

Christianity and revolutionary Europe, 1750–1830

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1 Church structures and ministry

The Christian culture of Europe

From Ireland to Russia and from Sweden to Sicily, the peoples and states of Europe in the mid-eighteenth century predominantly professed Christianity. Even Europeans living within the Ottoman Turkish Empire – in the Balkans, Greece and the eastern Mediterranean littoral – had largely held on to the faith and not adopted the rival Islamic monotheism of their overlords. Its roots went deep. Since the Arab conquests in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe had been confirmed as the heartland of Christianity, with its main spiritual leaders in 1750 resident in Rome, Constantinople, Moscow, Canterbury and Geneva. For most men and women Christianity was not one option among competing alternatives; it was part of one's inheritance. To be born a Frenchman or a Dane, a Scot or a Hungarian, or into any other European nation or empire, was by definition to be born a Christian unless one belonged to one of the numerically insignificant minority religions, principally Judaism. Christianity had to be actually disclaimed; otherwise the assumption was universally made that, to whatever extent, the individual subscribed to the Christian view of the world and the scheme of salvation it offered to man.

Even the deists respected the figure of Jesus Christ while rejecting his claims to divinity. They tended to present him as someone who, like themselves, had been misrepresented by the authorities of the day as a threat to their power. Unbelievers had to be exceptionally courageous to avow their infidelity. Deists and Christians alike saw the profession of atheism as a threat to social cohesion. Voltaire, the most famous *philosophe* of them all, was apprehensive that moral anarchy would inevitably follow on from a denial of God: it was not until the 1760s that he felt safe to publish extracts from the so-called *Testament* of the French country priest Jean Meslier (d. 1729), by which date some Parisian salons, notably the Baron d'Holbach's, had flung aside concealment and were openly fostering atheist publications and values. D'Holbach had few

imitators. Irreligious sentiments articulated with conviction remained a rarity, largely confined to the upper reaches of society and seldom heard in public utterance. They belonged to a well-established libertine tradition. Clerical concern that these views were on the increase and spreading among the population at large could not just be dismissed as alarmist by the later eighteenth century when public, written challenges to the faith were appearing, especially in the western European states, designed for a wide readership and combining the old slogans against ‘priestcraft’ with the latest enlightenment materialism. There is a limited sense in which such writings were sapping the prevailing Christian culture, but equally the influence of these ‘Men of Letters’ (except for the greatest among them, like Voltaire) was minimal in comparison with the omnipresence of the Church on the ground through its ministry to the mass of people.

That ministry, in all its diversity, gave some lingering credibility to the notion of Christendom as commensurate with the frontiers of Europe, although not in the shape of a seamless medieval web (in as much as there had ever been one), for the Reformation had led to the ‘confessionalisation’ of a unitary Christendom, fragmented into at least three main confessional Churches. With the last public reference to Christendom in the Treaty of Utrecht 1713, it ‘slowly entered the limbo of archaic words’.¹ Nevertheless, there survived a general Christian polity characterised by denominational tensions among Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox believers coexisting with an underlying commitment to the same historic faith differently perceived; the litany used in the Church of England still included prayers for Catholic Christians threatened by the Turks. Religion was formative in the maturing of national identities: Gallican Catholicism took pride in having a longer pedigree than the French monarchy and members of the Church of England were taught to look on its providential survival as a sign of God’s favour towards the nation. These were relatively settled states where national identity was not much contested. Other ethnic communities struggled to secure recognition. In the Ottoman Empire the Greeks made the most of the Hellenisation policy favoured by the Porte, regardless of its effects on other Christian national groups trying to survive in a multinational and multiconfessional polity. More and more national Churches were allotted to the oversight of the (Greek) patriarch in the Ottoman capital, Constantinople. In 1766 the Serbian patriarchate of Péc was suppressed, and the following year the Bulgarian Church came under the aegis of the patriarch with the forced retirement of Arsemnis, archbishop of Ochrid. Catholics in

¹ Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (rev. edn, Edinburgh, 1968), 116.

