

# Catholicism

A GLOBAL HISTORY

FROM THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION TO POPE FRANCIS

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ONE

## Revolution

In France and around the World

### I

EVERYTHING ABOUT JANUARY 21, 1793, remained etched in Abbé Henry Edgeworth's memory. The church bells ringing across Paris, rousing them at dawn. The carriage ride to the Place de la Révolution, crowds



Abbé Edgeworth blessing King Louis XVI before the king's execution in Paris, January 21, 1793. (Leemage/Corbis via Getty Images)

pressing in on the street. As a conduit for messages from hapless counter-revolutionary plotters, Edgeworth had hoped for an attack on the king's captors. "A great number of people devoted to the King had resolved on tearing him from the hands of the guards," he wistfully recalled. For that reason, "I still did not despair of rescue at the foot of the scaffold."<sup>1</sup>

Edgeworth and Louis XVI did not know each other well. An Irishman educated in Toulouse and Paris, Edgeworth had been drawn into the royal court by service as confessor to the king's aunt. After Louis XVI's failed flight from Paris in 1791, the king requested Edgeworth's counsel. When the National Convention sentenced him to death, the king asked to meet one final time with his wife, Marie Antoinette, and their children. Edgeworth listened from the next room as the family said their goodbyes, the sobbing children clutching onto their father.

No serious rescue effort materialized. When the king reached the top of the scaffold stairs, Edgeworth announced, "son of St. Louis, go to heaven." The king prayed out loud "to God that the blood you are going to shed may never be visited on France." Edgeworth knelt at the base. Then the guillotine fell, and the crowd roared. Edgeworth recalled the executioner "showing the bleeding head to the mob, and sprinkling me with the blood that streamed from it." Not permitted to wear his clerical robes, Edgeworth then managed, to his own amazement, to blend into the vast crowd. He journeyed to the country home of Malesherbes, the king's lawyer and an early proponent of the revolution. Malesherbes and his family would die by guillotine a year after the king. He begged Edgeworth to "Fly, fly, my dear Sir, from this land of horror and from the tigers that are now let loose in it."<sup>2</sup>

Edgeworth flew to England. His own opposition to the revolution was longstanding. Even in 1789, during the revolution's first months, he had complained that "no nation in the world has ever undergone so complete a change of principles in so short a time. Modern philosophy has broke all religious, all social ties."<sup>3</sup> His anxiety deepened as revolutionaries placed church property, in Edgeworth's words, "at the free disposal of the nation." That clergy were required to take an oath of loyalty to the new regime as part of the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy appalled him. Soon, Edgeworth predicted to an Irish friend, "we must practice our religion in corners and holes, as you formerly did in Ireland."<sup>4</sup>

In exile, Edgeworth became friendly with the greatest critic of the revolution, Irish statesman and member of the House of Commons Edmund Burke. Burke (an Anglican born to a Catholic mother) organized a fund for "Relief of the Suffering Clergy of France" and insisted "that a difference in religious persuasion will not shut the hearts of the English public against their suffering brethren, the Christians of France."<sup>5</sup> Edgeworth connected Burke with the Catholic bishop of Cork, Richard Moylan. Moylan worried about the "spirit of the French infernal Revolution" spreading to Ireland and urged "all friends of order" to rally around the British throne.<sup>6</sup>

Edgeworth eventually followed Louis XVIII, brother of the executed king and claimant to the throne, to a palace in Mitau, then part of the Russian Empire and now part of Latvia. Tsar Paul I funded Louis XVIII's exile, including a household of courtiers who replicated the rhythms of Versailles. Edgeworth stood at the king's right during the daily promenade and otherwise upheld the fiction of a continued unity between throne and altar. The distance from Paris, where Napoleon consolidated his authority, to Mitau permitted the fantasy of a popular movement to restore the monarchy. Napoleon's spies mockingly called Louis XVIII the "King of Mitau." As late as 1800, Edgeworth speculated in a letter to his sister that "the French will sooner or later return to their former masters, though it be impossible at present to say by what means, or when."<sup>8</sup>

When Napoleon's armies sliced through northern Europe, Edgeworth aided wounded Prussian soldiers brought to the estate. Edgeworth's health deteriorated after he contracted a fever from an ill soldier. In 1807 he died at Mitau, far from his native Ireland and the France he had called home. Louis XVIII mourned "a friend and comforter, a benefactor." Clergy at an Irish seminary stored a set of Edgeworth's vestments. Once a year a priest donned them and said Mass in honor of Edgeworth and all victims of the revolution.<sup>9</sup>

## II

ABBÉ EDGEWORTH'S MELANCHOLY career is a footnote to the French Revolution. But a revealing footnote. Until the Second Vatican Council

in the 1960s, no single event in the history of modern Catholicism was as momentous, none as disruptive, as the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars. One of the first Catholic analysts of the revolution, the diplomat Joseph de Maistre, predicted that its reverberations would be "felt far beyond the time of its explosion and the limits of its birthplace."<sup>10</sup>

He was right. The revolution became the default for how Catholics explained the corruption of the modern world. When another set of revolutions broke out in 1848, the leader of the Jesuits in Rome assumed that leaders of the revolts aimed to replicate the "grand revolution in France."<sup>11</sup> In 1932, Dublin's archbishop informed a presumably befuddled audience in County Cavan that the "[revolution had] inspired the whole modern attack on Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ and his Church."<sup>12</sup> A few bishops assembled in Rome for the Second Vatican Council remained fixated on the "phantom" of the revolution.<sup>13</sup>

This rupture was not inevitable. The importance assigned in Catholic memory to the destructive effects of the French Revolution blotted out the more ambiguous relationship between Catholics and revolutionary ideas. Many Catholics played leading roles in the first phase of the French Revolution, and many more would participate in subsequent democratic revolutions in Europe and North and South America.

Sketching the life of another French priest, Abbé Henri Grégoire, the man who chaired the National Convention that voted to execute Louis XVI, permits a different narrative. Grégoire described the same 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy that horrified Edgeworth as "based on the Gospels."<sup>14</sup> He was elected Bishop of Blois in the new Constitutional Church created during the revolution. He emphasized national unity to the extent of insisting that government officials standardize the French language and discourage the use of regional dialects. He advocated for toleration of Protestants and Jews, although he viewed traditional Jewish devotional practices with the same disdain that he expressed for traditional Catholic devotions. Jews, like Catholics, could become citizens only by discarding outdated and superstitious habits.<sup>15</sup>

Grégoire also became one of the first European abolitionists, urging the emancipation of enslaved people as a corollary of the revolutionary

rights of man. He later chastised Thomas Jefferson for denigrating the intellectual capacity of people of African descent. "The more imposing and respectable the authority of Jefferson," Grégoire explained, "the more essential it is to combat his judgment."<sup>16</sup>

As a cure-citoyen, or priest-citizen, Grégoire introduced the American radical Thomas Paine to French revolutionaries. Paine had once explained to his readers that "monarchy in every instance is the Popery of government."<sup>17</sup> "Let us instruct, build and continually make people realize," Grégoire wrote, "that Christianity is the friend of the Republic [and] the friend of liberty, equality and fraternity."<sup>18</sup> He supported the decision to remove Louis XVI from his throne because "we must destroy this talisman whose magic power may still stupify many more people."<sup>19</sup>

### III

BOTH MEN WERE PRIESTS, both lived much of their lives in Paris, and both were active during the revolution. Why did Abbé Grégoire and Abbé Edgeworth assess it so differently? And why did Abbé Edgeworth's understanding triumph within Catholicism?

To answer these questions is to enter a debate about the relationship of Catholicism to the modern world that began in the early eighteenth century. The debate arrayed Catholics on two sides: on the one side, those who focused on the papacy as the primary source of Catholic authority, termed "ultramontanists," or "over the mountains" to Rome. On the other side were advocates of Reform Catholicism, a catchall term lumping together overlapping traditions variously identified as Enlightenment Catholicism, Richerism, Gallicanism, Conciliarism, and Jansenism.<sup>20</sup>

For most of the eighteenth century, Reform Catholicism seemed in the ascent. The movement only lightly touched the rural masses, a disabling weakness that would become more apparent in the nineteenth century. It appealed, though, to some eighteenth-century popes, many bishops and clergy, and an assortment of Catholic kings, nobles, and lay leaders. Reform Catholicism exerted the deepest influence in France, where its advocates inherited a tradition of episcopal independence from the papacy dating back to the seventeenth century. But Reform Cathol-

icism also held sway in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, parts of the Netherlands and Germany, northern Italy, and among elites in Spain, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Portugal. Outside Europe, Reform Catholicism exerted significant influence in colonial Brazil and much of Spanish-speaking Latin America. Groups of Reform Catholics lived in England, Scotland, and British North America.

The nuances of Reform Catholicism defy brisk summary, but its adherents essentially desired two things: a Catholicism more consistent with Enlightenment ideals of science and investigation and a church with more deference toward episcopal and even lay authority at the expense of the papacy.

The blend of Catholic and Enlightenment ideas became increasingly visible during the eighteenth century. The first European university to offer a course in experimental physics was run by Benedictine monks in Salzburg.<sup>21</sup> Bishops funded scientists studying astronomy and medicine, with a Bolognese bishop facilitating the use of corpses for medical research. Pope Benedict XIV, himself, promoted the career of Laura Bassi, the first woman to hold a position at the University of Bologna and one of the era's most distinguished scientists. He thought scholarly work a "way for women to inhabit the Palace of the Pope."<sup>22</sup> In colonial Venezuela, priest-scientists mapped the Orinoco River, and in colonial Mexico they traced the origins of syphilis to Europe, not the supposedly primitive New World.<sup>23</sup> A German Catholic pastor wrote of his search "for all that is true and good, wherever it may come from." Without this independence, a Catholic intellectual risked becoming a "slave to the establishment."<sup>24</sup>

The same Reform Catholics favored a subdued, less baroque piety modeled after that of the early church: they downplayed the exuberant devotions associated with Catholicism after the sixteenth century Council of Trent. The Spanish monk Benito Feijóo y Montenegro cultivated interest in the scientific method, even as he dismissed tales of witches and exposed fictitious (but popular) saints and miracles. The Italian priest Ludovico Muratori was even more influential, and he proposed that Catholics stress aid to the poor instead of endowments for chapels or Masses for the dead. Both men published scientific treatises: Muratori on electricity and inoculations against smallpox and Feijóo on botany.

Muratori also warned against an overreliance on devotions to the Virgin Mary and such "pagan" superstitions as ringing church bells to ward off storms. Not celebrating a saint's feast day, he informed his readers, did not mean that "cattle would perish [and houses] would be in danger of being burned."<sup>25</sup> Translations of Muratori's works appeared in the major European languages and became standard seminary textbooks. Austrian priests influenced by Muratori urged an abandonment of "useless theological-scholastic controversies."<sup>26</sup> In Kraków, the archdiocese in 1781 forbade the following rituals: celebratory gunfire at Easter and on the feast of Corpus Christi, throwing oats at the priest on St. Stephen's day (to mark the stoning of St. Stephen), parading a man dressed as Jesus on a donkey on Palm Sunday, and reenacting the funeral of the Virgin Mary.<sup>27</sup>

Benedict Maria von Werkmeister, a priest based in Stuttgart, placed himself on Reform Catholicism's cutting edge. He favored a German-language liturgy (and illicitly celebrated a Mass in German using his own translation), proposed strict limits on papal authority, suggested closing monasteries because they evoked a bygone medieval past, and urged toleration for believers from other faith traditions. "Religion," he wrote, "is . . . the essential or that which makes humans wiser, better, and happier: the church is only something accidental and exterior."<sup>28</sup>

This same focus on a more reasonable religion may have diminished missionary zeal. The Catholic evangelization effort beginning in the sixteenth century in South America, the Philippines, French North America, China, and the Caribbean depended on the mixture of empathy and exploitation that marked all missionary programs. Its successes meant that Catholicism in the seventeenth century could plausibly claim to be the most global religion in human history. Already by 1650, Jesuits had established parishes and schools in Havana, Goa, Lima, Beijing, Manila, East Africa, and Quebec.<sup>29</sup>

The ebbing of the missionary effort in the eighteenth century occurred in part because Reform Catholics defined orthodoxy more narrowly, discouraging inculturation into non-European societies. The "stupid superstitions" that Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos battled in Spain were not identical to those held by Hindus in India, Buddhists in China, or Indigenous people in Baja California or East Africa.<sup>30</sup> But absorbing

pagan beliefs seemed dangerous. The most famous dispute took place regarding China. A series of popes, culminating with Pope Benedict XIV in the mid-eighteenth century, criticized Jesuit missionaries for distorting the Christian message by wearing native silk robes, permitting use of the Chinese term "Lord emperor" for God, and allowing Catholic converts to practise some Confucian rituals. The Chinese, Roman authorities insisted, must abandon the "superstition of their parents."<sup>31</sup> In part as a response, the Chinese emperor began persecuting Christian subjects. By the end of the eighteenth century, fewer than eighty priests, mostly native-born Chinese, labored in the vast empire.<sup>32</sup>

The single most important development in Catholicism in the decades before the French Revolution was the suppression of the Jesuits. Virtually everything about the Jesuits worried Reform Catholics. The special vow of obedience Jesuits took to the pope seemed an open invitation to destabilize both the local state and the local church. Every Jesuit, complained one Mexican bishop, "is the enemy of the Sovereign Power, depending on a despotic government [that is, the papacy] resident in a foreign country."<sup>33</sup>

Many Jesuits made significant contributions to natural science, but even more were vocal defenders of Aristotle and the traditional canon along with papal institutions such as the Inquisition.<sup>34</sup> Given their ultramontane leanings, the Jesuit role as the primary educators of Europe's Catholic nobility seemed positively dangerous to Reform Catholics. One German bemoaned the opportunities possessed by Jesuits to "beat or coax infantile prejudices and dogma into the heads of young people."<sup>35</sup>

Jesuit piety was also suspect for its focus on popular devotions in Europe, many of which Reform Catholics assessed as "ignorant," "superstitious," and "mechanical."<sup>36</sup> Despite their professed devotion to reason and science, Reform Catholics dabbled in their own conspiracy theories. Did the Jesuits, they wondered, condone the assassination of unfriendly monarchs? Or turn wives against their husbands by manipulating them in the confessional?<sup>37</sup> Some Reform Catholics composed (or forged) texts demonstrating that the Jesuits sought to subvert secular and religious authorities.<sup>38</sup>

Supporters of Reform Catholicism orchestrated the suppression of the Jesuits in stages, beginning in the 1750s in Portugal. The powerful

Portuguese minister Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, known as the Marquis of Pombal, disliked the fact that Jesuit missionaries governed dozens of villages in colonial Brazil and Paraguay, beyond the reach of Portuguese authorities. Pombal expelled the Jesuits from Portugal's empire, not only in South America but also in Goa and Macao. He imprisoned some two hundred Jesuits in Portugal itself, half of whom died before their release.<sup>39</sup>

Pombal's machinations existed alongside parallel efforts in France and the French Empire and in Spain and the Spanish Empire. Everywhere Catholic monarchs and statesmen judged the Jesuits as overly independent of royal authority. The same monarchs and statesmen helped arrange a general papal suppression of the Jesuits in 1773—with the exception of the Russian Empire, where Catherine the Great ignored papal edicts. The cumulative effect of these suppressions was one of the largest seizures of property, including schools, churches, libraries, communal homes, and tracts of land, in modern history. In France, 103 Jesuit colleges closed. In Belgium, auctioneers sold plates, silver, chalices, and paintings. (State officials hoarded for themselves valuable paintings commissioned by the Jesuits from Peter Paul Rubens.)<sup>40</sup> From small communities of Jesuits in Goa, French Guiana, and colonial Louisiana, to massive Jesuit establishments in Rome, Mexico City, and Vienna, the society's twenty-three thousand men abandoned the priesthood, joined other religious orders, or became diocesan clergy. In Rome, an English Jesuit recorded the reaction when, after the doorbell rang at suppertime, a delegate from the Curia entered with a team of soldiers to read the papal brief of suppression out loud: "We all stood stupefied and only now and then looked at one another. It was well that no one fainted."<sup>41</sup>

The Marquis of Pombal expressed particular enthusiasm for a Reform Catholic text written by an auxiliary bishop of Trier in the Rhineland under the pseudonym Febronius. Febronius naturally disparaged the Jesuits, but his primary focus was on episcopal authority within the church and the importance of synods or gatherings of bishops and priests as checks on papal authority. He insisted that bishops received their authority directly from the apostles, not the pope.<sup>42</sup>

Concrete expressions of these Reform Catholic sentiments—with copious references to Febronius—occurred at the Provincial Council

of Utrecht in the Netherlands in 1763 and the Congress of Ems in the Rhine valley in 1786. Smaller synods occurred in South America in Lima and Caracas and in North America in Baltimore and Mexico City. The delegates at Ems identified the pope as merely the "principal overseer" of the bishops.<sup>43</sup>

The Synod of Pistoia, led by Bishop Scipione de' Ricci and held in 1786 under the auspices of Tuscany's Grand Duke Peter Leopold, the brother of the Habsburg emperor Joseph II, drew the most attention. Despite heading a minor diocese, Ricci was a major intellectual, a Reform Catholic busily corresponding with peers across Europe, including Henri Grégoire.

The eighty-five published decrees of the synod—ranging from support for liturgy in the vernacular to limitations on festivals—circulated through Reform Catholic networks. They appeared in translation in Vienna and Salzburg, and copies made their way to Spain to be scrutinized by clerics and allied state ministers, some of whom also began a correspondence with Grégoire. Catholics in Beirut pondered their implementation.<sup>44</sup> In Mexico City, Reform Catholics sympathetic to the Synod of Pistoia urged Catholics to obey the "Apostolic Canon" and not be distracted by the "novelty, opulence, and sensuality" of popular devotions.<sup>45</sup> One Scottish priest thought that "the good bishop of Pistoia . . . has set the example, even in Italy."<sup>46</sup>

#### IV

THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS of Reform Catholicism also became evident. The monarchs and rulers favoring Reform Catholicism—Joseph II in Austria-Hungary, Charles III in Spain, Peter Leopold in Tuscany, Stanislaw August in Poland, and Joseph I in Portugal—did not consider themselves democrats, then a term of abuse more than a compliment. The textbook phrase "enlightened absolutism" describes their autocratic approach to reform.

