was still the king's sanction and support that was needed. After all, its importance has been shown in Revolutionary pamphlets²³⁴ and must have been somewhat instrumental in getting clerics to swear the oath and laymen to support the Civil Constitution. So as the extreme Montagnards gained more and more power, France became a dangerous polity, and the king sanctioned the Civil Constitution and later the oath. So the answer to the nun's question is yes. If the king sanctioned the Civil Constitution due to the increasingly hostile climate, his approval of the Constitution of 1791 was preordained, completed or not.

Just as Louis XIV had done away with Gallican rights as a statement of absolutism, the execution of his descendant was more of a statement of Revolutionary sovereignty than a trial for treason. They may perhaps, however, be construed as one and

²³³ McManners, *Ecclesiastical Society*, 263.

²³⁴ One woman tried to convince her circle to accept the Civil Constitution because the king had sanctioned it and the king's own chaplains tried to dissuade the king from the sanction. See chapter two.

the same. After all, the last pre-Restoration king did state his intentions to end the Revolution. It happened that the two sides of the constitutional monarchy became irreconcilable in large part over religion. So only by ending the monarchy would a Democracy be the truly sovereign power in France. Robespierre's insistence that the government would be "Revolutionary until peace" would consign the king to treason. The monarch's death, the instance of complete revolutionary sovereignty, was two years after the schism's commencement which was not resolved until Napoleon's Concordat.

The Assembly had tried and failed to hold the king's mandate on Gallican religion. The Revolution had caused the Church to become barely a shadow of its former self. In heavily revolutionary regions such as l'Ile de France, refractory clerics who did not flee were subjected to chastisements such as ridicule, then persecution including forced marriage, and eventually violence. Those familiar with the period of de-Christianization (1793-1799) know of the mockery and violence done to the clerics of both churches and refractory supporters, as well as the transformation by de-christianizers of Catholic churches into secular, patriotic, places of worship, or as they style them, Temples of Reason. These measures of de-Christianization were a product of Jacobin extremism, but it must be admitted that, in some measure, nonjuring priests and their supporters brought these measures on themselves with their reactionary and severe opposition to the oath and other revolutionary policies. The force comprising the pro-refractory effort was legitimately feared by mainstream, pro-revolutionary factions.

While the Jacobins of Paris may have witnessed less of the fervor of traditional Catholics, parts of the countryside became a hotbed of counter-revolutionary activity and

resistance to revolutionary policies, particularly regarding the Church and the clergy. This was certainly the case in the southern city of Besançon in the Franche-Comté where the supporters of the traditional Church threatened the life of the local magistrate. Upon instating a Constitutional priest to replace the town's familiar, nonjuring priest in his duties, the magistrate was dragged out of his house by the pro-refractory townspeople who then tried to drown him in the Doubs River.²³⁵ The account of this episode, written as a warning from the Jacobin Society of Besançon to the central Jacobin Club in Paris, however, is very minor compared to what happened in the southern city of Arles where refractory supporters staged a coup. The warning from the protestant Rebaut de Saint-Étienne to the Minister of the Interior tells that the counter-revolutionaries were stockpiling canons and rifles. The "patriots," he reported, had been treated with derision to the point where many left, Constitutional priests were chased out, and finally, those who chose to speak out against the traditional Catholic Church were hanged.²³⁶ But Rebaut de Saint-Etienne feared more than counter-revolution; he feared international war. Since Austria had signed the Declaration of Pillnitz in which its supporters pledged their support of the French royal family should they be threatened, the proximity of the refractory border on the Mediterranean, including towns like Aigues-Mortes, heightened

²³⁵ Jacobin Society of Besançon, "Report by the Jacobin Society of Besançon on Refractory Priests," January 8, 1792, P. Robinet, *Le Mouvement Religieux à Paris pendant la Révolution*, vol. 2 (Paris: 1896–1898), 141–43. Translated by Exploring the French Revolution project staff from original documents in French found in J.M. Roberts, *French Revolution Documents*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 387–88. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/548/> accessed October 1, 2013.