Ireland and Poland found external influences in the shape of Britain and Russia hard to contain. Polish Catholics were increasingly coming under Prussian, Russian and Austrian control after the Partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795. By and large, toleration was extended to Polish Catholics by their new Russian overlord. Indeed in 1798, the very year that French troops occupied Rome, Paul I created six new sees for Roman Catholics and twelve for Uniates, an orthodox tsar as protector of the papacy.

The Czech educational pioneer, Jan Amos Comenius, had hoped in the late seventeenth century that European unity could be founded on religious federation and toleration. It was visionary but impractical. Religious schism had given Christians an overriding loyalty to their own preferred allegiance, but there were always a few, such as Archbishop William Wake of Canterbury early in the century, who had a wider vision of what united the Churches. He had entered into conversations with several French churchmen after the contentious passing of the Bull *Unigenitus* directed at Jansenists in 1713 to see if a basis could be found for a working union of the Anglican and Gallican communions. Though the scheme had lapsed by the late 1720s, it played its part in diminishing tensions between the two Churches down to the French Revolution and beyond. Within a British context, well-connected Irish Catholics in the 1780s with the Franciscan friar Fr Arthur O'Leary as their spokesman urged Anglicans to look favourably on the Irish version of 'Gallicanism' – shorn of Jacobitism and papalism – as a far more suitable ally than Protestant sects of dubious credal orthodoxy. Other Anglicans reactivated the links between the Church of England and Orthodoxy dating from Archbishop Laud's primacy in the 1630s. Charles Daubeny (1745–1827), later archdeacon of Salisbury, was in Russia between 1771 and 1772 and made a study of Orthodox theology and ecclesiology, which was of importance in the formation of his own influential brand of high churchmanship.

In Germany, there was a more generous attitude to inter-confessional relations evident at elite level towards the end of the century. More than one scheme for Church reunion was mooted, that winning support at the Congress of Ems in 1786 attracting most notice, though less than it deserved, overlaid as it was by the Congress' extreme anti-papalism. In Hungary, the distance between the Catholics and the Calvinists was narrowing even in Maria Theresa's reign (1740–80). The abilities of József Batthyány, primate of Hungary at Joseph II's accession, could not be denied by Protestants. Their spokesmen could find little worse to say about him than that he was inordinately fond of his skills as a chess player. When famine broke out he provided for his Calvinist serfs just as for the others.

Between 1750 and 1790 the Protestant sense of solidarity gradually diluted as Catholicism became less of a threat. When one of Archbishop Herring's clients, Ferdinando Warner, spoke in 1752 of 'those amiable qualities in your grace [which] are acknowledged by protestants of all denominations, not only in our three kingdoms, but in the most distant countries'.² Anglican interest in their co-religionists beyond the British Isles had already passed its peak. In the Seven Years' War (1756–63), another archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Secker, tried to foster links between the Church of England and continental congregations looking to Britain's ally, Frederick II of Prussia, for protection, but the return of peace in 1763 made the increasing number of non-latitudinarian Anglicans less inclined to speak sympathetically of non-Episcopal Churches where heterodoxy appeared to flourish. Ministers still made gestures of solidarity. Henry Seymour Conway, when British secretary of state for the Northern Department between 1765 and 1768, urged British diplomats to agitate for full civil liberties for Protestants in Poland and to co-ordinate their efforts with those of the Russians. But this was one of the last such requests.

Attitudes to other faiths

The vast majority of Christians were suspicious, sometimes overtly hostile to other faiths. Anti-Semitism was rife at every level of eighteenth-century society, with Ashkenazim stereotypes impossible to displace from both the popular and elite consciousness. These images were decisive in the public agitation in England surrounding the Jew Bill of 1753 and pushed the Pelham administration into repeal and an embarrassing volte-face; in France, some limited concessions were offered to the monied Sephardim traders of the Bordelais in return for additional tax burdens, while their Ashkenazim cousins in Alsace and Lorraine were left to pay the poll tax and suffer other social indignities, perhaps because of their usefulness as money-lenders to the gentiles. Enlightenment thinkers did little to dilute popular resentments, seeing Hebraism as a conservative, marginal and backward-looking culture which resisted integration, and progressive politicians fought shy of alleviating the Jews' uncertain legal status precisely because nothing raised the temperature in eighteenth-century public culture more than changes to the religious status quo. Muslims were, if anything, less indulged and their faith was presented in every sort of Christian apologetic as a sham, a travesty and

² Ferdinando Warner, *A Rational Defence of the English Reformation and Protestant Religion* (London, 1752), v–vi.

a blasphemy with Muhammad traditionally condemned as an imposter. Positive acknowledgement of his extraordinary qualities as a leader and law giver were only gradually given in the late Enlightenment.