Still, opposition to ecclesiastical authoritarianism—at least in the papal court—pushed many Reform Catholics to reflect on political representation. The primary goal of a string of patriotic revolts in the 1770s and 1780s—in North America, Asia, and Europe—was to change sys-

tems of political authority based on aristocratic status to some version of popular sovereignty. Even in the fifteenth century, questions about representation in the church had ricocheted into questions of representation within the polity, and by the 1780s, reformers repeatedly made unfavorable comparisons between the less hierarchical structures of the ancient church and the tendency of popes to consolidate their power. Similarly, they noted that ancient constitutions had once limited royal authority. Complaints about a "despotic" papacy segued into questions about political representation within an absolute monarchy.<sup>47</sup>

Reform Catholics also supported religious toleration. In an era when minority religious faiths everywhere existed on sufferance, Joseph II and other Reform Catholics proved much more likely to recognize interreligious marriages than their ultramontane rivals. Joseph II's 1781 Edict of Toleration granted Protestants property and civil rights and permitted freedom of worship, even if he still restricted the construction of Protestant churches and synagogues to side streets so as to "not look like a [Catholic] church."<sup>48</sup> Poland's King Stanislaw August denounced the Roman institution of the "Inquisition, terrible in its very name." French priests associated with Reform Catholicism encouraged Louis XVI to sign an Edict of Toleration that gave modest legal rights to Calvinists.<sup>49</sup>

Protestant rulers also demonstrated a growing appreciation of religious toleration. Dutch authorities in Holland and in colonies such as Sri Lanka edged away from efforts to punish or convert Catholics and allowed them, in the words of a Catholic petition, "the same freedom and liberty as the Heathens, the Mohammedans and the Buddhists."<sup>50</sup>

Movement toward toleration within the British Empire was equally uneven, but equally noticeable. In most of the empire, including England itself, Catholics enjoyed freedom of religious practice as a practical matter but with little legal protection. They often could not vote and faced restrictions on owning property, appointing bishops, and publicly displaying their faith. Almost everywhere potential Catholic officeholders were deterred by having to take test oaths denying the doctrine of transubstantiation. When the French colony of Quebec (most famously) and Caribbean islands such as Grenada passed into British hands in 1763, the question of what to do with significant Catholic populations became more pressing. In Quebec, the British governor general received explicit

instructions to persuade Catholics to "embrace the Protestant religion, and to raise their children in it."<sup>51</sup>

Yet less than a decade later the British imperial strategy had shifted. In Grenada, the colonial authorities overcame complaints about "popery" and allowed Catholics—a majority of the free male population—to hold office and vote in 1768.<sup>52</sup> Members of Parliament in London, cognizant of the resentments brewing in their North American colonies, passed the Quebec Act in 1774, providing for full religious freedom and exempting Catholics from the test oath. By this they hoped to head off any rebellion in French Canada. A young firebrand in the colony of New York, Alexander Hamilton, expressed outrage: "They may as well establish popery in New York and the other colonies as they did in Canada."<sup>53</sup>

The same English Parliament proposed Catholic Relief, or the elimination of test oaths, in England itself. The proposal reflected a growing appreciation of religious tolerance as a Protestant virtue, as well as a more pragmatic goal: recruiting more Irish Catholic soldiers into the British army. A "Catholic Committee" of leading English Catholics discreetly lobbied for the bill's passage, even though Catholics could not legally appear in the king's presence, even for a moment.<sup>54</sup>

Just as the British army needed Catholic soldiers, the American revolutionaries after the Declaration of Independence in 1776 needed allies, and found them in Catholic France. The Franco-American alliance—in a war against Protestant Britain—diminished anti-Catholicism in the United States. The first Catholic bishop in the United States, John Carroll, enjoyed pointing out that a Protestant empire, Britain, had nearly crushed the United States "in its birth."<sup>55</sup> A mellowed Alexander Hamilton now urged the New York State Assembly to allow Catholics full voting rights due to the "little influence possessed by the Pope in Europe." No need, Hamilton assured his colleagues, "to extinguish fires which had many days subsided."<sup>56</sup>

The Catholic Relief bill that passed in England never became law in Scotland, as "Protestants and loyal subjects" rallied against its passage. Riots against the bill in Glasgow and Edinburgh demonstrated the tenacity of popular anti-Catholicism.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, some of the bloodiest riots in London's history occurred in 1780, with hundreds reported dead from fires set by anti-Catholic mobs.<sup>58</sup> But in England, as in its

rebellious colonies, political leaders now deemed violent anti-Catholic agitation unacceptable. George Washington prohibited his soldiers from celebrating Guy Fawkes Day, or that "ridiculous and childish Custom of burning the Effigy of the Pope." King George III called the riots in London offensive "to all truly pious and good protestants."<sup>59</sup> English Catholics, in turn, expressed loyalty to the British Crown while distancing themselves from the papacy. "I am no Papist nor is my religion Popery," explained one English Catholic bishop in 1781. These are only to be found "in the kingdoms of Italy, Spain and Portugal."<sup>60</sup>

Sympathy for democratic reforms in the political realm and Reform Catholicism in the religious realm also became evident on the other side of the world. Goa remained under Portuguese control, and just as Pombal had favored Reform Catholic ideas in Portugal, he did so in the colonies. He pressed for greater toleration of the Hindu minority, permitted the building of Hindu temples and encouraged the public celebration of Hindu weddings.<sup>61</sup>

Yet Pombal and Portuguese rulers generated some of the same resentment among their colonial subjects that King George III did in British North America. A group of native-born priests led a revolt in 1787. Fully aware of the example set by the American Revolution, they worked at "implanting a new republic" led by native Goans. The revolt's leaders were betrayed in its first days, and fourteen priests eventually spent the better part of two decades in jail as a result, but the rebellion suggests the widespread availability of new political ideas.<sup>62</sup>

From Baltimore to London to Goa, then, and soon in Warsaw, Madrid, and Mexico City, a Reform Catholic sensibility prompted discussion of limits on papal authority as well as sovereignty and constitutions. By the 1780s, new forms of representation within both church and state seemed a logical next step.

## V

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP between Reform Catholicism and new forms of political representation proved most consequential, and tragic, in France. Popular dissatisfaction with the monarchy fueled by its incapacity to manage the nation's finances had swelled in the 1770s and

1780s. Precisely because church and state in France were so intertwined, resentment grew against the web of taxes, tithes, and fees supporting bishops, abbots, and other clerics who lived in luxury. Clergy owned (and often farmed) some 10 percent of French property. Clerical positions and places in convents attracted parents eager to place unemployed younger sons or unmarried daughters in stable positions, but piety was often not required. When Emmanuel Sieyès, later one of the leaders of the revolution, entered the seminary, he did so because as the son of a tax collector he saw no other way to obtain a steady income. Sexual and financial scandals, from episcopal mistresses to frivolous spending, took a reputational toll. Two hundred priests and bishops were deemed necessary to serve the royal court at Versailles.<sup>63</sup>

Up until the revolution, dissatisfaction with clerical corruption could still be understood as part of a normal ebb and flow. Just as efforts to reform the monarchy seemed to bear promise in the 1780s, so, too, did that rarity, a genuinely pious king, Louis XVI, attempt to raise the ecclesiastical tone. He refused to appoint the openly skeptical Cardinal of Toulouse to the more prestigious see of Paris on the grounds that the holder of such a post "must at least believe in God."<sup>64</sup>

The corruption and cynicism associated with the church by its detractors did not eliminate a reservoir of popular piety. The irreligion of Voltaire, Diderot, and the philosophes was the leading edge of a skeptical current that would strengthen in the nineteenth century, but such views rarely disrupted the day-to-day flow of parish life and the sacraments. In the years before the revolution, living in the heart of Paris, Abbé Edgeworth wrote to a friend about his ministry to Irish immigrants and predicted that it would be unchanged "thirty years hence."<sup>65</sup>

When queried in the first weeks of the French Revolution in 1789, members of the three Estates General called by the king—one for clergy, one for nobles, and one for common people—evinced little hostility to religion. Fifty-two bishops were elected to the First Estate (for clergy), although they were outnumbered by over two hundred ordinary priests. These clergy expressed their desire to help the poor—whose situation they knew better than any other educated group in French society—but they also took this unusual opportunity to voice ecclesiastical grievances. For example: why were so many priests poor and why could only

nobles become bishops? More radical priests pleaded for the election of bishops. "If election was restored [as in the early Church]," the clergy of the small city of Toul explained, "the face of the Church would be transformed; the voice of the people always decides more surely than the intrigues of a Court."<sup>66</sup>

The Estates General were succeeded by a National Assembly that rapidly became more antagonistic to traditional Catholicism. The National Assembly confiscated the landholdings of wealthy clergy and bishops and passed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in the summer of 1790. The Civil Constitution required that citizens, not popes or kings, select bishops and even priests, that dioceses conform to administrative lines established by the revolutionary government, and that clergy take an oath of fidelity to the nation, the king, and the new constitution. Monasteries were suppressed.

Some Reform Catholic clergy and their allies expressed their opposition to these policies as "a frontal assault on our liberties."<sup>67</sup> A slightly smaller number welcomed them. They assessed the reforms as making Catholicism more authentic, not less, restoring "principles of the primitive church" lost in the haze created by Latin liturgies, baroque devotions, and obeisance to Rome. Far from doing any damage, Grégoire explained, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy will restore the Church to its "pristine discipline." He took the oath of loyalty on the first possible day, along with sixty-two like-minded priests.<sup>68</sup>

These changes in the first phase of the French Revolution could be understood for a last fleeting moment as the French version of a wider Reform Catholic project. After all, Joseph II's policies in the Austro-Hungarian Empire resembled those enacted in the first phase of the French Revolution. He had suppressed over half of the monasteries in Austria during the 1780s and considered contemplative houses dedicated to prayer "useless" and "sources of superstition." He focused governmental attention on the training of secular (or diocesan) clergy.<sup>69</sup> His toleration of Jews had encouraged some Reform Catholics, such as Henri Grégoire, to extend such toleration in France.

In Poland, too, statesmen in the early 1790s pondered declaring church lands part of the national patrimony and selling them to fund new government ventures. A Reform Catholic clergyman, Hugo Kołłątaj,

saw the initial phase of the French Revolution as a giant step forward for liberty, and he had also spent time in Vienna, where he came to admire Joseph II's reforms. Typically, he criticized the Jesuits, urged a national episcopal synod, and stressed the independence of Polish Catholicism from direct oversight by the pope.<sup>70</sup> In Germany, monks sympathetic to Reform Catholicism applauded the revolution and saw the Civil Constitution of the Clergy as a way to purge "papal despotism."<sup>71</sup>

This precarious balancing act did not endure. No event in the French Revolution was more decisive than the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. When one dismayed French bishop noted that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy meant that unbelievers had as much say as "a single priest or bishop" in the episcopal selection process, revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre retorted that "the nomination of bishops is an exercise of political power." He saw no reason to "privilege the clergy over other citizens in this process."<sup>72</sup> A secular anticlerical revolutionary leadership now anchored one pole of the French discussion, forcing Reform Catholics to choose sides. Either they could declare loyalty to a church under siege or to a state increasingly antagonistic to Christian expression.

In the United States, at this exact moment, Maryland planter Charles Carroll, whose ideas about church and state had been shaped by Reform Catholicism, helped draft Article VI of the United States Constitution, which banned oaths of religious allegiance for public office, so aggravating for English Catholics. His cousin, soon to be Bishop John Carroll, had requested an English acquaintance to send him writing on the limits of papal authority and the desirability of the liturgy in the vernacular. For a time, John Carroll favored priests electing their bishops as recommended at the Synod of Pistoia.<sup>73</sup> Charles Carroll also served on the committee that drafted the first amendment to the United States Constitution forbidding a religious establishment and supporting free exercise.<sup>74</sup>

Distinctions between church and state drawn in the United States never seemed plausible in France, where church and state had so long been interwoven. Pius VI's verdict on the first phase of the French Revolution was uncertain, and he waited a full seven months before making a public statement. Abbé Edgeworth nervously predicted that the pope "will be firm."<sup>75</sup>

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy proved the tipping point. When Pius VI consulted his curial cardinals, the more pessimistic saw the Civil Constitution as a "schismatic system tending toward the total extermination of religion." The pope agreed and excommunicated priests and bishops willing to take the loyalty oath. His objections, articulated in a long letter addressed to the French bishops seated in the National Assembly, were in the first place ecclesiastical: the Civil Constitution "cuts down and subverts the Catholic religion."<sup>76</sup>

But his objections were also political. Pius VI's reaction to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy should be understood as the first strike in a counterrevolutionary Catholic movement that would solidify in the mid-nineteenth century and last well into the twentieth. He assessed "unrestrained freedom" as resulting in chaos and mobilized Catholics to resist a whirlwind that threatened to destroy both church and society.<sup>77</sup>

In the aftermath of the papal condemnation, the gap between Catholicism and the revolution widened with dizzying speed. Already almost all of the French bishops and slightly under half of the French clergy had refused to take the loyalty oath on a succession of wintry Sunday mornings. (They were termed nonjuring clergy.) Another group of clergy recanted their oath when learning of papal opposition. Formally prohibited from saying Mass or leading religious ceremonies in France, thirty thousand nonjuring priests fled to Belgium, Rome, England, Italy, Spain, and the United States, clutching their chalices and vestments. Meanwhile, the National Assembly banned any kind of religious apparel for priests or nuns. They should not, explained one legislator, be allowed to distinguish "themselves from the national mass by wearing a total or partial costume not established by the nation."<sup>78</sup> In the fall of 1792, terrified by approaching Prussian armies, Parisian revolutionaries began slaughtering perceived opponents (or suspected traitors), among them 223 nonjuring priests in one bloody September week.

Soon after the execution of Louis XVI, revolutionary armies confronted a full-fledged rebellion in the Vendée, an especially devout region in western France. The rallying cry of the Catholic masses became a primal scream of resentment against civic elites for persecuting clergy, disrupting parish life, and trying to eliminate processions and pilgrimages. A fish vendor and a wig maker helped lead the revolt.

By one estimate 200,000 men, women, and children died in the Vendée in less than two years of guerrilla warfare. Savagery marked the fighting on both sides, and the Catholic and royalist force eventually succumbed to the numerical and organizational superiority of the revolutionary armies.

Recognizing that Catholics were now disproportionately numbered among the revolution's opponents, revolutionaries shifted in 1793 and 1794 from reforming Catholicism to dechristianization. Civic authorities forbade public worship, replaced the seven days of the Christian calendar with a ten-day week (eliminating the Sabbath), and renamed churches, streets, and squares in an effort to eradicate France's religious heritage. In Strasbourg, revolutionaries seriously proposed (but could not manage) toppling the spire on the city's medieval cathedral in order to challenge the "people's superstition." They did manage to remove hundreds of statues from the exterior of the cathedral's nave. Militants lopped off the heads of the long rows of saints on the exterior of the one-time cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (renamed a Temple of Reason) and carved "To Philosophy" over the cathedral doors. At the Parisian parish of Saint-Sulpice, the commune in control of the city stopped all Masses, and militants carried away chalices to be melted down for cash. A local philosopher, according to the pastor's account, "also gave a speech announcing that there was no more God and everything was a question of Nature." "This," wrote the pastor, "is the new religion or rather cult, established now in all the churches of Paris."<sup>79</sup> After a group of Carmelite nuns died at the guillotine for refusing to adhere to the Constitutional Church, friends found devotional pictures of Louis XVI hidden in their abandoned rooms.

In 1789, with its high standards of erudition, magnificent music, great cathedrals, charitable works for the poor, and churches in every village, Catholicism remained an inescapable part of French life. Five years later the French church stood bereft. The Mass had become illegal. Clergy and nuns had scattered. Traditional Catholic ministries in education and aid to the poor had been dissolved. The country's grand monasteries, cathedrals, and convents—some dating from the Middle Ages—had been emptied and their material treasures looted. Thousands of vacant church buildings dotted small towns and the country-

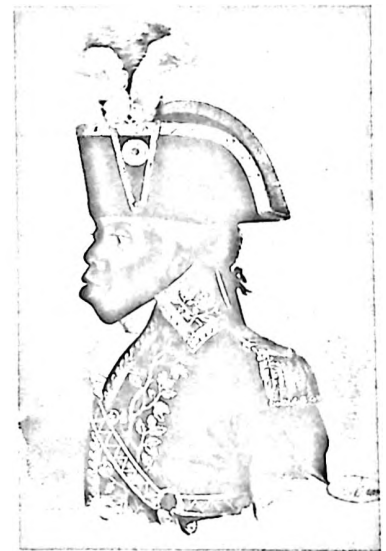
side, with groups of furtive communicants sustaining links to a tradition once thought immemorial.

## VI

JUST AS THE DEBATE over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy erupted in France, a group of plantation owners in Haiti burned Henri Grégoire in effigy. Grégoire had corresponded frequently with Toussaint Louverture, the Haitian-born leader of the rebellion of five hundred thousand enslaved people and free people of color that began in 1791 and eventually led to Haitian independence.

Grégoire supported the Haitian revolutionaries and eventually played a role in persuading the revolutionary leadership in France to support slave emancipation. Most Catholic clergy in Haiti, almost all French-born and many with a Reform Catholic sensibility, supported both revolution and emancipation.<sup>80</sup> "What pierced the heart with pain," complained one aggrieved planter, "was the thought that most of the parish priests had only remained among them [the rebels]."<sup>81</sup> Louverture requested from Grégoire recommendations for priests not only of "exemplary conduct" but also "religious and republican." He invited Grégoire to move to Haiti—an invitation Grégoire declined—and run the island's ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>82</sup>

Enthusiasm for the French Revolution and then a rebellion against a colonial power also characterized Ireland, if on a less grand scale. Protestants such as Theobald Wolfe Tone took the lead, arguing that if Catholics in France could support freedom and republicanism, so, too, should the Irish Protestant minority and the Irish Catholic majority demand freedom from England.<sup>83</sup>



Governor-General Toussaint Louverture. (Photo by Stock Montage/Getty Images)

More vehemently than Grégoire and Reform Catholics in France, Tone dismissed the importance of links to Rome. "Look at France," he exclaimed, "where is the intolerance of popish bigotry now?" Why worry about the "rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican?"<sup>84</sup>

In 1798, twenty thousand people died during an explosion of violence that metastasized into a sectarian war of Catholic versus Protestant, despite the ecumenical ambitions of the movement's leaders. Those who joined the rebellion found themselves allied, unpredictably, with French revolutionaries against Ireland's British imperial masters. Irish bishops chose the other side, fearing that revolution would lead to anti-Catholic chaos. Encouraged by Vatican officials, bishop after bishop in Ireland denounced the "French disease" of revolution.