²³⁶ Rabut de Saint-Étienne, "Letter from Rabaut de Saint-Étienne to the Minister of the Interior," 27 February 1791, *La Révolution française*, 105 vols. (Paris, 1881–1934), 35:270–73. Translated by Exploring the French Revolution project staff from original documents in French found in J.M. Roberts, *French Revolution Documents*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 388–91. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/549/>, accessed October 1, 2013.

Saint-Etienne's fears of Spain and the Italian states allying themselves with the Catholic cause.²³⁷

This fear of foreign invasion made France highly volatile in 1792. Rumors quickly spread that foreign armies were planning to march on Paris and intended to free counter-revolutionaries—including refractory priests—from prison. The monarchy was overthrown on August 10 and the Parisian mob, in fear of the perceived surmounting danger, rushed into the prisons and executed many of the city's prisoners in what became known as the September Massacres. A Parisian named Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne wrote of the brutality that he witnessed, noting one particularly troubling episode when a woman was killed after she refused to shout out "*Vive la Nation.*" A man stripped her naked, and impaled her. Bretonne, having fainted, awoke to see her decapitated head and the offenders telling him that they planned to curl the hair and mount the head on a pike.²³⁸

The religious conflict all but culminated with the revolt in the Vendée, the highly counter-revolutionary area in western France. The need for more troops became apparent as France faced not just Prussia, but Britain and Spain as well. Rebelling against possible conscription, peasants of the Vendée orchestrated the revolt. The rebellion, however, was not merely a statement against forced military service. These peasants resented the sale of Church lands and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, and even called their forty

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, "Account of the September Massacre," Nicolas-Edme Restif de la Bretonne, *Les nuits de Paris* (Paris: Hachette, [1793] 1960), 247–53, excerpted by Exploring the French Revolution project staff, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/392/>, accessed October 2, 2013.

thousand man force the Catholic and Royal Army. The results were catastrophic with historians estimating that the bloody conflict claimed over two hundred thousand lives.²³⁹

While the Civil Constitution of the Clergy truly was one of the most radical and unpopular happenings of the entire Revolution, the schism it engendered must be viewed within the greater context of the Revolution. The final blow to the hopes of a moderate revolutionary movement came with the Federalist Revolt of 1793. The moderate Girondins incited revolts in Marseille, Bordeaux, Caen, and Lyon against the more radical Montagnards. This revolt ended with the victorious Montagnards expelling the Girondins from the National Convention and executing their leaders, thus ending hopes of moderate reforms and bringing the Terror. As for the revolt, many refractory priests and their supporters joined in hopes repealing the Civil Constitution. This revolt, however, is best viewed as a struggle between moderate and extremist revolutionaries for control of the Revolution and not as a religious matter. Even Adrienne Lamourette, a champion of the Civil Constitution, joined in opposition to Jacobin extremism.

After the expulsion of the Girondins from the National Convention the persecution of the refractory clergy came in earnest. While the September Massacres can be seen as a frenzied and confused reaction to fears of foreign intervention against the Revolution, the persecution of the refractory Church during the period of de-Christianization, however, was intentional. As for Constitutional priests, they too had their challenges. Adrienne Lamourette, for example, found that newly elected Constitutional bishops, shortly after the Civil Constitution's promulgation, had trouble

²³⁹ Popkin, *A Short History*, 76.

finding sitting bishops willing to consecrate them.²⁴⁰ Many also faced their own share of violence from the supporters of refractory priests in Arles and other towns, and they too were roughly handled by de-christianizers who were active not just in Paris, but also in the provinces. The de-christianizers, among whom were ex-clerics who took every opportunity to denounce Catholicism, committed acts like destroying sacred objects and sermonizing against religion. John McManners, in a study on Catholicism in the French Revolution, has offered a few reasons for their behavior, one of which was familial pressure. Some clerics never had a desire to join the priesthood but were forced by their families into the Church. These coerced and the willing individuals alike, he explains, might have resented the Church after years of forced chastity and embraced the emerging spirit of liberty.²⁴¹

Orthodox Catholics had to suffer the overt humiliation put on them by the de-christianizers: In Paris, sacred artifacts, as well as being destroyed, were sold in shops, churches were converted to Temples of Reason and, if spared, *enragés* sometimes showed their disrespect by leaving toilet seats on Church pews. Possibly the most degrading was forced priestly marriage by deputies on mission and *enragés*.²⁴² Forcing priests to take wives was a revolutionary reaction against the medieval practice of priestly celibacy as well as humiliating for those who preferred to maintain their vows. Meanwhile, the Church of the Supreme Being was being pressed. It was never widely accepted but was tightly intertwined with Revolutionary politics as leaders like

²⁴⁰ Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 296.