The infidel and the exotic enticed as well as repelled the European gaze. This slant is well seen in a stock character like Osmin, overseer of Pasha Selim's harem in Mozart's *Seraglio*, who combined a hatred of Christianity and a cruel nature with the repression of women. This venomous perspective partly reflected the fact that Islam had been pushed to the margins of Europe only within living memory and its containment could not be assumed. The Barbary corsairs, pirates from North African states dependent on Ottoman Turkey, still preyed on western trade and rumours regularly circulated in the Mediterranean ports of forced conversions. In the east, the Austrian Empire had been steadily extended at Ottoman expense after the successful campaigns of the 1690s and 1716–18, but there was no room for complacency. The Ottoman Turks revealed their military resilience in the war of 1737–9 when they recaptured Belgrade from the Habsburgs, and down to the mid-century there was no shortage of interest in proposing (on paper at least) joint offensives of the European states against the infidel. The Order of Malta, a Catholic crusading Order that ruled Malta, had branches throughout Europe, especially in France, and still took its historic role seriously. Increased commercial contact and a growing number of western travellers in Islamic areas of Europe only slowly altered perceptions of the Turks and their holy book. The stereotype might equate Turkish rule with tyranny, but on the other hand, Orthodox Christians living in Ottoman territories often found the sultan's yoke remarkably light, and the patriarch of Jerusalem can be found in 1798 warning his flock off liberty, that foreign invention, to render tribute to Caesar (in this case the sultan) and be glad 'that this our Orthodox faith flourishes in this powerful empire'.³ Challenged on the fringes of Europe by Islam, the Christian reaction to the discovery of the New World had been to win it over to Christ, backed by the support of sponsoring states. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church had a massive institutional presence in Spanish South and Central America, the Philippines and French Canada; in the British thirteen colonies of North America, a variety of Protestant faiths jostled for supremacy, fearful of the popish threat until that was neutralised by British success in the Seven Years' War. By that date, Christianity was as much part of the dominant American culture as it was of the European.

³ Quoted in Richard Clogg (ed.), *The Movement for Greek Independence 1770–1821* (Basingstoke, 1976), 56–62, at 59.

Roman Catholicism

While religious allegiances could assist in the construction of national identity, the varieties of confessional Christianity in the eighteenth century were rarely coterminous with state boundaries. That was especially true of the Roman Catholic Church, with its own independent head in Rome directly descended, as it was claimed, from St Peter. The Catholic Church, as its apologists were not slow to point out, was an institution which predated every contemporary European state, whose hierarchy existed alongside the secular bureaucracies of nation states, and declared itself uniquely to possess the hallmarks of divine inauguration. In numerical terms alone, Roman Catholicism was the dominant Christian communion as much in the 1750s as it had been a century previously, instructing men and women in their sacramental and social duties in this world and preparing them for eternity in the next. It was a Church that had already displayed its capacity for adaptation and survival when confronted with the Protestant challenge of the Reformation, and the steady implementation of Tridentine initiatives first formulated in the mid-sixteenth century was reaching a successful conclusion in the mid-eighteenth. Ireland was the most recent region to display what has been called a 'Tridentine surge' and, though dated as late as the 1770s, bore fruit in the form of tighter clerical organisation, regular episcopal visitations, more diocesan conferences and the moral improvement of the laity. At the other end of Europe, the Church had since 1699 benefited numerically from the advances made into former Ottoman lands and the active patronage of the empress Maria Theresa. Islamic expansionism had been checked and so, it seemed, had Protestantism, which had made no significant European conquests since about 1600, though the problem of clandestine Protestantism (*Geheimprotestantismus*) among minorities caused much restlessness to over-anxious officials in the Habsburg monarchy. Despite the reconquest of Hungary, the majority of its nobility remained stubbornly attached to their Calvinist faith as a means of safeguarding their legal freedoms from imperial encroachment. Meanwhile, beyond Europe, missionaries of the different denominations looked to win new followers from among indigenous peoples and swell their ranks that way.