Abbé Edgeworth's close friend, Cork bishop Richard Moylan, proved especially vocal in his attack on "atheistical incendiaries."<sup>85</sup> In nearby Scotland, bishops dismissed "emissaries of impiety and rebellion." In faraway Newfoundland, where 80 percent of the population was Irish-born, the Apostolic Vicar made clear that only British rule had made residents "the happiest people in either the old or the new world."<sup>86</sup>

## VII

ON THE CONTINENT, the story was different. Here a populist reaction against Reform Catholicism and French anticlerical armies strengthened ultramontanism. A crucial episode occurred before the French Revolution, in 1787, in Prato, near Pistoia, when rioting broke out after rumors spread that the Reform Catholic Bishop Ricci planned to destroy a relic, the Virgin Mary's cintola, or girdle. Protesters dragged the bishop's ceremonial chair out of the cathedral into the piazza and burned it. After several chaotic days, Ricci's patron, Duke Leopold, sent in troops to calm the crowds, but Ricci eventually abandoned the diocese, never to return.<sup>87</sup>

Once the French Revolution took an anti-religious turn, revolutionary armies did the work of alienation more efficiently. The occupation of both Belgium and the Rhine valley during the first wars of the revolution in 1793-1794 and the simultaneous war with Spain created multiple small Vendées. Everywhere patriotic reaction against French

imperial ambitions merged with a rejection of French anticlericalism. In Aachen, delegates to the local assembly refused to swear the oath to liberty and equality instituted by the French and instead adopted the following statement: "We swear to maintain the Roman Apostolic religion in all its purity and to support with all our power the sovereignty, freedom and welfare of the people of Aachen, So help us God and his dear saints."<sup>88</sup>

In the lands that later became Belgium, revolutionary armies implemented one of the fiercest repressions of religion since the Reformation. All exterior signs indicating a church were banned, as was the ringing of church bells. The occupation government suppressed all religious orders and began deportations of priests unwilling to swear an oath of loyalty to the revolutionary government. Some were deported to neighboring Prussia, others to a penal colony in French Guiana. A populist uprising against these measures turned into a civil war. Priests celebrated Mass in disguise and parishioners took pride in hiding the church bells—a game they called Klöppel Krieg—from exhausted French commissioners. One priest changed his clothes four times a day to evade capture and proudly wrote in the parish register in the tiny town of Sichern: "In spite of the terror I baptized all the children between 1797-1802."<sup>89</sup>

In Spain, censorship of the press limited popular knowledge of the French Revolution, but the roughly six thousand French émigré priests entering the country at the height of the anti-religious persecution filled in the gruesome details. Spanish priests and monks mobilized the faithful with exhortations against "irreligious men" determined to shatter Spain's unity of "faith and country."<sup>90</sup>

Napoleon's ascendancy within the French army accelerated this pattern. Napoleon's basic sympathy for the revolution made him an ally of Reform Catholics, and he and his deputies saw part of their task as weaning Catholic peasants (and some clergy) from "the sort of superstition that often abuses natural occurrences." They proposed mandatory courses for clergy in math and science.<sup>91</sup> While Napoleon's armies established republics across northern Italy—for a *triennio*, or three-year period—his generals enlisted Reform Catholics to draft constitutions. In the Genoese Republic, a Bishop Ricci protégé authored a "political catechism" that attempted to persuade local peasants of the need for politi-

cal and religious reform. Only the abolition of "superstitious" practices could lay the groundwork for a republic of self-governing citizens.<sup>92</sup>

These modest triumphs for Reform Catholics, however, could not counteract continuing unrest. Parish priests in Imola, having witnessed the looting endemic to Napoleon's armies, became unenthusiastic about democracies installed by bayonets. "They have suppressed St. Charles, and all the brotherhoods, abolished bequests, [and] imprisoned eleven of the cathedral canons in the castle," one diarist sardonically explained, "So democracy, that Liberty and Equality of the Republicans and the French, robbed our Italy." In southern Italy, one cardinal based in Naples led a guerrilla army of some seventeen thousand men against the occupying French armies. One of his victims—shot dead in his bed—was a bishop stationed in Calabria and allied with Bishop Ricci. The bishop's dying words were reportedly "Long live Jesus Christ, long live the republic."<sup>93</sup>

## VIII

HENRI GRÉGOIRE bravely defended his Catholicism and the new Constitutional Church at the height of the Terror in Paris, even refusing to abandon his clerical clothing. When the Terror ceased, he again insisted that Catholicism was "in perfect harmony with liberal principles."<sup>94</sup> As always, Grégoire and other constitutional clergy demanded a church "as pure as it left the hands of Jesus Christ, as it was in the first centuries." Again, councils were held (in 1797 and 1801) to discuss the liturgy in the vernacular and other reforms. "Sensible men," Grégoire wrote, "will never confuse the Revolution with the crimes and disasters that accompanied it."<sup>95</sup> His influence extended to Spain, where the country's most prominent minister, Gaspar Melchior de Jovellanos, had long proposed, like French revolutionaries, to sell church lands as a mechanism for renewing the "pure and ancient discipline of the church."<sup>96</sup> Even as he advocated restraints on the papacy by invoking early church councils, Jovellanos wondered if some form of constitutional monarchy might serve as a check on royal absolutism.<sup>97</sup>

Anyone predicting the future of Catholicism in 1789 might have

forecast a group of national Catholic churches, loosely linked to the papacy but fundamentally tied to local monarchs and even republican governments. This Reform Catholic ethos did not disappear after the French Revolution: Henri Grégoire's influence, for example, endured through his disciples in Mexico, Italy, and Haiti well into the 1830s.

But Abbé Edgeworth's account of Louis XVI's death was one small part of what became a more influential project. It distinguished Catholicism not only from the French Revolution but from the modern world it brought about. If for its proponents the French Revolution ushered in republican government and allied civil liberties, at least for a time, ultramontane Catholics described it as a "seditious and murderous" conspiracy led by anti-Catholic philosophes.<sup>98</sup>

A cluster of theologians, mostly based in Rome, had already begun to defend papal authority. They described the pope as the monarch of the church, much more than the first bishop among equals. The papacy preceded church councils, instead of deriving authority from them. Only the pope—not princes and government officials—should appoint bishops. The pope himself, acting on certain matters, might be understood as infallible.<sup>99</sup>

Ex-Jesuits, appalled by their treatment at the hands of Reform Catholics who had orchestrated the suppression of the Society of Jesus, took a leading role. One ex-Jesuit, François-Xavier de Feller, set up a print shop in Liège and rallied ultramontane opponents of Reform Catholicism and the French Revolution. He inveighed against Voltaire as the symbol of a secular Enlightenment but also against Reform Catholic figures such as Joseph II.<sup>100</sup>

Ultramontane polemicists such as Feller applauded Edmund Burke's 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke's dismay at the course of the French Revolution rested upon what he saw as its abandonment of an established church and inherited political institutions. He pointed to the widespread confiscation of church property as an "unheard of despotism" of state over church.<sup>101</sup> A French bishop used Burke to pour scorn on the "metaphysical legislators" drafting the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen and in so doing "placing the germ of atheism in the preamble of their constitution."<sup>102</sup> In Poland, a papal

nuncio denounced priests perceived as sympathetic to the French Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Such men were "infected with the dangerous maxims and pernicious systems of the Assembly of France."<sup>103</sup> As far away as Pondichéry, in India, missionary clergy refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the new French government, offered a requiem Mass for Louis XVI, and complained about local priests who "breathed only the air of democracy."<sup>104</sup>

Even as they issued a stream of documents condemning the revolution, Pius VI and his advisers turned their attention back to the Synod of Pistoia. The Vatican condemned the decrees of the synod in 1794, eight years after their promulgation, and directly linked the synod to the "revolutionary upheaval" shattering Europe.<sup>105</sup> Ricci complained to Henri Grégoire that their enemies desired to persecute all "good Christians who hope to reform abuses in Church or State."<sup>106</sup>

## IX

PIUS VI DIED IN 1799, in Valence, France, as a captive of Napoleon. Many thought he would be the last pope. The entire Roman apparatus of curial cardinals, nuncios, and even Swiss guards lay in disarray. Napoleon's troops occupied Rome, and a republic had been declared. Most Catholic universities had closed, and missionary efforts had ground to a halt. The number of monasteries and convents had declined precipitously.

Forced to hold their conclave in Venice, not occupied Rome, the beleaguered cardinals managed to elect a new pope, Cardinal Barnaba Chiaramonti, or Pius VII. A pragmatist, Chiaramonti had attracted attention for a Christmas homily of 1797 in which had endorsed a "form of democratic government." "Do not believe," he stressed, "that the Catholic religion is against democracy."<sup>107</sup> He embarked on negotiations with Napoleon, who had just assumed dictatorial control of France, and the two men signed a concordat in 1801. Pius VII hoped to save the church; Napoleon hoped to fend off continuing Catholic resistance to his plans to remake Europe. State involvement in religion remained significant: the treaty limited the number of French clergy, affirmed the legality of the seizure of church lands during the revolution, and

arranged for clerical salaries to be paid by the state. The treaty guaranteed freedom of religion, but also declared Catholicism "the religion of the majority of the French people." A bemused Napoleon reportedly explained his tactics this way:

It was by making myself a Catholic that I won the war of the Vendée, by making myself a Muslim that I established myself in Egypt, by making myself Ultramontane that I won men's hearts in Italy.<sup>108</sup>

In a few regions of Europe, the Reform Catholic impulse continued to crest. In Bavaria, the government now treated priests as state employees and introduced religious toleration. Bavaria's foreign minister denounced monasteries (and confiscated their land) for rejecting "the spread of enlightened principles."<sup>109</sup>

The primary optic remained that of a church besieged. Napoleon forced Pius VII to journey to Paris and witness his crowning as emperor in 1804 in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. (Characteristically, Napoleon placed the crown on his own head.) Soon Napoleon would pressure Roman cardinals into concocting from whole cloth an early Christian martyr named Neopolis. The martyr was dubbed Saint Napoleon, and his feast day was scheduled on August 15, the traditional feast day of the Assumption of Mary, but more importantly Napoleon's birthday.<sup>110</sup>

These humiliations obscured a different story. In attempting to control the French church, Napoleon had partially liberated it. Even though the French government still paid clerical salaries, the pope gained the right in one swoop to remove all of the bishops of France and appoint their successors. By ignoring bishops of the Constitutional Church, such as Henri Grégoire, who lost his job in the episcopal shuffle, Napoleon inadvertently strengthened the papacy.

On both the journey to Paris for Napoleon's coronation and the return to Rome, Pius VII marveled at the crowds clustered on the side of the road, drawn to catch a glimpse of the pope. (Former bishop Ricci scrambled to get a papal audience when the Pope arrived in Florence, noting to Abbé Grégoire that the pope's aides doubted his "orthodoxy.")<sup>111</sup> Sometimes priests rang bells or arranged for the organist to

play while they muttered the mandatory prayer for the emperor, Napoleon, under their breath. Pius VII had once found Napoleon captivating and was grateful that his attacks on the church had ceased. But in 1809 he finally broke with Napoleon, excommunicating him for annexing the Papal States to the French Empire. When confronted by French troops who demanded that he acquiesce to Napoleon's demands, Pius VII responded, "we must not, we cannot, we will not."<sup>112</sup>

Napoleon removed the pope from Rome—to a bishop's palace in Savona, in northern Italy, where he remained under house arrest for five years. But Pius VII's resistance to Napoleon's demands inspired his flock. As one contemporary later commented, "the detention of the Pope and the annexation of the States of the Church to France were the caprices of tyranny by which [Napoleon] lost the advantage of passing for the restorer of religion."<sup>113</sup>

Pius VII's release in 1814 and Napoleon's final defeat a year later meant a new beginning. Word of the pope's release spread around the world, reaching even Shanxi Province, where Jacobus Wang, one of the few remaining Chinese priests, wrote to congratulate the pope on his freedom.<sup>114</sup> By then, the pieces of the ultramontane Catholic worldview were locked in. Its proponents heralded feast days, processions, saints, and miracles. They disparaged any idea of revolution, and their focus on hierarchy and authority made ideas of representation and popular sovereignty unacceptable in the church and less welcome in the state. They thought state endorsement of the church a worthy ideal, but only with ecclesiastical independence from state authority. They exalted the status of priests, bishops, and especially the pope. They understood themselves to be battling Protestant, Jewish, and secular foes.

Pius VII could not revive the shattered church of the old regime, so dependent on Catholic monarchs and divided by nationalist rivalries. He did not try. Instead, he immediately restored the Jesuits, reversing one of Reform Catholicism's signature achievements. Some of these Jesuits began explaining how "crimes of philosophy" and the wrong direction taken by the modern world had inexorably led to the persecution of the church in France.<sup>115</sup> And so the pope and his allies set about fashioning an ultramontane church in a postrevolutionary age.

## TWO

## Revival

## Devotions, Miracles, and the Papacy

## I

BORN IN DUBLIN IN 1778, Catherine McAuley was orphaned at a young age. She first lived with a Catholic uncle, then distant Protestant relatives, and finally an affluent Protestant couple, Catherine and William Callaghan. After the deaths of the Callaghans, McAuley inherited their estate. She persuaded a small group of women to join her in a new venture funded by her inheritance. Together they built and staffed a House of Mercy on Baggot Street, in Dublin, which opened in 1827 with Catherine and her friends in residence. They enrolled five hundred poor girls in a school and provided a home for young women attempting to find employment as maids and in laundries.

The neighbors on the prosperous thoroughfare protested. But a priest advising McAuley stressed that "if you would have a public institution be of service to the poor, place it in the neighborhood of the rich."<sup>1</sup> Dublin's archbishop, Daniel Murray, signed a petition that the women circulated door-to-door, conveying his endorsement of the school as preparing "poor girls" for the "duties of the humble state in life to which it has pleased God to call them."<sup>2</sup>

Jealousy from other Dublin-based women's religious orders could be shrugged off. Doubts expressed by Archbishop Murray about the informality of the arrangements on Baggot Street could not. McAuley

should not be "designated Sister," Murray told Cardinal Mauro Cappellari, soon to be elected Pope Gregory XVI, since the women did not take vows or belong to a "legitimately established congregation."<sup>3</sup>

Against her inclination to simply gather like-minded women, McAuley petitioned Rome for approval. Along with two colleagues, she took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience "until the end of my life." Once canonically recognized, she dedicated the Sisters of Mercy to the "visitation of the sick poor" and "protection and instruction of poor females."<sup>4</sup> Roman officials insisted that she add the phrase "the Parish priest shall always be consulted" when young women applied to join the order.<sup>5</sup>

McAuley's decision to begin a new women's religious order was not unusual. The number of nuns or women religious had declined over the course of the eighteenth century, a decline accelerated by revolutionaries who forced between thirty and fifty thousand women to leave their convents in the aftermath of the French Revolution.<sup>6</sup> But women like McAuley and bishops or priests inspired by such women founded a staggering 571 women's religious congregations in the nineteenth century. In France, the number of women religious increased from 12,300 in 1808 to 135,000 in 1878, and women religious by that time significantly outnumbered clergy (the opposite of the situation in 1789).<sup>7</sup> In Germany, women were four times as likely to enter a convent in 1908 as in 1866.<sup>8</sup> The number of nuns within Ireland grew from 122 in 1800 to 8,031 in 1901, a number that does not include a large number of Irish nuns working outside of Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, women in these new religious orders balanced prayer and contemplation with active service in the world, instead of devoting their lives to prayer and contemplation alone, as would have been typical in the eighteenth century. Attracted to lives of service, perhaps wary of the day-to-day demands of family life in a world where the authority of husbands and fathers remained difficult to question, women religious formed the institutional backbone of modern Catholicism. They staffed schools, founded hospitals, and raised orphaned children. Where gaps existed between lofty ideals and weak governments, women religious stepped in. They focused especially on the tribulations endured by young women migrating from the countryside to urban areas, searching

for work as maids and at risk of turning to prostitution. What McAuley did in Dublin, other women did elsewhere. Barbara Maix, founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, did similar work in Vienna and later in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>10</sup>

Leadership roles for women religious within the church frequently exceeded possibilities for women outside it. "You do not know," explained an envious Florence Nightingale, having observed Sisters of Mercy working as nurses in the British army during the Crimean War, "what a home the Catholic Church is. . . . There is nothing like the training (in these days) which the Sacred Heart or the Order of St. Vincent gives to women."<sup>11</sup> Bishops and priests competed to lure women's religious orders to their dioceses with promises of financial support. When a priest in Dundee, Scotland, asked the Sisters of Mercy to open a school, he admitted that they would be moving to a "dark and bigoted Protestant town." In recompense he offered "the prettiest and best Irish cow that could be found in Scotland."<sup>12</sup>

McAuley and her contemporaries absorbed and transmitted the piety of the ultramontane revival. They meditated on their own sins. "Since one sin alone required this expiation [of Christ's death]," McAuley instructed novices, "see how many strokes your sins added to the number."<sup>13</sup>

They also championed self-denial. McAuley thought the "most acceptable offering we can make to Him is the sacrifice of our self will."<sup>14</sup> Routinely, Sisters of Mercy—and other men and women in religious orders—gathered to listen as each individual member apologized for faults and errors within community life and endured public corrections from the mother superior or rector. Women religious often chose new names upon their admission to a community, sometimes the names of male saints, as symbolic breaks with their biological family. Occasionally their names were chosen for them. Some nuns challenged themselves to wear hair shirts or iron bands around their legs as a reminder of Christ's suffering. Women religious wore distinctive habits at all times, even during the heat of summer, identifying themselves as a separate caste. Friends and relatives, even parents, received only occasional visiting opportunities.

The rhetoric associated with the ultramontane revival meant that relations with other Christians became more strained. Dublin's Archbishop Murray avoided the term "heretic" when referring to Protestants and preferred "separated brethren" or even "beloved fellow-Christians." His ultramontane successors thought this vocabulary overly sensitive. The greater risk was to "delude Protestants and scandalize Catholics regarding salvation."<sup>15</sup>

McAuley, too, became more combative. She had spent her childhood surrounded by Protestant relatives, which testified to at least casual exchange between Protestants and Catholics in early-nineteenth-century Dublin. When she founded the first Houses of Mercy, she appreciated Protestants' willing to contribute to charitable bazaars and sign petitions in her support.