²⁴¹ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 86-91.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 92-94.

Robespierre championed the spiritual body as a deistic alternative to Catholicism. Despite his love of the new cult, peasants in the countryside saw him as a potential dictator and likening this dictatorship to absolute monarchy, they thought they might bargain France's return to Catholicism.²⁴³ Instead they saw more de-Christianization. In the provinces, this movement turned more toward utility than spite for Catholicism. For instance, a town government could choose not to repair a Church due to its expense or it could melt down artifacts to forge weapons to fight the wars.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, 93.

EPILOGUE

Partly as a result of anti-clericalism brought on by a Gallican Church of the Old Regime whose lower clergy lived meagerly while its prelates enjoyed a great deal of wealth and authority, the National Assembly tried to nationalize the Church. It did this by taking Church lands and enacting the reforms of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which included taking on the payment of priests for their services and redrawing dioceses to fit the new civil geography of the department system.

The nationalization of Church property was met with mixed feelings but allowed for peasants and the bourgeoisie alike to purchase newly available lands. Quickly, the patriot language spread that the Church merely held its lands in usufruct and the nation, by “confiscating” them, was merely claiming its rightful inheritance. While both sides employed primordial myths of inheritance and while many regular orders could even provide documentation of land that had been donated to them over the centuries, the National Assembly voted to take the ecclesiastical lands. In doing so, it upheld the August 4th Decrees that did away with all rights of the privileged orders and therefore attempted the reform of the Church.

It is clear that the Assembly went too far in imposing nationalized reforms, especially when it came to the public elections of ecclesiastics and denying the pope the authority to ordain bishops and enact bulls and encyclicals in France that his office had held for centuries.

The investigation of primary sources on these matters, especially revolutionary pamphlets, shows the diverse reactions of the French people and reveals the strong

reaction of many traditional Catholics against the National Assembly and its self-perception as a sovereign body which had the mandate to interfere in Church matters as the king had done for centuries. While there had been anti-papal movements among French ecclesiastics, the pope did not approve of the National Assembly, democracy, or the Civil Constitution and his condemnation of the reforms would compromise the authority of the Assembly so that roughly half of the ecclesiastical population rejected the oath. Furthermore, its decision to ignore the Church and its proposed reforms, such as the synod-run Church, led to its failure to successfully reform it.

While the reform package proved too invasive, the decision to reject or accept the oath was not always an easy one. It was a burdensome choice for many and it happens that it was common for many to take a restrictive oath. In the same vein, what was not uncommon among ecclesiastics was their conditional allegiance to the Revolution. Many advocated for democracy and recognized the National Assembly, just not its intervention in Church matters or the particular reforms it chose as it did not consult the Church. These “nonjuring patriots” truly struggled with the decision to accept or reject the oath. While the Civil Constitution did split the clergy into two competing camps and further divided the nation, evidence of the oath’s heavy burden shown by the “nonjuring patriots” demonstrates the hopefulness and faith that was strong in the early Revolution and so contrary to what some historians have argued, to reject the oath was not to reject the Revolution.

While Napoleon would come to bridge the chasm between France and the pope, the conflict, among the revolt in the Vendée, the September Massacres, and de-

Christianization, would claim hundreds of thousands of lives. While there may have been increasing secularization and disbelief in 18th century France, Tridentine Catholicism was certainly not dead and between the National Assembly attempting to nationalize the Church and Jansenist reformers attempting to bring back the landless, primitive Church, the country was split along religious lines. If there was ever a short phrase, verse, or credo to sum up the conflict that arose between spiritual and temporal authority during the French Revolution, it is “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s.” It was differing ideas of faithfulness coupled with the same conviction of Christian faith that engendered this destructive split and the problems with these words of God.

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