Even where governments were hostile to Roman Catholicism and its representatives (and thus had no envoy resident at the Vatican), there was frequently a Catholic minority in a state's population – as in Prussia or Britain – that was increasingly left unmolested whatever the strict letter of the law. Elsewhere, in the majority of European states – Ireland, France, the kingdoms of Spain, Portugal, the Italian principalities, about

one-third of the Holy Roman Empire, most of the Habsburg hereditary lands, Bavaria, Poland – Catholics composed the vast bulk of the Christian population. In Germany there were even several ecclesiastical states (there were thirty-seven voting members of the spiritual bench of the *Reichsfürstenrat* in 1792) where one ruler combined the role of prince and prelate, notably the three electoral Rhineland states of Cologne, Mainz and Trier, whose possession had until recently been a subject of intense diplomatic competition. Whatever the local usages in worship and observances (and they were not inconsiderable), people of all backgrounds heard the offices in the same Latin tongue, and respected the ecclesiastical hierarchy at the same time as they grumbled about it. Church membership and responsibility as citizens and subjects were still inextricably linked.

Protestant denominations

The pretensions to universalism implicit in the word Catholic remained despite the reality of religious division on the continent. Certainly, Protestantism continued to see the Roman communion as much intent on its destruction as it had been at the height of the Counter-Reformation in the previous century, never mind the legal provisions upholding the confessional status quo for Germany contained in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). These apprehensions reflected the inherent vulnerability of Protestantism on account of its own divisions and a gradual diminution of vitality within most denominations since the later years of the Reformation. But, as will be discussed later, renewal was already under way in Britain and Germany by the 1750s and the Protestant denominations would slowly recapture their sense of initiative, fuelled by an enlightenment perception that Protestantism was, uniquely among the Churches, on the side of moral and cultural progress. Such confidence was apparent in the influential writing of Friedrich Karl von Moser, a Pietist and hater of princely absolutism. His pamphleteering in the Osnabrück succession crisis – especially *Concerning the Government of the Ecclesiastical States in Germany* (1787) – classically linked Protestant pride in its reasonable faith with progressivist hopes. By contrast, in the words of one Scottish critic of 1781, the Roman Catholic faith ‘hath ever evinced itself to be most inimical to the Civil and Religious rights of mankind’.⁴

The various Protestant Churches had one key advantage over their Catholic counterparts: they were used to working with secular governments

⁴ Joseph Callender to Lord Hailes, 2 January 1781, National Library of Scotland, New Hailes MS. 25303, f. 106.

(indeed their legal subordination to state power went back to the Reformation) and were mostly adaptable enough not to be constrained thereby. The times of defensiveness and sometimes persecution were almost over, and the years between 1750 and 1790 brought recovery as well as theological liberalism on one hand and evangelism on the other, as some Protestants opted to dilute orthodoxy just when their brothers and sisters were taking a stand on it. The mainstream Reformed Churches still belonged either to the Lutheran or Calvinist traditions, although the dividing line between them became increasingly blurred. Lutheranism's principal bastions remained centred on a Baltic zone: Sweden, Denmark and Prussia with the majority of other German states. Calvinists looked, as they had always done, to Geneva as their mother Church, but outside Switzerland had substantial numbers in eastern Europe (Poland and Transylvania), as well as Scotland, the United Provinces and a minority of German states.