By the 1830s, though, McAuley understood herself to be competing against Protestants "employing wealth and influence to allure Catholics from their faith." Prior to the foundation of the House of Mercy, she explained, young girls would have fallen victim to the "Protestant influence in this neighborhood."<sup>16</sup> She and her colleagues worried that even "amiable" Protestant or unchurched acquaintances might be doomed to eternal torment "for want of a knowledge of the faith."<sup>17</sup>

McAuley died in 1841, inspiring genuine grief. The phrase "God's holy will be done," noted one bereft Sister of Mercy, seemed "difficult to say . . . sincerely."<sup>18</sup> She had requested a simple coffin laid in the earth like the poor. Her legacy was less simple. She helped construct the institutions of modern Catholicism. A century later, her successors worried about being trapped within them.



Mother Mary Catherine McAuley.  
(Archives of the Sisters of Mercy)

## II

WHAT HISTORIANS NOW TERM the ultramontane revival shaped every dimension of Catholic life from the early nineteenth century through the 1960s. It was a revival because a church near collapse emerged as a more potent source of meaning for tens of millions of people. It was ultramontane because it nurtured a particular set of theological and institutional forms. Its origins lay in parish missions, a better trained (and monitored) clergy, and activist nuns. Particular ideas about suffering and sin developed during the Reformation provided a foundation, but only the disarray caused by the French Revolution allowed ultramontanism to become the dominant form of Catholic Christianity.

If a single text sparked the revival it was *The Genius of Christianity*, written in exile in London and published in 1802 by François-René de Chateaubriand, a French nobleman and former military officer. In his youth, Chateaubriand had lamented priests serving as "vampires who suck your money, your blood, your very thought," but he had experienced an instant, emotional conversion upon learning of his mother's death. As he later reported, "my conviction came from the heart; I wept and I believed."<sup>19</sup>

Chateaubriand looked forward by looking back. He accepted Napoleon's concordat with the pope and prudently dedicated *The Genius of Christianity* to the French emperor. But in a Europe divided between secular and religious, revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, he yearned for a unity he associated with the Middle Ages. Across Europe and North America, Catholics devoured Chateaubriand's writings and found in them inspiration for a religious ideal standing against the revolution, certainly, but also broader than a nation-state.<sup>20</sup> That same year, Friedrich Schlegel, a German poet living in Paris, founded the journal *Europa*. He, too, thought "the great question" was whether a Europe marred by war and revolution could rebuild itself "as in the Middle Ages."<sup>21</sup> Along with his wife, Dorothea, Schlegel converted to Catholicism in 1808, and the couple lived with a like-minded circle of friends first in Munich and then in Vienna. They aimed to develop a Catholic "system of science" in opposition to the "revolutionary spirit of the age."<sup>22</sup>

Thirty years later, the famed English historian Thomas Macaulay glumly described the "progress of the Catholic revival." "We often hear it said," he explained, "that the world is becoming more and more enlightened, and that this enlightening must be favourable to Protestantism and unfavourable to Catholicism. We wish that we could think so." Quite the opposite:

No person who calmly reflects on what, within the last few years, has passed in Spain, in Italy, in South America, in Ireland, in the Netherlands, in Prussia, even in France, can doubt that the power of this Church over the hearts and minds of men is now greater far than it was when the Encyclopaedia . . . appeared [in the 1760s].<sup>23</sup>

The geographical sequence is significant. The earliest centers of the revival were France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. It swept through North America soon after its origins in Europe, carried by migrants and missionaries. The fragility of institutional church structures in Mexico and South America and the region's more enduring Reform Catholic tradition meant that the revival only arrived there later in the nineteenth century.

The revival began with hearts, not minds. Chateaubriand championed popular devotions and thought ordinary believers "wiser than philosophers." Catechisms were simple. One 1840 manual encouraged nuns and priests to stick "simply to the text, without adding any explanations of complex questions, repressing the curiosity of the mind, so as to accustom them to treat matters divine with respect, and to make them more humble and more submissive to the simple beliefs of our faith."<sup>24</sup>

At the revival's core was a deepening attachment to the institution of the church. As one Polish priest explained:

It is not enough to believe in Jesus Christ, to be a simple Christian like the heretics [Protestants]; in addition it is necessary to be faithful, that is, to believe strongly and proclaim everything that the Church teaches; to be united with the bond of the Holy Sacraments and remain,

through one's pastor and bishop, unified with and obedient to the highest leader, the Pope.<sup>25</sup>

The first mechanism to spread an ultramontane Catholicism was the parish mission. Typically, a week-long series of exhortations, opportunities for confession, and Mass, concluding with the erection of a huge cross, missions were pioneered by Jesuit, Redemptorist, and Passionist priests beginning in the mid-eighteenth century. In France, clergy organized a stunning fifteen hundred missions between 1815 and 1830.<sup>26</sup> In the Netherlands, the Protestant King William I attempted to ban missions but found enforcement of this edict impossible given the groundswell of enthusiasm among his Catholic subjects. The Protestant governments of Baden and Prussia also banned missions, but eager participants simply crossed into Alsace and Belgium.<sup>27</sup>

Mission psychology pivoted between two poles: a doctrinal severity centered on the horror of sin and everlasting damnation and a practical piety aimed at persuading Catholics to view the sacraments (especially confession) and the institutional church as their best shield in a bewildering, often hostile world. The severity is evident in the correspondence of one Jesuit missionary trained in Switzerland and sent to Maine, in the United States. He viewed missions as "spiritual weapons" for "reclaiming a very large number of bad Catholics" and converting the occasional "Protestant or heretic." "Hardened sinners" must understand that eternal life depended on reconciliation with the church. He was appalled by local Protestants of a more liberal bent who speculated that "there is no hell, or if there is, it is not for men, as Christ ransomed us all."

At the same time, this missionary reassured his listeners, "who seemed lost without hope," that their sins could be forgiven in the confessional. Damnation could be evaded.<sup>28</sup> As a leading ultramontane theologian in Rome explained, men and women not in a "culpable state of heresy, schism or unbelief" would not "suffer the eternal torments of hell." The "goodness and mercy of God" were too great.<sup>29</sup>

Reform Catholics had a different view. At the 1786 Synod of Pistoia, the assembled clergy attacked the "irregular noise of these new practices called 'exercises' or 'missions.'" Such events rarely succeeded in "producing a real conversion."<sup>30</sup>

This suspicion of parish missions demonstrates how Reform Catholics never strayed far from their elite roots. Their more restrained, contemplative Catholicism, disdainful of processions and pilgrimages, did not penetrate beyond a stratum of educated clergy and laypeople. The leaders of the ultramontane revival, by contrast, possessed a genius for tapping into the spiritual longings and fears of ordinary men and women. They recognized the comfort that came from a renewed attachment to the institutional church through its sacraments, the peace of mind derived from a conviction that even the most habitual sinners would be saved. Mass attendance increased markedly, even in countries such as France and Spain, where anticlericalism possessed deep roots. The same clergy stressed the importance of "regularizing" marriages (and forbidding informal cohabitation). They urged the anointing of the sick before death, proclaiming the sacrament crucial to eternal life. Stories circulated of priests on horseback riding for miles to anoint a dying parishioner.

A second change brought about by the revival was a set of reinvigorated devotions, including the rosary, nine-day novenas to Mary, and forty-hour-long sequences of prayers to the Blessed Sacrament. Most of these dated from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (or even earlier) but were never more popular than during the nineteenth century. The most important such devotion was to the Sacred Heart. The central image—Jesus gazing directly at the viewer, with his pulsing red heart exposed and pierced by a lance—became one of the most widely distributed of the era, stamped, carved, or engraved onto countless holy cards, stained glass windows, statues, tracts, and pamphlets. Here Jesus came neither as a conquering savior nor as a wise teacher. Instead, he suffered with the devout.

Reform Catholic clergy found the devotion to the Sacred Heart distasteful. At the Synod of Pistoia, Bishop Ricci criticized it as "fantastical, womanish and ridiculous." (He allegedly kept in his dining room a portrait of Joseph II tearing up a picture of the Sacred Heart.)<sup>31</sup> Ultramontanes naturally took offense. When he condemned the Synod of Pistoia, Pius VI described criticism of the Sacred Heart as "false, rash and injurious."<sup>32</sup>

A Lyon Jesuit took a small French devotional group and transformed



The Sacred Heart of Jesus, statue from c. 1920 (photo courtesy of David Morgan)

it into an international movement devoted to the Sacred Heart, a group that numbered four million dues-paying adherents by 1900. He also founded *Le Messager du Coeur de Jésus* (The Message of the Heart of Jesus), the most influential Catholic devotional periodical of the nineteenth century. By 1926, Catholics in sixty-nine countries published versions of *Le Messager* in forty-five languages.<sup>33</sup>

This empathy with ordinary believers was also displayed in a distinctive focus on the miraculous. Most Protestant intellectuals believed that miracles had ceased with the deaths of the apostles, and miracles occupied an uncertain space in many Protestant churches. Miraculous healings, certainly, were discredited by association with Catholicism and in the nineteenth century were understood by educated elites as incompatible with a belief in modern science.

Catholics believed otherwise. A cluster of alleged miraculous events in the 1840s—the exhibition of Christ's Holy Robe at Trier in Germany in 1844; the appearance of the Virgin to three children at La Salette in France in 1846; the winking Madonna at Rimini on the Adriatic coast in 1848—signaled a renewed fascination with bridges between the human and the divine.

The events at Trier, a city in the Rhine valley, were the most startling. In the late eighteenth century, Reform Catholic bishops uneasy with the legend that a robe worn by Christ had made its way in perfect condition to Trier, had discouraged pilgrimages and even the robe's public display. Those pilgrims allowed to see the garment were instructed to desist from "bellowing" and to "abstain in future from all clapping of the hands, waving of the finger, and kissing."

What embarrassed Reform Catholics inspired ultramontanists. In the 1840s, at the urging of a new bishop, the Trier coat was again displayed, this time with an emphasis on the seamlessness of the gar-

ment reflecting the unity of German Catholics, "be they rich or poor, polite or humble, governors or the governed." Five hundred thousand pilgrims—the largest gathering in German history until that point—trooped through the cathedral to see the robe in seven weeks, at the rate of ten thousand visitors a day, overwhelming (and enriching) local merchants. Observers noted the pilgrimage's popularity with women and its disciplined, orderly character, with ten bishops and close to three hundred priests leading parish and diocesan groups. To the most prominent German Catholic writer of the era, Joseph Görres, the pilgrimage signaled "the unity of the Church."<sup>34</sup>

Protestant ministers and editors mocked adoration of the robe at Trier. So did some Catholics. Uneasy with the emerging alliance between lower-class Catholics and ultramontane clergy, Fr. Johannes Ronge left the Roman Catholic Church and founded the *Deutsche Katholiken*, or German Catholic Church, in one of the first schisms of the nineteenth century, all of which were reactions in some way against ultramontanism. (They included another schism in Germany in the 1870s, one among Polish-speaking immigrants in the United States, and one in the Philippines.) He disparaged pilgrims from "the lower classes, very poor in any event, oppressed, ignorant, dull-witted, superstitious and, some of them degenerate."<sup>35</sup> Ronge's influence extended across the Atlantic. Eager to welcome "Rongianers," the Boston minister Theodore Parker hoped that "science" would end such charades as the Holy Robe at Trier.<sup>36</sup>

### III

ULTRAMONTANE THEOLOGIANS saw only disaster coming out of the French Revolution, especially the ongoing efforts of revolutionaries—often aided by or inspired by Reform Catholics—to assert civic controls over religious institutions. One of the young theologians associated with the ultramontane school, Mauro Cappellari, concluded his seminary training with a thesis defending papal infallibility as well as a treatise attacking the Synod of Pistoia. In 1799, he published a five-hundred-page study with the revealing title *The Triumph of the Holy See and the Church against the Attacks of Innovators*. Its publication was considered a

daring gesture given Cappellari's hostility to revolutionary activity and the presence of French troops in Rome. It attracted few readers. Thirty-two years later, it would be translated into four languages and reprinted in multiple editions after its author was elected as Pope Gregory XVI.

More than ever, Rome became a training ground for a clerical elite. Bishops sent talented seminarians there to prepare them to take up important positions upon their return home. As early as 1820, one astonished Montreal visitor to the Roman dicastery in charge of missions, the Propaganda Fide, observed seminarians reciting texts in fifteen languages, from Irish to Flemish to Coptic.<sup>37</sup> The rector of Rome's Irish College described its mission as "introducing Roman maxims into Ireland and uniting that church more closely with the Holy See."<sup>38</sup>

The shift toward Rome was also intellectual. Joseph de Maistre spent two decades pondering the legacy of the French Revolution from a consular post in St. Petersburg. He acknowledged corruption within the monarchy and the clergy, but he regretted democracy within the state and within the church even more. De Maistre's 1819 *Du Pape* argued for papal primacy at the expense of authority held by bishops or church councils. "There can be no European religion without Christianity," he explained in a syllogism that would have startled eighteenth-century Catholics, "there can be no Catholicism without the pope; there can be no pope without the sovereignty that belongs to him."<sup>39</sup>

De Maistre's death in 1821 and his layman's status limited his initial influence. But his visibility from an out-of-the-way perch in St. Petersburg reflects the disordered state of Catholic intellectual life. The closure of most European Catholic universities during the revolution and the Napoleonic Wars swept away a once vibrant ecosystem of publishers, learned societies, and scholars. Catholics also battled a post-revolutionary conventional wisdom that associated Protestantism with political liberty, prosperity, and toleration. James Mill, the economist and father of the English philosopher, encouraged Catholics to abandon a faith so "unfavourable to their progress in reason and virtue."<sup>40</sup> One young French ultramontane, Frédéric Ozanam, tried to rally Catholic students at the Sorbonne to challenge every "rationalist professor." No one should be allowed to profess that the "institution of the papacy was passing" or that the clergy "consistently favored despotism."<sup>41</sup>

In Germany, small groups of Catholic scholars worked on the intellectual margins of Protestant universities. Some of these scholars taught at the University of Bonn, where their leader, Georg Hermes, explicitly drew upon Immanuel Kant to demonstrate the rationality of Christian faith. His association with Enlightenment ideas and Reform Catholicism made Hermes suspect to ultramontanists now gathered in Cologne and Rome, as did his refusal to lecture in Latin. That ultramontanes now controlled the levers of power became clear when Gregory XVI issued an unexpected condemnation of Hermes's work as "false" and "rash" in 1835. The ultramontane archbishop of Cologne compelled priests on theological faculties to reject theses associated with Hermes. His successor reassigned priests tainted by association with Hermes to "the darkness of a lonesome little village."<sup>42</sup>

The Italian Jesuit Giovanni Perrone, one of the consultants who recommended the placement of Hermes's work on the Index of Forbidden Books, was not a neutral arbiter. Based in Rome, he taught at the Collegio Romano, handed over in 1824 by the pope to the newly restored Jesuits. Perrone favored a different theological school, termed scholastic or neo-Thomist. As the name suggests, the Jesuits and Dominicans who led this enterprise saw themselves as recovering the wisdom of Thomas Aquinas and the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages.

Even within the church, the neo-Thomist task was formidable. Four decades had passed between the Jesuit suppression in 1773 and their restoration in 1814, and the French Dominicans had been exiled during the French Revolution. One Irish Jesuit scanned the room at a gathering of the world's Jesuits in 1829 and admitted that "the Society can no longer boast of so many brilliant men as she had in the age when Scholasticism flourished."<sup>43</sup>

*Key* { The work of these neo-Thomist scholars rested upon a particular reading of history: Protestant and Enlightenment intellectuals might prattle on about a "solitary subject" but such a notion was untrue to the dense familial and social worlds humans inhabited. The mistaken individualism taken in philosophical matters had religious implications, producing, in the words of Perrone, men and women "who reject the Catholic Church and follow the fantasies of their private spirit."<sup>44</sup>

All of this would later be spelled out in fine-grained detail. In these

early years of the 1830s and 1840s, scholastic or neo-Thomist theologians and philosophers struggled to sort out their presuppositions. The theologian John Henry Newman's conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism was one of the great ecclesiastical events of England's nineteenth century, and Newman's writings on doctrinal development and conscience would later exert enormous influence within Catholicism. In 1846, just after his conversion, Newman made his first visit to Rome. He became disillusioned. He feared that the Roman Jesuits displayed a "deep suspicion of change with a perfect incapacity to create anything *positive* for the wants of the times."<sup>45</sup> Still, in the 1840s, Newman could at least discuss doctrinal development with Roman interlocutors. Giovanni Perrone admiringly quoted Newman at length.<sup>46</sup>

These cordial exchanges would not endure. In the 1850s and 1860s, Neapolitan and Roman Jesuits would join with like-minded Dominicans and triumph over Catholic rivals. Their scholarship became deeply ahistorical, abandoning ideas of doctrinal development and using Aquinas and his sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interpreters as the basis for answering contemporary questions. This neo-Thomist project would provide the scaffolding for the ultramontane milieu, the core of seminary and university education and a counterpoint to more secular philosophical traditions. Two brothers trained as neo-Thomists in the 1830s in Italy would become especially influential. The older brother, Giuseppe Pecci, grew up to become a leading Jesuit theologian and seminary rector. The younger brother, Vincenzo, became a diocesan priest, papal nuncio to Belgium, bishop, and cardinal archbishop of Perugia. In 1878 he would be elected Pope Leo XIII. He then made his older brother a Roman cardinal. \*

#### IV

OVER TIME, bishops and priests, along with women religious such as the Sisters of Mercy, became formed in an ultramontane image. One shift was social location. In the eighteenth century, many bishops, certainly, but often leading clergy and women religious, too, had been raised in aristocratic families. To serve as bishop or abbot or mother superior meant a guaranteed income and high status. In German-

speaking Europe and in Latin America, aspiring clergy often studied at universities, not seminaries.<sup>47</sup>

Many of these bonds between the priesthood and the aristocracy were severed during the nineteenth century. Certainly, the assumption that taking on an episcopal role guaranteed great wealth no longer held. The willingness of states to confiscate church lands as a source of revenue did not cease at the end of the French Revolution. In Spain, to take the most extreme example, 83 percent of the property belonging to religious orders was seized by the 1840s.<sup>48</sup> In Mexico, clergy associated with Reform Catholicism proposed confiscating available church land as part of the "rights of nations and governments."<sup>49</sup> Even in countries where Catholics owned no vast tracts of land, such as the United States, former president James Madison cautioned "against the wealth of ecclesiastical corporations" and lauded reformers in Europe and Latin America for rectifying "that disordered state of things."<sup>50</sup>

Recruitment for the clergy shifted to bright young men from the peasantry. After all, as one German theologian put it, "few members of the aristocracy have any desire to serve [the Church]."<sup>51</sup> Cologne's cardinal archbishop, Johann Geissel, was the son of a poor winegrower. A newly appointed French bishop, older local clergy worried, would surround himself with "relatives from the working class and without education."<sup>52</sup> In India, ultramontane missionaries proved more willing than their Reform Catholic predecessors to ignore the boundaries of caste.<sup>53</sup>

Religious orders expanded at an impressive rate. Along with the even greater number of women's religious orders, dozens of male religious orders were founded in the early nineteenth century, including the Marianists (1817), Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1826), Resurrectionists (1836), and Congregation of Holy Cross (1837), all marinated in the devotional piety of the revival and often begun by men with personal experience of persecution during the French Revolution. Older religious orders such as the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Redemptorists reinvigorated themselves. The six hundred aged Jesuits alive at the order's refounding in 1814 grew to seventeen thousand men by 1914.

French revolutionaries had raised doubts about celibacy along with so much else, and many intellectuals scorned it as "unnatural." A salacious popular literature mocked priests as sexually avaricious.<sup>54</sup> Delegates

to the National Assembly passed laws permitting priests to marry, and several thousand priests did. As the revolution descended into the Terror, celibacy became described as a "social crime," since married priests were presumed more likely to become good republican citizens. One Robespierre protégé denounced men vowed to celibacy "who wish to isolate themselves further from their fellow man and to violate natural and social law." Revolutionaries funded clerical weddings.<sup>55</sup>

Napoleon and Pope Pius VII agreed to forbid clerical marriages in the Concordat of 1801, although it took longer to sort through the several thousand existing unions. Roman officials chose not to highlight clerical marriages and quietly informed local bishops that they were willing to legitimize these marriages and make the clergy (and their wives) laypeople in good standing instead of excommunicating them. Vows of chastity—taken as priests—could be abrogated given the "frightening . . . circumstances of the Revolution."<sup>56</sup>

Still, questions persisted. In French Catholic New Orleans, a newly installed ultramontane bishop banned a priest from celebrating Mass because he was living with his housekeeper and their children, who called him "Papa." Led by the mayor, the city erupted in protest with many petitions signed in support of the beloved, if decidedly not celibate, clergyman.<sup>57</sup> In Mexico, a crusading journalist blasted celibacy in a celebrated 1825 pamphlet as an addition "that you [theologians] have made to the Gospel written by the Apostles."<sup>58</sup> A group of Catholics in the Grand Duchy of Baden called for an end to mandatory celibacy in 1828 and addressed their plea, significantly, not only to the local archbishop but the local archduke and legislative assembly.<sup>59</sup> They understood vows of celibacy for clergy as proof that it was "more than ever necessary . . . to separate the Catholic church from the Roman curia."<sup>60</sup>

The gap between celibacy as an ideal and celibacy as a lived reality could be wide. In regions of the world with few priests, clerical families were widespread. Half of all clergy in the Brazilian diocese of Salvador are estimated to have lived in common-law relationships with wives and children, a practice that while accepted at the village level made priests vulnerable to blackmail if they wished to advance their careers.<sup>61</sup> Brazilian clergy and statesmen associated with Reform Catholicism frequently denounced celibacy as a relic of an unenlightened age.

Legislators proposed that bishops be allowed to ordain married men as priests, "as occurred in the primitive Church, as occurs today in the Greek church and among the Reformed Christians."<sup>62</sup>

Under pressure, ultramontane theologians forged a response, first by attributing weaknesses in sexual discipline to the loose standards set during the eighteenth century. Married clergy preoccupied with their families, they also asserted, would be drawn away from ecclesiastical institutions. A celibate priesthood promoted loyalty. Why is it, one defender of celibacy asked, "that enemies of celibacy always seem to be hostile to the Pope while its defenders are on his side?"<sup>63</sup>

This emphasis on the priesthood as a separate caste even became evident in dress. In the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, a more aristocratic clergy had dressed in ways appropriate for their social class. One German Reform Catholic bishop favored a military uniform decorated with medals. Some Irish priests sent to India wore trousers and cutaway coats in the manner of Protestant ministers because it afforded them "access to society." But by the 1840s, ultramontane bishops had begun to require the Roman collar or robes for all clergy.<sup>64</sup>

Over the course of the nineteenth century, clerical careers became more regimented, structured by orderly training and intensive monitoring. Scandals, endemic to a system where clergy could have remarkable day-to-day autonomy despite a formal chain of command, became less frequent. These better socialized priests displayed a greater esprit de corps, an enhanced sense that the clergy as a group had a distinctive and vital role to play as "soldiers of God." Or as one priest in Le Mans, France, explained to his parishioners in the 1830s: "The Gospel gave the Church [that is, the clergy] the right to command; it imposes on you the duty to obey."<sup>65</sup> The sheer number of clergy indicated renewed vibrancy. In 1800, there was one priest for every 2,676 Catholics in Ireland and in 1901 one priest for every 1,126. The ratio also became considerably more favorable in France and Germany.<sup>66</sup>

## V

MISSIONARY EFFORTS after the French Revolution collapsed. Napoleon closed the Propaganda Fide and carted its archives to Paris while

orders of priests and nuns dedicated to missionary work teetered on the edge of extinction. In Vietnam, a mournful letter from a French missionary in 1805 tallied the numbers: a few isolated "European priests" and "recently ordained Cochinchinese" ministering to over ten thousand Catholics. "Judge for yourself," he concluded, "what a dearth this poor mission suffers."<sup>67</sup> In Africa, modest Catholic communities in the kingdom of the Kongo, Angola, and Senegal fell into disarray.<sup>68</sup> In once major sites of missionary activity such as China, persecution increased—one French priest was beheaded in Chengdu in 1815—as rulers hostile to Christianity detected a vacuum. Only determined efforts by native Chinese ensured the persistence of Catholic communities.<sup>69</sup>

During the nineteenth century, an expanded missionary program would lessen the isolation of Catholics in all of these places, creating a more integrated, more Roman church. Priests, nuns, and brothers came from the regions of Europe touched by the ultramontane revival. Tiny Luxembourg sent missionaries to Africa, South Asia, China, North America, and South America.<sup>70</sup>

French missionaries were the key, even if French people never migrated in significant numbers. The revolution left permanent scars, and Catholicism in certain regions of France never recovered its previous vitality. But in other regions the Catholic culture deepened, and French Catholics took on responsibility for the global church. By one estimate, French priests, nuns, and brothers numbered two-thirds of the Catholic missionary total in 1900.

French benefactors also did the underwriting. A laywoman, Pauline-Marie Jaricot, founded the most important funding organization for Catholic missions, the Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi, in Lyon in 1822. It encouraged regular donations from ordinary Catholics in France—five centimes a week—to support mission work. Within a generation, the organization enrolled tens of thousands of members, and the organization's journal quickly became one of the most important print publications of the era, with a circulation of 178,000 by 1846 and translations into English, Polish, Italian, German, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese. A single issue included letters from missionaries in the Seychelles, Scandinavia, China, Japan, Korea, India, Libya, the United States, Canada, and Oceania.<sup>71</sup> Fundraising was global (and effective)

Celibacy as  
a form of  
clericalism

too, with contributions from many countries. Successful benefaction campaigns resulted in a budget over ten times that of the Propaganda Fide in Rome, where officials maneuvered (without success) to gain control of the Propagation de la Foi funds.<sup>72</sup>

Another French missionary society, the Holy Childhood Society, founded in 1843, reflected the importance placed by ultramontane Catholics on the sacraments. Its goals were simple: "the administration of baptism to children in danger of death and the purchase and adoption of a great number of others." Children burdened by original sin, Catholics concluded, must be absolved by baptism even if their parents had no desire for the sacrament. Within France, the practice of infant abandonment was rife, but orphanages took up the sacramental and institutional slack. Outside of France, members of the society focused on China, where infant abandonment was even more prevalent. They organized European and North American Catholic children to bear the psychic weight of praying for the souls of "pagan" Chinese infants and enumerated with startling precision the exact number of souls saved. Again, weekly donations were requested, and again, considerable sums were raised. Soon the journal for the association appeared in fourteen languages and funded programs in Indochina, India, and Africa.<sup>73</sup>

German missionary societies also formed on the model of the Propagation de la Foi. The Leopoldine Society (1829) in Vienna and the Ludwigs-Mission Verein (1838) in Munich mobilized German-speaking Catholics to fund missionaries, primarily in the United States. As in France, small weekly contributions came from parishioners, but unlike France, significant direct support also came from Catholic royalty, including the Habsburgs in Vienna and the Wittelsbach royal family in Munich.

Competition spurred the missionary effort, since everywhere Catholic missionaries ventured they encountered Protestants who had gotten there first. (The reverse had been true in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.) In southern India, the first missionary priests to visit the area in a generation worried that Methodists would "pollute" the region.<sup>74</sup>

Competition was especially keen in North America. Prominent Protestant ministers, such as Ohio's Lyman Beecher, authored widely distributed tracts warning of Catholic infiltration into the vast region

west of the Appalachian Mountains. In turn, the Father General of the Jesuits requested (and received) volunteers to combat "ministers of error" (that is, Protestant clergy.)<sup>75</sup> In a remote village in the Canadian Great Lakes region, a Catholic missionary bumped into a Protestant counterpart, who immediately explained how a backward Catholicism was impeding the "progress of civilization."<sup>76</sup>

In much of Asia, Catholic communities had over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century become isolated from Rome. Their joy when reconnected to missionaries was palpable. In Japan, villagers in the area around Nagasaki approached the first French Catholic missionaries to appear in the region in over one hundred years. They recited the Hail Mary, the Our Father, and asked about Lent. "The hearts of all of us here," they explained, "do not differ from yours."<sup>77</sup> In Vietnam, a French apostolic vicar traveled through the Mekong Delta in 1828, regularly passing through small Catholic communities that had not seen a priest—native or foreign—in decades. Some communities had not been visited by a bishop for over one hundred years.<sup>78</sup>

The same clergy noted, with varying degrees of empathy, that local practice after the French Revolution and the disruption of missionary programs had veered from orthodoxy. In India, missionaries complained that locals had "reverted" to their "paganism." "Errors" and "depravity" needed correction.<sup>79</sup> In China, missionaries tried to ban a local custom of setting off fireworks at the moment the host was elevated during the Mass.<sup>80</sup>

In locations as diverse as China and the North American frontier, the absence of clergy meant that Indigenous laywomen took on new roles as catechists and parish leaders. In the view of one skeptical missionary to China, women had "usurped the functions of [an] administrator" because they "led the changing of prayers at the church, gave pious readings, [and] admonished delinquents."<sup>81</sup>

## VI

ULTRAMONTANISM ALSO TOOK material form. Sales figures are elusive, but the number of religious book titles increased dramatically in the mid-nineteenth century as the Catholic component of the publish-

ing revolution. French titles were probably the most widely distributed, then English language texts. Prayer books and catechisms were also distributed through an extensive German-language Catholic publishing network.<sup>82</sup>

Stained glass, crosses, statues, rosaries, and paintings came from Munich and Paris, mass-produced by the many firms that sprang up to meet global demand. A Swiss firm with a New York City branch office, Benziger Brothers, became the largest distributor, with items ranging from inexpensive figurines and prints affordable to working-class Catholics to life-size statues of saints. Benziger also distributed readers for Irish Catholic schools in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and other sites of Irish Catholic migration. Convent diaries in isolated towns in French Catholic Louisiana repeatedly mention the arrival of new religious goods, including Sacred Heart pendants, statues of the infant Jesus, holy medals, and scapulars.<sup>83</sup>

The material consequences of the ultramontane revival were also artistic and architectural. Small groups of Catholic painters rebelled against the longtime focus within the art establishment on classical subjects and shared in the yearning for the medieval period. Drawn to the philosophical and theological texts of the Catholic revival, their paintings emphasized the continuity of the sacraments through the mediating institution of the church. One group of German painters who moved to Rome—the Nazarenes—lived in a converted monastery, wore old German cloaks, and grew their hair long, severely parted in the middle, in an homage to Raphael, the artist they most admired. One of the leading figures read essays out loud from neo-Thomist periodicals to his family after dinner. Their critics, in turn, mocked these artists for their loyalty to the “crass dogmatism of dark and depleted centuries.”<sup>84</sup>

The impact of ultramontanism on church architecture was even more profound. “One cannot enter a Gothic Cathedral,” Chateaubriand wrote, “without feeling a kind of shiver of awe and a vague sentiment of the Divinity.”<sup>85</sup> Thirty years later, Augustus Pugin, the most influential English architect of the nineteenth century and a Catholic convert, began designing what would become dozens of new Gothic churches. The opening sentence of a Pugin manifesto conveys his philosophy: “On comparing the Architectural Works of the last three cen-

turies with those of the Middle Ages, the wonderful superiority of the latter must strike every attentive observer.”<sup>86</sup> Pugin thought it crucial to saturate church buildings with statuary, stained glass, and “sacred representations.” Fear that such objects would lead to a “superstitious reverence” was misplaced; instead, the right combination of structure and decoration could “improve and elevate the religious feelings of a nation.”<sup>87</sup>

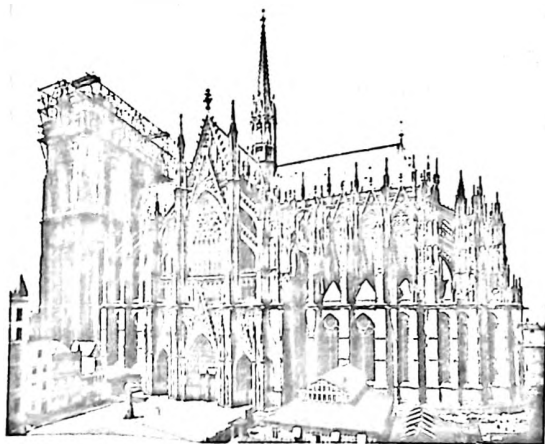
This neo-Gothic sensibility was new. Many Catholic churches built in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—such as La Madeleine in Paris—displayed a classical facade, and Benedict XIV had acted as a patron for classical buildings in Rome.<sup>88</sup> When Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore commissioned the first Catholic cathedral built in the new United States in 1805, he hired Benjamin Latrobe, the architect of the United States Capitol Building. Asked to choose between Gothic and classical designs, Carroll chose classical, complete with Greek columns fronting the church.<sup>89</sup>

Pugin’s influence meant that Greek columns became incongruous. By 1850, Gothic dominated. Cementing this view was a long controversy in Cologne, whose unfinished Gothic cathedral, including an antique medieval crane, towered over the city, and whose completion became an international Catholic cause. When Friedrich Schlegel sauntered across the Rhine valley just after 1800, he paid special attention to the “unparalleled” Gothic buildings in Cologne. “Were it [the cathedral] completed,” Schlegel wistfully concluded, “Gothic art might boast having produced a giant work, worthy of rivaling the proudest edifices of ancient or modern Rome.”<sup>90</sup>

Pugin visited Cologne and championed the cathedral’s reconstruction. There he met with an admirer, August Reichensperger, the leader of the movement to finish the Cologne cathedral who worked also as a Catholic journalist and eventually a member of the German parliament. When Prussia’s Protestant King Friedrich Wilhelm IV offered to conciliate his Catholic subjects with funds to complete the cathedral in 1840, Reichensperger seized the opportunity. He had long regretted that the “Middle Ages have only given us these fragments.” The cathedral “breathed through and through the spirit of Catholicism” and formed a “most vital opposite to Protestantism.”<sup>91</sup>

Not everyone found the neo-Gothic style appealing. When the Sisters of Mercy arrived in London in 1839, they occupied an unfinished Pugin convent. "I do not admire Mr. Pugin's taste," complained Catherine McAuley, "though so celebrated—it is quite the old heavy monastic style."<sup>92</sup> Still, through travel and correspondence, Pugin quickly built an international network of architects and artisans. (His architect son, Edward, sustained this network after his father's death in 1852.) These Irish, Canadian, French, and Australian protégés all brought enthusiasm for the neo-Gothic to their own countries. One Canadian bishop, dedicating St. Patrick's Church in Montreal, delighted in the fact that this new building "would compare with the old churches, now in ruins," that had marked medieval Ireland.<sup>93</sup> A German architect designed a massive neo-Gothic church for the remote South Indian village of Vadakkankulam.<sup>94</sup>

The baroque style was less common but even more ultramontane. Often associated with the Jesuits because of the archetypically baroque Gesù church in Rome, the frescoes, side altars, and statuary in baroque churches seemed to skeptical observers calculated to overwhelm visitors. The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt coined the phrase "Jesuit style" as an epithet. He complained, "The Jesuits were as insincere in



Cologne cathedral, under construction c. 1890. (Archive Photos/Getty Images)

their architecture as they were in every other aspect of the spiritual life of the people; they wished only to dazzle them." He contrasted the "inner poverty" of baroque architecture with its "raw effects." In both Montreal and Philadelphia, Jesuits and their architects made "exact comparisons" between their new churches, also named Gesù, and the Roman namesake.<sup>95</sup>

The fascination with the medieval period reshaped the liturgy itself. In the early nineteenth century, liturgical rites varied widely across the Catholic world. A Roman rite existed, but in France, for example, a variety of older rites predominated, with priests in Paris using different prayers than priests in Lyon or Marseilles. As late as 1840, only eighteen out of over eighty French dioceses used the Roman missal.