In the course of the eighteenth century both Lutheran and Calvinist Churches became characterised by a formalism (especially visible in forms of worship) that bore witness to a blunted evangelical impulse. That was left more and more to minority Protestant groups such as the Baptists, whose numbers rose steadily. For many Protestants the message of Christian salvation, while still at the heart of their faith, had become somehow less urgent, not least since the legacy of the Thirty Years' War had been to make men doubt the value of conversion at any price, including the life of anyone unresponsive. Those, as in Germany, who rejected arid theological disputation in favour of Pietism, with its fostering of practicality and benevolence, downgraded interest in the niceties of doctrine concerning Christ's redemptive work; but Pietism had a deeply spiritual dimension as well, which satisfied the inner aspirations of thousands of Germans and helped to turn it into such a formidable presence within contemporary Protestantism. Initially distrusted by the Lutheran hierarchy, from the mid-century Pietism became the new German Protestant orthodoxy in Prussia thanks to powerful support from the Hohenzollern monarchy, and it made significant inroads in Holland, Scandinavia and Switzerland.

Its spiritual emphases much influenced John Wesley, co-founder with his brother, Charles, of the Methodist revival within the Church of England. Like the vast majority of eighteenth-century Anglicans, the Wesleys saw their Church as unflinchingly Protestant despite pre-Reformation survivals such as the division of the ministry into bishops, priests and deacons, and an influential strand of teaching on the Eucharist which went well beyond the merely commemorative. Anglicans were to be found wherever English was spoken, and in some parts of the

British kingdoms where it was not: despite establishment, Anglicanism was slowly giving ground to dissent in Wales, it was professed by no more than 20 per cent of the population in Ireland, and it was technically illegal in Scotland from 1689 to 1792 unless clergy and their congregations renounced Jacobitism to take advantage of the 1712 Act of Toleration. Membership of the Church of England functioned as a token of good citizenship and this contributed to its distinctive mid-century stress on benevolism rather than personal piety. Nevertheless, from the 1750s, the growth of Methodism and the high church revival between them rekindled an interest in the Church's spiritual heritage hitherto submerged: Wesley's insistence that every penitent sinner had access to Christ's saving grace recalled the Arminian theology of 1630s Laudianism and was just one aspect of the Caroline inheritance of the Church of England and its apologists – Henry Hammond, Jeremy Taylor and Peter Heylyn – which young Oxford-educated clerics such as George Berkeley, Samuel Glasse, George Horne and William Jones found an inspiration in their own ministry.

The Orthodox Churches and the Uniates

The Orthodox Church in Russia was, like the Church of England, seen as the appropriate focus of allegiance in the tsar's domains for all his loyal subjects, and attempts at non-Orthodox proselytisation had been prohibited in 1702 and 1735. Yet alone of the principal European denominations, the Russian Orthodox Church was afflicted by schism. Perhaps one-fifth of the population was made up of the so-called Old Believers. This minority (themselves divided into sub-sects) had broken away in the late seventeenth century primarily on theological grounds from the main body of the Church protected by the tsars, and their existence was tolerated after the accession of Peter III in 1762. But Orthodoxy flourished beyond the Russian frontiers. Historically, its centre was not Moscow but Constantinople, the New Rome and the old capital of Byzantium, and its head – taking precedence over the patriarch of Moscow – was the ecumenical patriarch, resident in a city that had been controlled by the Ottoman Turks since 1453. In practice, the ecumenical patriarchate was controlled by the prosperous and influential Greek families of Constantinople, the Phanariots, and they made narrowly Greek concerns uppermost in Orthodox politics across the Balkan region. In Serbia and Bulgaria, birth into a Slavic culture brought with it membership of the Orthodox Church, and a sense of being on the front line against Islam. Its Slavic character, distinctive rituals and rejection of the universal claims of Rome had largely isolated it from the post-Reformation conflicts of

the western Churches, and this left it less exposed to enlightenment challenges. Meanwhile, the historic schism with the western Church was reignited in 1755 when, for the first time, doubt was cast upon the validity of baptism administered by Latin Catholics in the patriarchal decree, the *Oros* of that year, issued by Kyrillos V.