As nationalists, Reform Catholics favored civic uniformity through a common language and common school texts, but as Reform Catholics they defended liturgical diversity. In some of the German-speaking principalities, Reform Catholic clergy experimented with saying the Mass in German. One of their ultramontane opponents wrote Gregory XVI. to complain that in Baden "every lowly clergyman dares to tinker with the worship service, with the handling of the sacraments, to celebrate the Holy Mass in [the] German language, to present his very own catechism."<sup>96</sup>

By contrast, ultramontanists welcomed checks on nation-states, but favored centralization and uniformity within the church. France's Prosper Louis Pascal Guéranger, deeply influenced by Chateaubriand and de Maistre, argued that the Roman liturgy represented the apex of worship. Guéranger unsurprisingly proved an enthusiast for the neo-Gothic revival led by Pugin, as well as another medieval artistic form, Gregorian chant. He purchased one of France's many abandoned monasteries, studied medieval musical notation systems, and recruited aspiring monks. One protégé proclaimed the abbey's mission: "The music of the past better understood will be greeted as the true music of the future."<sup>97</sup>

Since Guéranger's goal was a uniform liturgy, he thought using vernacular languages instead of Latin was nothing more than an "anti-liturgical heres[y]." Should Mass be said in French, German, Italian, or Portuguese, he predicted, "the people will find that it is not worth their

while to leave their work or entertainments to go to Church to hear the same language that is used on the streets."<sup>98</sup>

Guéranger launched a fierce campaign against bishops insufficiently enthusiastic about the Roman liturgy. "It is a matter only," asserted one protégé, "to pray as they do at Rome, in the same words, on the same days, with the same ceremonials, from one extremity of the world to the other."<sup>99</sup> In the United States, ultramontane bishops substituted the "Roman ritual" for traditional English practices. In Canada, another ultramontane bishop reported to Rome that "the faithful are wonderfully uplifted by the splendor of divine worship since it is conducted as much as possible according to Roman forms."<sup>100</sup>

## VII

PRACTICAL ISSUES OF episcopal and parish appointments garnered much attention. Odd as it sounds to contemporary Catholics, the tradition of the pope appointing bishops around the world is a recent one. Ministers and monarchs appointed most of the world's bishops into the twentieth century, usually with the curia and pope holding only veto power. In 1829, the Holy See had appointed just 24 of the world's 646 bishops; 67 were elected by local clergy and 555 nominated by monarchs and presidents.<sup>101</sup>

Those parts of the world designated as "mission" territories, such as the United States, the Middle East, Africa, China, and South Asia, fell directly under the aegis of the Propaganda Fide, theoretically allowing Rome more control. Even in these regions, though, traditions of consultation endured. John Carroll's selection as the first bishop in the United States needed an assist from Benjamin Franklin, who lobbied for Carroll's appointment in correspondence with curial bureaucrats. Despite protestations of neutrality, Franklin enjoyed acting the part of an Old World prince.<sup>102</sup>

In much of the world, officials at the Propaganda Fide knew they had to maneuver episcopal appointments through the gauntlet established by Catholic imperial powers. The situation was especially tricky in India, China, and Latin America. In India, from the sixteenth century onward, the Portuguese government nominally controlled the

right to make episcopal appointments. By the 1830s, the presence of priests from Ireland (ministering primarily to Irish Catholic soldiers in the British army) and missionaries from France, Germany, and Italy made this situation untenable. Following much bureaucratic jousting, Gregory XVI reorganized the missions in India and installed apostolic vicars (not bishops who possessed more autonomy) reporting directly to the Propaganda Fide. The men dispatched as missionary priests from Rome to Calcutta were assessed on their "attach[ment] to the Holy See." They wrote home of encounters with "ignorant Christians" and "schismatic priests" who thought the "Pope has no jurisdiction over them."<sup>103</sup>

In China, beginning in the 1840s, the Catholic missionary effort became integrated with the French Empire through a sequence of Sino-French treaties that permitted Catholic evangelization but only under French auspices. French bishops, not Roman officials, controlled and monitored missionary efforts. Missionaries from other countries working in China needed French passports to identify them as *notre compatriote*, or "our countrymen," if they wanted to venture beyond international ports into the Chinese interior.<sup>104</sup>

The issue of episcopal appointments was even more fraught in Latin America. Leaders of newly independent nations, such as Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru, assumed that appointment rights once exercised by the Spanish Crown transferred to new national governments. Roman officials disagreed. They thought the move from monarchy to republic meant an opportunity for Rome to control appointments, especially given the intermittent anticlericalism evident among elected Latin American leaders. They refused to recognize the new Haitian republic in part because that republic's leaders demanded the right of appointment. Curial representatives predicted that if such episcopal appointment rights were granted to Haiti's rulers, other Latin American leaders "will not delay in demanding the same."<sup>105</sup>

The result was a standoff. As bishops appointed by Spanish monarchs died off, they were not replaced. In 1825, only one officially appointed bishop worked in the countries of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. By 1829, none worked in Mexico or Central America. Only bishops could ordain clergy and so the number of

clergy fell precipitously. Over four thousand priests worked in Mexico in 1810; just over two thousand in 1834. In Argentina, the absence of bishops meant only thirty-five priests served the region around Buenos Aires in the early 1850s.<sup>106</sup> Eventually, Gregory XVI rebuilt this ecclesiastical infrastructure. More pragmatic than his predecessors, he hammered out concordats or treaties with almost every nation in Latin America and granted even many republican governments the right to nominate bishops.

Another type of conflict occurred at the parish level. In parts of Europe with strong Reform Catholic traditions, such as France, Poland, and the Rhine valley, lay leaders approved the appointment of pastors, and indeed such consultation had been a recommendation of Febronius, the eighteenth-century Reform Catholic writer and bishop.<sup>107</sup>

These traditions crossed the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. In Bombay, English, Irish, and Indian Catholic parishioners insisted on elections for parish clergy instead of viewing their parishes as "private property of the bishop." High-caste lay Indian Catholics especially resented assertions of episcopal authority.<sup>108</sup> In both Canada and the United States, a tug-of-war occurred between laypeople and priests sympathetic to Reform Catholicism and ultramontanists who disliked such divided authority. Typically viewed as ethnic battles between French and Irish (in Canada) or French, German, and Irish (in the United States), these episodes were often that, but they were also examples of Reform Catholics attempting to restrain an ascendant ultramontanism.

In Montreal, Louis-Joseph Papineau, the leading "patriote" of the era and a founding figure of Canadian nationalism, demanded representation of "notables" in parish councils so as to avoid a "taxation without representation" that occurred when clergy spent funds collected from parishioners without accountability. "In spite of your splendid robes," he told his bishop, "you are incapable of seeing or feeling, yet you claim a divine right to control everything. Can anything be more anti-national or anti-patriotic?"<sup>109</sup>

Parallel governance disputes existed in the United States. In Louisiana, lay committees of French-speaking Creoles paid parish bills and collected parish funds. The first bishop of New Orleans disliked this practice and worried that such parishioners sympathized with the French

Revolution. It seemed to him that "rebellion is in their hearts and their minds are imbued with the maxims of democracy."<sup>110</sup>

A few decades later, the trustees of St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans ingeniously argued that the sovereignty of the Spanish and French monarchs had now passed to "the people" as the sovereign power in the democratic United States. And so the people—lay Catholic trustees—should approve any nomination for bishop or pastor. Ultramontane clergy and their supporters fought back via state legislatures, secular courts, and the pope. They arranged for Gregory XVI to issue a papal brief denouncing this "wound . . . inflicted on Episcopal authority." They also persuaded the Louisiana Supreme Court to thwart the lay trustees.<sup>111</sup>

## VIII

WHEN THE ENGLISH WRITER Frances Trollope toured Belgium in the early 1830s, she termed its people "deeply and severely Catholic." To her amusement, she reported much talk of relics and miracles, and she included a disapproving description of churches jammed with decorations and statues of the Virgin "tricked out in tawdry finery."<sup>112</sup> What fascinated Trollope was not, as she imagined, a retrograde Catholicism yet to be liberated from the Middle Ages. The Belgium she documented was then in the throes of the ultramontane revival, and a brief sketch of the revival in one country allows more purchase on the whole.

The first mission preachers appeared in Belgium in the early nineteenth century. Their presence, signaling the rebuilding of the church after the long occupation by often anticlerical French troops during the revolution, brought native Catholics to tears. The number of male religious in the country tripled in just twenty-five years after 1829.<sup>113</sup>

The number of women religious increased at an even faster rate. By 1846, ten thousand women religious worked in Belgium. Before 1789, most of these women had lived lives of contemplation; fifty years later, fewer than 10 percent did, as they came to prefer lives focused on public service. Most women religious staffed hospitals and schools, while others ran "homes of preservation" and "refuge" for women trying to escape prostitution or make their way in an unfamiliar city. They began

the first homes for the mentally ill. When Trollope encountered Sisters of Charity in a hospital ward, she found their spirit of self-sacrifice admirable. So effusive were her compliments, Trollope joked, that her friends might think she had "turned Catholic."<sup>114</sup>

The same missionary impulse propelled Belgians abroad, with the United States as the most important destination. (Later in the century missionaries from Belgium would journey to places as diverse as the Congo and Mongolia.) The most famous of these men, Jesuit Pierre De Smet, spent most of his career in the American West, and his tales of his encounters with Indigenous peoples became best sellers in Catholic Europe. De Smet and other missionaries organized mission campaigns, complete with monumental crosses erected in town squares, devotion to the Sacred Heart, and churches "well adorned with pictures and statues." He promoted the claim of a Flathead boy to have seen an apparition of Mary. De Smet's goal was a "Christian civilization" better than the "modern civilization" bequeathed to the world by the French Revolution.<sup>115</sup>

Brussels also came to Rome. After 1842, Belgian expatriates in Rome worshipped in a national church, Saint-Julien-des Belges. The Belgian bishops founded a college for seminary students to provide Roman seasoning. Belgian tourists also visited the city in growing numbers, expressing fascination with the catacombs (as a symbol of persecution) and the Colosseum (which invoked Christian martyrdom).<sup>116</sup> Belgian Catholics, like their ultramontane contemporaries around the world, favored Sacred Heart devotions, Roman liturgies, and neo-Gothic cathedrals. "Our heart needs to compose itself sometimes in the memory of all the great things of the Middle Ages," explained one devotee, "when people did not make railways but immense Gothic churches."<sup>117</sup>

This ultramontane revival—and the devotions, schools, associations, cathedrals, philosophical texts, and paintings it spawned—had analogues in other religious traditions. During this same period, Protestant evangelists crisscrossed not only Europe and North America, but also once-remote locales such as Australia and South Africa. Muslim scholars journeyed from Istanbul to Cairo to Calcutta to lay the groundwork for a more unified "Muslim world."<sup>118</sup>

Even so, the Catholic global community was distinctive. Its tentacles reached into the tiniest rural, Flemish-speaking parish, aristocratic homes in Brussels, and ecclesiastical offices in Rome. Its institutions constituted a milieu far more dense than anything that existed in the eighteenth century. As one Belgian Catholic explained:

Catholicism is not only a doctrine, but an action. Catholicism is the people praying in our churches; it is the Sister of Charity sustaining the patient's head in our hospitals; it is the Christian brother using his life to instruct small children; it is the missionary evangelizing ignorant populations; it is the priest, from the parish vicar so loved by the poor and downtrodden to the pontiff sending his benediction *urbi et orbi*.<sup>119</sup>

## THREE

## Democracy

How Catholicism Fostered  
and Inhibited Democratic Revolutions

## I

NEAR DEATH, unable to work in either "mind or body," Fr. Servando Teresa de Mier invited friends and colleagues in Mexico City to a reception to observe him receiving last rites on the morning of November 15, 1827. Guests included the president of the Republic of Mexico, who had arranged for Mier to live in an apartment in the presidential palace as a token of gratitude for his service to the new nation.

The ceremony began with a procession including a military band. Mier's guests then gathered around his bedside as he received the last rites from Fr. Ramos Arizpe, a fellow priest serving as the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs. Mier had worked with Arizpe since 1810, when the two men attended the first democratically elected legislative assembly in modern Spanish history, the Cortes of Cádiz, and the two friends had each played a significant role in the fight for Mexican independence from Spain.<sup>1</sup>

This odd ritual—and Mier's death three weeks later—capped an eventful life. Born in 1765, Mier was educated in Mexico and ordained a Dominican priest. He achieved prominence by making the odd claim that Our Lady of Guadalupe had appeared to St. Thomas soon after the death of Christ and not to Juan Diego outside of Mexico City in

1531. Suspicious of Mier, the archbishop of Mexico City exiled him to Spain.<sup>2</sup>

Eventually, Mier made his way to France, where he became friendly with Fr. Henri Grégoire and other clergy of the Constitutional Church. He thought Grégoire nothing less than "the pillar of religion in France." Like Grégoire, Mier believed that the French Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790 did not contain "anything heretical." He admired the "wise" Bishop Ricci and the Synod of Pistoia and was dismayed by the pope's condemnation of its decrees.<sup>3</sup> After journeys to Portugal and Rome, Mier moved to London in 1811, where he helped edit the leading Spanish-language journal, *El Español*, and sustained contact with colonial revolutionaries.

For Mier, as for many Reform Catholics, little separated the political from the ecclesiastical. Like Grégoire, he believed in the affinity of Catholicism and republicanism, since "God gave his favorite people [the Israelites] a republican government." Mier and Grégoire both admired Thomas Paine and both wrote treatises on Bartolomé de las Casas, positioning the sixteenth-century Spanish defender of Indigenous peoples as a critic of nineteenth-century Spanish imperialism. Grégoire arranged for the reprinting and distribution of the 1797 homily of the future Pope Pius VII on the compatibility of democracy and Catholicism, and Mier's friends published editions in Spanish and English.<sup>4</sup>

After participation in a failed rebellion in Mexico followed by another imprisonment, Mier retreated in 1821 to Philadelphia, which had become a center for Reform Catholicism. He immediately fell into a community of Spanish-speaking Catholic exiles, some of whom also had participated in the Cortes of Cádiz. This group found common cause with Irish Catholic émigrés, many of whom had fled to the United States after the failed 1798 revolution in Ireland and joined the Democratic-Republican party led by Thomas Jefferson. For all of these men, the United States with its republican government and strong religious institutions seemed a better model than France, where, in Mier's words, the abandonment of religion during the revolution had led to the "demoralization of the people."<sup>5</sup>

Enthusiasm for republican or democratic government extended to the parish level. Together, Irish and Latin American Catholics led a

fight for parishioner control of the finances and pastoral appointments at St. Mary's Church. Despite having just arrived in Philadelphia, Mier jumped in. Along with his allies, he defended the rights of lay parish trustees and a charismatic if erratic Irish pastor, William Hogan, against an Irish-born bishop, Henry Conwell, in what became the country's most significant trustee conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The rhetoric was heated. In the same breath Mier denounced Spanish bishops who "established crusades against [Mexican Catholic] patriots" and the recalcitrance of Bishop Conwell in Philadelphia. The key was "to distinguish the *church* from the *bishops*, and *religion* from its *abuses*."<sup>7</sup>

Mier's opponents termed him an "infidel Mexican priest . . . lately escaped from the prison of the Inquisition." Mier retorted that "citizens of the United States and every civilized country" should consider it "honourable" to be imprisoned by the Inquisition. The embattled Bishop Conwell, in a reference to the French Revolution, feared the "success of these Jacobins."<sup>8</sup>

In 1830, Roman officials charged another Irish-born bishop, Francis Kenrick, educated in Rome, with restoring order. Laypeople in Kenrick's view should be "obedient subjects of the ruler," and by ruler he meant pastor or bishop. Priests should exhibit "docility." He confronted trustees—dressed in full episcopal regalia—and to the delight of another Philadelphia pastor and soon-to-be bishop in New York City, John Hughes, "made them eat their words." When resistance from members of the congregation did not cease, he threatened excommunication and stated that "Catholic principles of church government" admitted no role for laypeople beyond "obedience and subjugation."<sup>9</sup>

Well before Kenrick's arrival in Philadelphia, Mier had returned to Mexico, where he became one of the leading figures in the successful movement to declare independence from Spain. On the legislative floor he recalled his time among the "constitutional clergy of France" and the need for the state to appoint bishops and the people to elect their pastors. When in France, he noted, "we had nothing to do with Rome except for the bishops sending the pope letters of communion as in the primitive church."<sup>10</sup>

Mier never abandoned his conviction that the state should endorse Catholicism as the official religion, even if he readily admitted the

importance of practical tolerance. But when Pope Leo XII made a futile plea for the Latin American subjects of King Ferdinand VII to remain loyal to the Spanish Crown, Mier authored a scathing response. Addressing "señor Papa" in an insolent tone, he aligned himself with the "many Catholic authors" who saw in such requests a "new doctrine" of papal authority. The "court of Rome" must shed its "ambitious pretensions."<sup>11</sup>

Mier's travels from Mexico to Spain to France to Rome to Portugal to England to the United States to Cuba and finally back to Mexico reflected the flux of an era when successive revolutions convulsed the Atlantic world. His life exemplified the strength of the Reform Catholic tradition, diminished in northern Europe but still vital in central Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, and Latin America. Its advocates professed sympathy for national ecclesiastical traditions, a more restrained piety, and the authority of church councils as opposed to the papacy. They stressed a lay voice—an educated, property-owning, male lay voice—and the rights of not only monarchies but republican and constitutional governments to appoint bishops and even pastors.

Just before his death, Mier complained to a friend that France was now "covered" with Jesuits and that a resurgent ultramontanistism had "swallowed everything." Newly appointed French bishops seemed to him "fanatics." He quoted with approval a letter from Henri Grégoire, urging Latin Americans to remain Catholic but "reject in force the pretensions of the Roman Court, so ominous to the freedom of nations."<sup>12</sup>

## II

HOW CATHOLICS WOULD RESPOND to what historians sometimes term the Age of Democratic Revolutions was not obvious.<sup>13</sup> Between the American Revolution in the 1770s and various European revolutions in 1848, at least twenty democracies sprouted (and withered) on both sides of the Atlantic, with the Mexican Republic supported by Fr. Mier as one of the most notable of these experiments.

Because so many ultramontanists, beginning with Joseph de Maistre and continuing through authoritarian Catholic leaders in the 1930s, voiced skepticism about constitutions and republican government, historians have neglected a wider Catholic political repertoire. Just as an

"uncompromising Protestantism" could support democratic nationalism in early-nineteenth-century Britain, the Netherlands, Prussia, and the United States, so, too, did Reform Catholics support constitutions and representative governments from Spain and southern Italy to Mexico and much of Latin America.<sup>14</sup>

An early indication that Catholics in southern Europe and Latin America were developing their own version of constitutional government became visible in Mexico. The first revolts against Spanish colonial rule began in 1810, with native-born priests leading an uprising not only in the realm of ideas but on the battlefield. After Mass in the village of Dolores, with the townspeople called into the main square by the ringing of church bells, Fr. Miguel Hidalgo organized an army eventually numbering thousands of men and dedicated to overthrowing the Spanish colonial government.

Placing an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the banners held by his troops, Hidalgo merged religion with a nascent Mexican national identity. He and his allies professed their loyalty to the Spanish king, Ferdinand VII, and their opposition to the putatively godless French who controlled much of Spain until 1814. But Hidalgo was also interested in Reform Catholicism. Educated by priests connected to Reform Catholic circles in Europe, Hidalgo came from an elite family and questioned papal authority, the virginity of Mary, and clerical celibacy. (He fathered several children with a succession of common-law wives.) Venezuela's Simón Bolívar, another Latin American leader eager to end Spanish colonial rule in the region, thought Catholicism an "exclusive and intolerant religion." But he envied how Hidalgo and "the leaders of the [Mexican] independence movement have happily profited from fanaticism with the greatest skill, proclaiming the famous Virgin of Guadalupe as queen of the patriots."<sup>15</sup>

Most bishops in Mexico, almost all from Spain, opposed Hidalgo's insurgent army, some by excommunicating rebels and predicting they would go "infallibly to hell."<sup>16</sup> The influential Michoacán bishop, Manuel Abad y Queipo, despaired of Hidalgo, a friend, leading the rebellion and after his capture ordered his execution.

Still, only a year later, during the chaos created by Napoleon's armies,

an election was held in Cádiz, Spain, for a Cortes, or assembly. The Cortes retained the monarchy—although King Ferdinand VII did not attend its sessions—but proclaimed national sovereignty, civic equality, and universal male suffrage. The constitution drafted at Cádiz became influential not only in Latin America but also in Greece and India.<sup>17</sup> Delegates claimed to transform Spain from a "Catholic monarchy," to a "nation of Catholics."<sup>18</sup>

Deliberations in Cádiz resembled those in Paris in 1789. Priests constituted one-third of the delegates, their presence at a democratic assembly a symbolic rejection of the alliance of throne and altar so central to Spanish history. Some religious orders were abolished, again as in France. In Seville and other Spanish cities, much as in France after the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, Spanish citizens swore oaths of loyalty to the constitution after Mass and the constitution itself was read during the service.<sup>19</sup> The Reform Catholic commitments of the assembly meant that delegates might discuss the relationship between the executive and the legislature on one day and ponder how to eliminate pilgrimages and prune overly exuberant devotions on the next.

Despite the enthusiasm that it generated, the Spanish constitutional regime of 1812 was short-lived. Napoleon's defeat and the evacuation of the French armies became King Ferdinand VII's opportunity, and he managed to restore the Spanish monarchy in 1814. Ferdinand VII reestablished the Inquisition and permitted the newly restored Jesuits back in the country. Mission campaigns began, and support for religious tolerance ebbed. One prominent Spanish ultramontane asked:

Are we in Spain, or in Holland and North America? . . . Which tolerance are we talking about? That of another religion, or that of people who are unfortunate enough to profess it? If we are speaking of tolerance of another religion, Catholicism is as intolerant as light is of darkness, and truth is of lies.<sup>20</sup>

Another ultramontane writer took the time to condemn not just the standard villains of Luther and Calvin, but the Habsburg emperor Joseph

II, Bishop Ricci, and other Reform Catholics for provoking the French Revolution and inspiring delegates at the Cortes of Cádiz.<sup>21</sup>

Still, Reform Catholic ideas continued to spread across the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The first European to call for the independence of Latin American nations, a Belgian bishop, warned his readers that Latin American Catholics with “republican” sympathies would not listen to either Spanish Catholics opposed to liberty or “Rome and her thunders.”<sup>22</sup> Bishop Queipo, in Mexico, had opposed Miguel Hidalgo’s populist revolt, but he also thought the 1812 Spanish Constitution “the most liberal, the most just and the most prudent” such document devised.<sup>23</sup> A Reform Catholic bishop became the first president of Ecuador under its new constitution.<sup>24</sup>

An unsuccessful republican revolt in Pernambuco, in northeast Brazil, in 1817 was often termed the “revolution of the priests” because of the participation of clergy trained at a seminary founded by a Reform Catholic bishop. The revolution’s leading figure melded science and faith by working as a botanist and a theology professor.<sup>25</sup> Another leader of the Pernambuco revolt, Fr. Antônio Gonçalves da Cruz, met with the former United States president, John Adams. Adams had long scoffed at the idea of Catholics in South America supporting “free government.” More likely, he thought, to establish “Democracies among the Beasts, Birds or Fishes.” After meeting the congenial Gonçalves da Cruz, Adams wavered. Perhaps, he speculated, “the Age of Reason is not ended.”<sup>26</sup> A Boston newspaper hailed Cruz as one of the “very patriotic” Catholic clergy, eager to “resist tyranny and establish liberty [just as] our clergy did in 1775.”<sup>27</sup>

That the Spanish Constitution of 1812 declared Catholicism the state religion might seem puzzling. (It puzzled Thomas Jefferson, who admired the constitution but expressed disappointment at the “intolerance of all but the Catholic religion.”)<sup>28</sup> After all, the same Cádiz assembly abolished the Inquisition in order to protect national sovereignty from Roman influence—this pleased Jefferson—and expelled the papal nuncio. And yet the constitution reads: “The religion of the Spanish nation is, and ever shall be, the Catholic Apostolic Religion and only true faith. The Nation shall, by wise and just laws, protect it and prevent the exercise of any other.”

In Haiti (1804), Venezuela (1811), Spain (1812), Naples (1820), Spain again (1820), Portugal (1822), and Mexico (1824), constitutions drafted in a Reform Catholic key defined Catholicism as integral to national identity. In Naples, legislators added the term “public” to the subsection on Catholicism as the national religion, implying that private practice of other creeds would not constitute a crime. Even this modification proved controversial and was dropped before the final vote. The Chilean Constitution of 1822 tolerated individual dissent from Catholicism only as long as it did not lead to “calumnies, affronts or crime.” Simón Bolívar judged religion an entirely private—indeed absurd—matter, but even Bolívar drafted a constitution for Colombia in 1828 declaring that “the government supports and protects the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion as the religion of Colombians.”<sup>29</sup>

This melding of religion and the state occurred because Reform Catholic clergy and politicians assumed that religion needed to support the state, not be separated from it. In the eighteenth century, Reform Catholics had pledged their loyalty to royal authority as one means of unifying the state and checking the power of the papacy. In the nineteenth century, republican governments were substituted for monarchies in some countries, but the principle of integrating church with state remained. Bishops and clergy still sat in parliaments, swore in presidents, and dictated legislation on moral matters.

The desire to weave together Catholicism and the state rested in part on an absence of religious diversity. In southern Europe and Latin America, Catholics were the overwhelming majority of the population, often with over 90 percent of residents baptized. Contact with clergy might be episodic in rural regions but a Catholic culture was widespread. (The religions of enslaved people in Latin America were more diverse, but many enslaved people also identified as Catholic.) Even leaders of the Italian republics of the 1790s viewed endorsement of Catholicism as part of a “religious social contract.”<sup>30</sup> A Benedictine monk elected to the Neapolitan parliament explained his preference for a state religion this way:

Having just the one religion, we do not need to proclaim freedom of worship, as other countries, where there are

followers of different religions, have been obliged to do. Happy as we are to have this powerful bond, we will not live in fear of those bloody scenes between Catholics and Protestants witnessed even in recent years in France.<sup>31</sup>

Small groups of Jews and Protestants lived in even the most Catholic countries, and Reform Catholics proved more accepting than their ultramontane Catholic contemporaries of this pluralism. One Protestant observer complimented a Portuguese bishop in Rio de Janeiro—where the constitution declared Catholicism the state religion—for being “perfectly and sincerely tolerant of every sect, while he is warmly attached to his own.”<sup>32</sup> Even so, Reform Catholic leaders only accepted the rights of groups to worship, not the rights of individuals to proselytize. The same Uruguayan constitution that made Catholicism the official state religion carved out rights of worship for specific groups, such as Anglicans, Swiss German evangelicals, and Waldensians, but not freedom of religion for individuals.<sup>33</sup>

Another liberal revolution occurred in Spain in 1820. Reform Catholics who had gone underground after 1814 resurfaced and began speaking again of constitutions and democracy. Fifty-four priests were elected to the reestablished Cortes, and priests explained the new constitution “to all their parishioners on Sundays and on festival days.” It still seemed possible that democracy could be supported by “the pure faith, without obstacles, without superstition or fanaticism.”<sup>34</sup>

This second Spanish revolution of 1820 gave Mexican patriots the opportunity to declare their own country's independence. After much turmoil, the republic established in 1824 exemplified Fr. Mier's vision in that the constitution declared Catholicism the “religion of the Mexican nation.” All parishioners attending Mass in Mexico City on one October Sunday swore an oath to the constitution and listened as priests explained the document.<sup>35</sup>

In Spain, democracy was again short-lived. The wily Ferdinand VII reclaimed his throne in the early 1820s, abolished the Cortes, and began imprisoning or exiling his opponents. His officers executed fifty priests supportive of the revolutionary government and now deemed traitors to the nation. Ferdinand's allies accused Havana's Reform

Catholic bishop of supporting Bishop Ricci and the Synod of Pistoia.<sup>36</sup> In neighboring Portugal, ultramontane Catholics argued that the appalling ideals of the French Revolution must not be allowed to corrupt “the best institutions” with “perversity, disorder and general annihilation.”<sup>37</sup>

By contrast, Latin America had become a global leader in republican government by 1830, with male suffrage more widespread than in any other region.<sup>38</sup> One of Fr. Mier's protégés, José Luis Mora, perhaps the most important Mexican intellectual of the era, admired the constitutional reforms passed by the Cortes of Cádiz. He criticized the needless expenses of pilgrimages and popular devotions and republished in Mexico Reform Catholic texts first published in Spain.<sup>39</sup> But Mora expressed grave doubts about the capacity of the church to adapt to the new world of constitutions and democracy. “Instead of inspiring youth with a spirit of inquiry and doubt,” he feared, “[Catholic clergy] will . . . instill habits of dogmatism and disputation.”<sup>40</sup>

### III

WHILE REFORM CATHOLICS in Spain and Latin America launched democratic revolutions, the political implications of the ultramontane revival in northern Europe remained uncertain. Joseph de Maistre—skeptical of representation in both church and state—had no doubts. “To hear the defenders of democracy talk,” de Maistre mockingly explained, “one would think that the people deliberate like a committee of wise men, whereas in truth judicial murders, foolhardy undertakings, wild choices, and above all foolish and disastrous wars are eminently the prerogatives of this form of government.”<sup>41</sup>

The Holy Alliance created at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 strengthened monarchical governments with strong ties to the papacy. Some Reform Catholic suspicions persisted, especially in the Habsburg Empire, where the emperor refused to permit bishops to travel to Rome for their ordination, since they might “return to their dioceses as Roman converts . . . doing more harm than good to church and state.”<sup>42</sup>

Other Catholics had begun a reassessment. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had demonstrated the dangers of revolution

and the need to mobilize religious influence on behalf of newly vulnerable monarchies. The Austrian chancellor, Metternich, once sympathetic to Reform Catholicism, now saw an alliance with the papacy as crucial to stabilizing the Habsburg Empire and worked to diminish Reform Catholic tendencies at the royal court. Papal officials expressed delight that leaders such as Metternich "have realized that the best defense of their thrones . . . lies in the true religion, which makes subjects faithful to their sovereign."<sup>43</sup>

In Canada, Archbishop Plessis, of Quebec, instructed his clergy never to criticize the king or the parliament and warned against "the spirit of democracy [that] is wreaking havoc among us." As he privately explained to the British governor general in a tone echoing Catholic defenders of monarchy in Europe, "our altars protect the Throne as the Throne protects them."<sup>44</sup> In 1819, Plessis and a group of clergy journeyed to a "degraded and degenerate" France and met with one of their heroes, Joseph de Maistre.<sup>45</sup>

Catholics in the United States also responded to ultramontane signals. In the 1780s, Bishop John Carroll had expressed sympathy for Reform Catholicism, but he recoiled from the 1790 Civil Constitution of the Clergy as an effort to reduce religion by "a slavish obsequiousness to the civil power."<sup>46</sup> When contacted by Henri Grégoire in 1809, Carroll declined his request for cooperation out of distaste for "some of the principles avowed in the pamphlets and proceedings of what is called the Constitutional clergy." He thought that "late and present events" merited caution and judged it more important to sustain the "independent jurisdiction of the Holy See and episcopacy."<sup>47</sup>

The brightest prospect for a unity of democracy and ultramontaniam came from Ireland in the person of Daniel O'Connell, the most important Irish politician of the nineteenth century. O'Connell had fled his Catholic boarding school in Belgium during the French Revolution. He was horrified to meet Irishmen who, after witnessing Louis XVI's execution, thought the deed justified "for the cause." At the time, he later recalled, he "thoroughly detested the revolutionists and the democratic principle."<sup>48</sup>

But O'Connell's views changed. Over the next three decades,

O'Connell became an inspiration to Catholic democrats around the world. In 1823, he formed a new Catholic association that focused on a variety of issues, including British prohibitions on Catholic chaplains visiting prisoners, the paucity of Catholic burial grounds, and bias against Catholics in the armed forces and the judiciary. A "Catholic rent" of one penny per month paid to O'Connell's movement mobilized the country's peasantry.

The Catholic emancipation campaign led by O'Connell—demanding the right of Catholics to sit in the British Parliament without swearing allegiance to the king or admitting, as then required, that veneration of Mary and the saints was "idolatrous"—

culminated with a victory in 1829. Parliament finally permitted Catholics to hold office not only in England, but also in Ireland, South Africa, and other parts of the British Empire. (Catholics in what is now Quebec and Ontario had long possessed this ability.)

Restrictions remained. Catholic students could enroll at Cambridge but were not allowed to take a degree; they could not even enroll at Oxford. Jesuits were banned from coming "into this realm" (although this provision was not enforced), and priests were not to wear habits "save within the usual Places of Worship of the Roman Catholic religion."<sup>49</sup> Still, the principle of Catholic participation in public life had been won. Reflecting on an electoral triumph in County Clare, O'Connell described election day as "in reality, a religious ceremony." Priests marched with parishioners carrying banners with such messages as "Vote for our Religion." Or as he concluded, "honest men met to support upon the altar of their countryman the religion in which they believed."<sup>50</sup>



Daniel O'Connell. (Courtesy of Rare Books and Special Collections, Hesburgh Library, University of Notre Dame)

## IV

OBSERVING DANIEL O'CONNELL in the late 1820s were an extraordinary trio of French Catholics. All would play significant roles in modern Catholic history, and their sympathy for democratic reform would demonstrate the uncertain political trajectory of Catholicism in the age of democratic revolutions.

The three friends or "liberal ultramontanists" were Charles Montalembert, a lay nobleman; Henri Lacordaire, a priest who would reestablish the Dominican order in France; and Félicité de Lamennais, a Breton priest. Lamennais was the leader, and his essays on religious belief in the aftermath of the revolution circulated across Catholic Europe, North America, and South America. Like de Maistre, with whom he cheerfully corresponded early in his career and whose *Du Pape* he praised, Lamennais initially defended monarchical government. The corruption of Reform Catholicism had led to the French Revolution and explained how a "Christian monarchy" had "degenerated into a democracy."<sup>51</sup>

Lamennais—again like de Maistre—did not begin with politics. Instead he rejected a Catholicism in any way subservient to a state or claiming independence from the papacy. This view ran against the grain in 1820s France, where the state still paid clerical salaries. Lamennais wondered how French bishops distinguished governmental endorsement from governmental oppression. After all, he pointed out, the same nominally Catholic French government proved willing to ban the Jesuits in 1828 and funded a "Ministry of Religion which works ardently to corrupt all sources of teaching." The intertwining of church and state led to "pressure for a break with Rome and the establishment of a national church which would represent only folly."<sup>52</sup>

Lamennais knew that younger ultramontane clergy found government restrictions on parish missions patronizing. Who would evangelize a France drifting away from orthodoxy? Not timid bishops appointed by the state. "By binding the cause of religion inseparably to that of the Government which oppresses it," Lamennais regretted, "they are preparing a general apostasy."<sup>53</sup>

Ireland seemed a happier case. Lacordaire admiringly termed

O'Connell the "Pope of Ireland," and lauded the Irish Catholic willingness to "defend and demand" their freedom. "Of all the populations of Europe," Lamennais explained, "the most indigent is that of Ireland, and yet nowhere is religion more endowed."<sup>54</sup> O'Connell reciprocated by expressing disdain—"as a Catholic"—for a French church still submitting episcopal nominations for approval by government officials.<sup>55</sup>

Lamennais also reconsidered what his ultramontane theology might mean for politics. Daringly, he became convinced that Catholicism needed open debate and freedom of religion to thrive and that the people needed the opportunity to vote for their political leaders. He rejected the instinctive ultramontane desire to support authoritarian monarchs against populist agitation, because it betrayed a piety and theology that claimed to respect the aspirations and struggles of common people.

Lamennais's opportunity to voice such views came during the European revolutions of 1830, a series of loosely linked revolts beginning in France but extending to Belgium, Poland, and northern Italy. As crowds again took to Parisian streets, Catholics with memories of the Terror in the 1790s trembled. (The archbishop of Paris hid in a convent.)

Lamennais thought the revolutions providential. The church must ally itself with the desire of the people for democratic government and basic liberties such as freedom of the press and freedom of religion. No longer should Catholics assume that monarchs in Paris, Vienna, and Madrid would shelter them from revolutionary storms. Better to welcome a "popular reaction against absolutism" and the collapse of a "worn-out order."<sup>56</sup> Watching from Ireland, O'Connell exulted in the idea that the revolution had dismayed "the tyrants and oligarchs of the world."<sup>57</sup>

Montalembert, Lamennais, and Lacordaire chose this moment to found *L'Avenir* (The Future), a newspaper emblazoned with the motto "God and Liberty." In its eighteen-month existence, the journal circulated across Europe and North America with issues passed hand to hand. The editors insisted that the proliferation of constitutional governments around the world required "Catholics to give the world a model" of how to blend religious and political commitments.<sup>58</sup>

The young ultramontanes paid special attention to Belgium and the United States. The influence of Lamennais in Belgium was strong, and Belgians elected a number of priests who admired Lamennais to the

country's first national assembly. The Belgian Constitution of 1830, drafted primarily by Catholics, granted freedom of religion to all citizens. "As in Belgium" became shorthand for the idea that Catholicism and republicanism could coexist.<sup>59</sup> Lacordaire pondered leaving France to work as a missionary in the United States, since only in such a "free, populous, young" country could the "Catholic revolution" move in sync with the "political revolution."<sup>60</sup>

They also looked east. Polish revolutionaries launched a revolt against the Russian tsar in 1830, a challenge that generated enthusiasm around the Catholic world. The tsar's crushing of the revolt meant a dispersion of Polish intellectuals, especially to Paris, where they quickly attached themselves to the liberal ultramontanes. Montalembert championed a "free and Catholic" Poland in the name of "Catholics of France."<sup>61</sup>

Crucially, these liberal ultramontanists saw no future for Reform Catholicism. At one time an alliance between the two impulses, both in their own way committed to a Catholic foundation for republican government, seemed possible. O'Connell welcomed the revolution that toppled Ferdinand VII in Spain in 1820 as an "auspicious circumstance."<sup>62</sup>

But different theological assumptions prevented a united front. Reform Catholics deplored an intrusive papacy, while liberal ultramontanes saw the papacy as protection against intrusive governments. O'Connell became disenchanted with the anti-papal contours of the revolution in Spain. In a speech that infuriated Spanish exiles in London, O'Connell denigrated "the attempts of the Cortes to ingratiate themselves with the English *Liberals* and their press." He compared them with French revolutionaries during the 1790s and wondered if they desired the "overthrow of the Catholic religion."<sup>63</sup>

Ultramontane scorn for Reform Catholicism also became visible in France. When Henri Grégoire lay dying in 1831, one of the few surviving members of the constitutional clergy and the symbol worldwide of the Reform Catholic tradition, the archbishop of Paris refused him the last sacraments unless he renounced his forty-year-old endorsement of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. (Independent to the end, Grégoire refused. The first sentence of his will blasted "ecclesiastical [and] political despotism.")<sup>64</sup> Montalembert mocked Grégoire's supporters. "Earn the salary the government has thrown to you," he sneered, "kiss

the rings of the government-appointed bishops." In Haiti, by contrast, where Grégoire had long been admired for his opposition to slavery and his Reform Catholicism, his death was marked by a national day of mourning.<sup>65</sup>

The prospects for an ultramontane version of democracy soon dimmed. Knowing that many French bishops despised *L'Avenir* for its attacks on the episcopacy, Montalembert, Lamennais, and Lacordaire traveled across the Alps in 1831 as "pilgrims of God and liberty" in order to persuade the pope of their orthodoxy.<sup>66</sup>

While they awaited an audience, the Polish community in Rome welcomed them, bestowing upon Lamennais a chalice in gratitude for his advocacy of their cause. Ominously, Gregory XVI chose this moment to condemn the Polish revolt against the tsar as an unlawful rebellion against a legitimate ruler. This papal edict shocked Polish Catholic rebels but also did not augur well for Lamennais, on record as calling the tsar a despot.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps Lamennais should have expected as much. From the first days after his election in 1831, Gregory XVI had struggled to quell a revolt in the northern sections of the Papal States, the portion of the Italian Peninsula governed (ineptly) by the Holy See. He had initially welcomed some of Lamennais's ideas, and the shocked representative of the Habsburg Empire to the papal court reported hearing curial officials deem some revolutions "justified as Catholic causes."<sup>68</sup> Papal government must be saved "from itself," Metternich bluntly responded.<sup>69</sup> He knew that Lamennais had found a ready audience among some Catholics in Turin and other parts of northern Italy.<sup>70</sup>

What Gregory XVI could not countenance was revolutionary nationalism. Out of desperation, Gregory XVI permitted Metternich to send the Austrian army to quash the revolt in northern Italy. Metternich also complained about *L'Avenir* to Rome and used his spy network to swipe Lamennais's letters (where Lamennais bemoaned the intrigue surrounding the papal court) and send them to the pope with his own annotations. Representatives from the governments of Russia and Prussia also lobbied Gregory XVI, unhappy to see any Catholic journal countenance revolution and worried about restive Polish and German Catholic populations within their midst. The Irish priest Paul

Cullen, one of Gregory XVI's colleagues from their days of working together in the offices of the Propaganda Fide, characterized the revolutionaries this way: "irreligion in its broadest sphere, the vilest hatred against the Catholic religion and especially its supreme head the Pope, a desire to overturn all established authorities, and to destroy all order."<sup>71</sup>

Entreaties from the great powers made Gregory XVI less inclined to support Lamennais, but so, too, did the dossier compiled in the Holy Office. It included a defense by the foremost Italian disciple of Lamennais, Gioacchino Ventura, who described him as a writer of the "first rank." Lamennais in this reading had demonstrated to Catholics around the world that the church did not invariably stand for the "despotism of kings" at the expense of "political liberty."<sup>72</sup> Other consultants were less admiring. They deplored the "disastrous" doctrines of Lamennais, allegedly imbibed from Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin. Popular sovereignty might work for a "Protestant people" accustomed to a society where each person is his or her own arbiter of the law, but not for a "Catholic people" faithful to compacts with king and God.<sup>73</sup>

After struggling for months to gain an audience with the pope, only to be baffled on the occasion by desultory chitchat, Lamennais retreated from Rome to Munich. During a banquet in his honor, he was handed a fresh-off-the-press copy of Gregory's XVI's 1832 encyclical, *Mirari Vos*. Here Lamennais encountered ultramontanism shorn of democracy and civil liberties. Gregory XVI held that freedom of conscience was liable to "spread ruin." Freedom of the press seemed "monstrous" because of the propensity to equate truth and error.<sup>74</sup>

Lamennais and the other young ultramontanes initially thought they should submit to the encyclical and continue their work. Surely the pope's words did not possess a "dogmatic character."<sup>75</sup> The pope, Lamennais thought, "is a good monk. He knows nothing of the world. He has no idea what the Church is like."<sup>76</sup> One Belgian disciple agreed that the pope referred to Lamennais in "only a few passages," but he still worried about the "effect it would produce in France, in England, in Ireland, in Germany!"<sup>77</sup>

So Lamennais kept writing. In 1834, in another messianic best seller, he again celebrated "liberty" and mourned those who think "the peo-

ple are incapable of understanding their own interests."<sup>78</sup> Gregory XVI reciprocated by denouncing Lamennais, this time by name. The bishop of Rennes forced Lamennais's brother, also a priest, to disavow him. In Quebec, onetime admirers of Lamennais took their papal cues and prohibited "anything [being] taught of the books, system or doctrine of that Author." Rectors snatched issues of *L'Avenir* out of seminary libraries.<sup>79</sup>

An embittered Lamennais now publicly denounced the "horrible system of [papal] tyranny which today burdens the people everywhere." He told a colleague that the church "was in a state of complete decadence." Friends pleaded with him to recant. "All agree that deplorable procedures have been used against you," one explained, "but all agree that you have lacked humility."<sup>80</sup> Lamennais did not agree. He abandoned Catholicism and confessed to Montalembert to having long held "very great doubts on many points of Catholicism, doubts which have become stronger since."<sup>81</sup>

One of Lamennais's correspondents during these fateful days was Giuseppe Mazzini, the world's foremost advocate of democratic nationalism. Mazzini founded the "Young Italy" movement just after the revolutions of 1830, and the term reflected his desire to replace the Old Europe of treaties between popes and kings with republican governments. "We will not attempt any alliances with the kings," he announced. "We will not delude ourselves that we can remain free by relying on international treaties and diplomatic tricks."<sup>82</sup>

Lamennais's influence on Mazzini was immense, and references to the Breton writer's "inspired pages" peppered Mazzini's prose.<sup>83</sup> Both men shared an antagonism toward Catholicism in its conservative, ultramontane form, and this clash between ultramontanism and liberal nationalism would soon become a fundamental organizing principle of the nineteenth century. Mazzini invoked the Reform Catholic hero, Bishop Ricci, as an intellectual ancestor who recognized the need to "establish the [principle of the] supremacy of the whole church over the pope in order to save . . . Christianity and religion from the ruin that threatens them."<sup>84</sup>

To Lamennais he was more direct. "The Rome of the Pope condemns you," he confided. Only "the Rome of the people will succeed."<sup>85</sup>

## V

GREGORY XVI HAD denounced Lamennais, but the dream of an ultramontane democracy did not die. Henri Lacordaire, another of the French liberal ultramontanes, still championed "free governments" as confirmed "by the example of Belgium, Ireland, the United States and the republics of [South] America."<sup>86</sup> One of Daniel O'Connell's clerical supporters in Ireland, Bishop John MacHale, mischievously offered an after-dinner toast to "the people, the source of all legitimate power." (Word of the toast reached Rome, and a curial official rebuked an unrepentant MacHale for provoking imperial British authorities.)<sup>87</sup>

One problem faced by these Catholic democrats was increased confessional tension. Protestants watched the ultramontane revival with dismay, and just as Catholics touched by the revival became more intolerant of ecumenical dialogue, so, too, did Protestants. During the 1830s and 1840s, proponents of the "Second Reformation" emerged in England, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada. They founded dozens of Protestant associations with such titles as the Evangelical Alliance, the Protestant Association, and the Protestant League and produced histories of the Reformation that painted Luther, Calvin, and other reformers in heroic colors.<sup>88</sup>

Allied with these Protestants were anticlerical nationalists, much like Mazzini, raised in Catholic countries such as Italy, France, and Mexico but wary of ultramontanism. They rolled their eyes at the religiosity of their Protestant allies—German radicals found it preposterous, for example, that Anglo-American Protestants lobbied for the Sunday closure of beer gardens—but found it easy to join forces against the Roman church, what one contemporary named as our "common enemy."<sup>89</sup>

Both Protestants and anticlerical nationalists stressed Catholicism's enervating effects. A member of Parliament from Glasgow explained: "In Ulster where Protestantism preponderates, there is wealth, comfort, peace, freedom, knowledge, enlightened and real loyalty. In Connaught, where Popery predominates, there is penury, misery, slavery."<sup>90</sup> Switzerland became another proof point. One minister crossing the

border from Catholic Turin toward Protestant Geneva concluded that "the people who drink the stream of Romanism and live on that side, are lean, poor and ignorant."<sup>91</sup>

The notion that Catholicism diminished economic progress was reinforced by a conviction that Catholicism generated retrograde views on the family. The increase in the number of women choosing to enter religious orders—consciously rejecting marriage and the patriarchal family—seemed positively dangerous. Protestant and secular reformers across Europe and North America promoted tales of nuns allegedly imprisoned in convents or lured away from their families. In France, an English Protestant father sparked an international debate by alleging that his twenty-one-year-old daughter had been lured under false pretenses into a French convent.<sup>92</sup> Rumors of imprisoned Protestant girls in Boston led to the burning of an Ursuline convent in 1834. The next year Protestants bitterly complained about "a nunnery" with an attached school in Newfoundland and attempts to "ensnare the poor and ignorant into the trap laid for them."<sup>93</sup>

The most controversial issue in the 1830s was marriage. The problem was simple: how should the state regulate interfaith marriages? In Cologne an aristocratic archbishop, Count Ferdinand August von Spiegel, and the Prussian state negotiated an agreement that Catholic priests could passively "observe" Protestant-Catholic marriages conducted by a Protestant minister. Girls born to Protestant-Catholic marriages would be raised in the faith of the mother and boys in the faith of the father.

This marital détente collapsed in 1837 when a newly appointed ultramontane archbishop with the formidable name of Clemens August von Droste-Vischering angered Prussian officials by insisting that all children of mixed marriages be raised as Catholics. Hardliners in the Roman curia came to his support. Prussian authorities responded by imprisoning Archbishop Droste-Vischering for disturbing the region's religious peace, and this imprisonment made the ultramontane revival a political as well as a religious event. As one of Daniel O'Connell's friends explained, the Cologne crisis demonstrated that "if we consider the State of the Church in Switzerland, Russia, Prussia and elsewhere, we will find it suffering more now from persecution than it has for centuries past."<sup>94</sup>

Advocates on all sides furiously drafted pamphlets, the most famous by Munich's Joseph Görres. (Görres had arranged for the translation of Joseph de Maistre's *Du Pape* into German in the 1820s.) Görres stressed loyalty to the papacy. "I cannot and may not appeal to other than the pope," he pronounced, the "head of the whole Church." The idea that Protestant Prussian bureaucrats would dictate how Catholics understood sacramental marriage was intolerable.<sup>95</sup>

These tensions between Protestants and Catholics, or secular nationalists and Catholics, extended to South America and then back again to Europe. Lamennais's first Spanish translator, Francisco Bilbao, came to public attention for his attacks on the church and its hierarchy in Santiago, Chile. Bilbao assessed Catholicism as in direct opposition to the "human self" and the need for free trade, public education, and representative government.<sup>96</sup> In the early 1840s he made his way to Lima and then Paris, where he again found himself in a maelstrom of anti-Catholic agitation. Eugène Sue had just published a serialized novel, *Le Juif Errant*, that became one of the century's best sellers. Despite the title—"The Wandering Jew"—the plot revolved less around Jews than around crafty Jesuits maneuvering a vast fortune away from an honorable but needy French Protestant family. In Colombia, legislators referenced the novel in an ultimately successful campaign to expel the Jesuits. In Belgium, crowds inspired by the novel vandalized Jesuit residences and schools and chanted anti-Jesuit slogans in the streets.<sup>97</sup>

Bilbao chose this moment to enroll in a course on the Jesuits offered by the historians Jules Michelet and Edgar Quinet at the Collège de France. He learned there that Jesuitism and ultramontanism menaced new nation-states. Michelet and Quinet compiled their lectures into another anti-Catholic text, *The Jesuits*, with global circulation. The choice patriots faced was stark: either "Jesuitism must abolish the spirit of France," Michelet and Quinet explained, "or France must abolish the spirit of Jesuitism."<sup>98</sup> After reading Michelet and Quinet, a Colombian statesman wondered if a Jesuit's "patria" (or homeland) would always be the Society of Jesus, not Colombia, or any single nation-state.<sup>99</sup>

## VI

ON HIS SPEAKING TOURS in the 1840s, Daniel O'Connell demanded the repeal of the union between England and Ireland. He continued to see the papacy as the "spiritual authority" and the "centre of unity, the safeguard of the Church."<sup>100</sup> In contrast to the 1820s, however, when bishops supported O'Connell's campaign for Catholic emancipation without hesitation, the episcopal response to O'Connell's repeal campaign was guarded. Some bishops welcomed O'Connell's efforts; others expressed doubts. The combination of democracy and ultramontanism, so alluring in the 1820s, had lost some of its luster. "It is the first time," wrote O'Connell, "that the people and any part of the Irish hierarchy were divided."<sup>101</sup> The English priest (and future cardinal) Nicholas Wiseman was dismayed by O'Connell's efforts. "I can see no Catholicity," he complained. "I fear it is thoroughly of this world. Repeal, universal suffrage, democracy etc. I have all along hated them and detested them and do so as yet."<sup>102</sup>

British government officials asked Gregory XVI to "discourage agitation" in Ireland. (The pope, who admired O'Connell, did nothing of the sort.)<sup>103</sup> The same British officials—working hand in glove with aristocratic English Catholics—weaned some Irish bishops away from O'Connell's movement by modifying laws forbidding bequests to the church. They arranged increased public funding for the Irish Catholic seminary at Maynooth, which provoked shrieks of protest from newly mobilized Protestant evangelicals in Parliament who accused the government of funding "a Popish Establishment."<sup>104</sup>

Gregory XVI's unexpected death in 1846 seemed an opportunity for O'Connell and other democratic reformers, since Gregory XVI's successor, Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, or Pius IX, offered a more conciliatory vision of the church's role. Pius IX began his papacy by authorizing the first legislative assembly for the Papal States and granting amnesty to political prisoners languishing in papal jails. Celebrations around the world, often led by non-Catholics, marked the apparent reconciliation between the papacy and new ideals of freedom. "The Pope's object," explained one Irish priest based in Rome to a colleague across

the Atlantic, "is to gain the affections of his own subjects by useful reforms, and to re-establish that paternal form of government which is best adapted to the common Father of the faithful."<sup>105</sup> When Pius IX greeted Belgian visitors, he praised the country's combination of democracy and Catholicism. "Thanks to liberty, religion flowers in Belgium," he said, "and it will flower more and more." Belgian students reportedly decorated their rooms with portraits of the pope next to portraits of George Washington.<sup>106</sup>

Gravely ill, Daniel O'Connell decided to journey to Rome and meet this reform-minded pope. When he reached Paris, Charles Montalembert insisted on paying tribute to his shivering friend, wrapped in a blanket and barely able to leave his chair. "Wherever Catholics begin anew to practice civic virtues," Montalembert proclaimed, "and devote themselves to the conquest of their legislative rights under God, it is [O'Connell's] work." No one had done more "for the political education of Catholic people."<sup>107</sup>

O'Connell never reached Rome, but his heart did. He died in Genoa in 1847 after requesting that his heart be carried to Rome, where it was displayed in the chapel of the Irish College, and his body returned to Ireland. At a massive two-day ceremony in O'Connell's honor, encouraged by Pius IX and held at one of Rome's largest churches just a short walk from St. Peter's, Fr. Gioacchino Ventura electrified the audience by denying the need to unify "throne and altar." O'Connell's life conveyed a different message. He had proven that "religion could only be victorious by the aid of liberty."<sup>108</sup>

A new era seemed to have dawned.

#### FOUR

## Triumph

### 1848, Vatican I and the Consolidation of the Catholic Revival

#### I

THE ASSERTION THAT Alexis de Tocqueville and Charles Montalembert were two of the most important French intellectuals of the nineteenth century is uncontroversial. To view them in tandem is less common.<sup>1</sup> Yet their lives bear comparison. Born five years apart, both men grew up in aristocratic families scarred by the revolution. Tocqueville's father served in the royal constitutional guard, and his parents narrowly escaped the guillotine. Montalembert's father fled France in the desperate emigration of 1792 and returned only in 1814.

Neither man followed his father into a military career. Instead they achieved renown as writers and politicians. Montalembert became one of the closest associates of Félicité Lamennais and joined him in heralding a new union between Catholicism and democracy. Tocqueville shot to fame with the 1835 publication of his *Democracy in America*, where he identified Catholics as the "most republican and democratic class in the United States." He rejected the claim made by some radicals during the French Revolution that the "Catholic religion [was] the natural enemy of democracy."<sup>2</sup> When he visited Ireland and met with a group of bishops and clergy, he reported "extremely democratic" sentiments.<sup>3</sup>

When in Paris, the two men dined together. When not in Paris,