With confessional divisions exacerbated, Orthodoxy felt particularly exposed to Catholic intimidation on its western frontier, despite Benedict XIV's sensitive letter *Allatae sunt* of 1755, issued to Latin missionaries and advising them against unseemly zeal in trying to make proselytes among eastern Christians. Rome's main ally in these parts was the Uniate (or Greek Catholic) Church, whose rivalry with Orthodoxy went back centuries. The Uniates recognised papal supremacy; the Orthodox, of course, did not. In line with the respective imperial interests, the two empresses adopted predictably contrasting policies. Maria Theresa always tried hard to guarantee Uniate independence, whereas Catherine saw it as a threat to Romanov sovereignty, and she readily approved an intensification of the Orthodox Church's longstanding proselytising of Uniates. In 1773, the very year the Russian empress proclaimed religious liberty, forcible conversion to Orthodoxy began in the former Polish provinces of Volhynia and Podolia. With Cossacks billeted on villagers, resistance brought torture or death. Many 'conversions' were merely nominal and by Catherine's death in 1796 at least one-fifth of Uniate populations remained true to their ancestral faith and were accorded a limited degree of respite and recognition by her son and successor, Paul I (1796–1801). Orthodoxy received fewer favours from the Russian crown in Poland. The single Orthodox prelate, the bishop of Mohilow, was forced to look for protection from the Protestant nobility in the face of a Catholic confessional predominance. After the first partition, Catherine in 1773 created a Latin see at Moghilev in White Russia and attached all Catholics to it as a means of both extending her control and winning over Polish Catholics to their new ruler.

The growth of toleration

No single theme united eighteenth-century critics of the European religious heritage more than the deprecation of intolerance. Partly as a result of pressure from such gifted spokesmen for this cause as John Locke and Pierre Bayle in the early Enlightenment (1680–1720), governments pressurised the leading denominations to move towards abandoning the active persecution of religious dissidents. The trend has a massive significance. Since the Reformation it had been a commonplace of statecraft that a plurality of faiths resulted in political instability, and the underlying principle

of the Treaty of Augsburg (1555) – ‘*cuius regio, eius religio*’ – had recognised as much. Religious toleration was for weak states; strong ones, like Louis XIV’s France as recently as 1685, threw out their minorities. Yet even those countries that had not participated in the Thirty Years’ War could see that the Treaty of Westphalia, with its guarantees for the established position of Calvinism, Lutheranism and Catholicism in particular territories in the empire, pointed to the bankruptcy of any policy aimed at compulsorily imposing religious uniformity. This was a commitment to toleration in a highly legalistic format via religious checks and balances in the constitution of the German *Reich*. These ensured that the Catholic majorities in the *Reichstag* were not converted into a voting bloc which could always have the whip hand over the Protestant deputies making up the *Corpus Evangelicorum* in the Council of Princes (*Fürstenrat*) and the Council of Cities (*Städterat*). It also justified many hardheaded local arrangements. At Frankfurt-am-Main, the main city church belonged to the Catholics but, with Lutheranism as the dominant confession locally, Catholic clergy were forbidden from holding public processions. In some towns iron gates and partitions in church marked out the space to which each was entitled.

Individual princes might convert from one faith to another; the post-1648 Church order in Germany stood unchanged. It was, in any case, rare for confessional allegiances to take primacy over state ones, as the alliance of Catholic spiritual princes and Protestant territorial states in the *Fürstenbund* of 1785 suggested in the face of Joseph’s aggressive imperial policies. Neither side lightly contemplated giving up the benefits of Westphalia, though it could not constrain the Habsburgs in Maria Theresa’s time from trying to impose Catholicism on Protestant communities in eastern Europe (converts were lured by government ‘pensions’), or provoking a rising in 1760 among Orthodox Transylvanians who had no wish to be forced into the Uniate Church. Still more notoriously, a Church-dominated statelet, Salzburg, under its archbishop, Firmian, expelled 18,000 Protestants in 1731–2. Such a use of coercive power was unusual by that date. Churchmen might still talk in the early eighteenth century of ‘religion’ in the sense of the one *true* religion, but they were also facing up to the fact that neither Protestantism nor popery were broken forces, and that some sort of contingent recognition of the cultural persistence of the other was unavoidable. Religious tensions slowly decreased as it became apparent that no great power alliance was interested in trying to extirpate a particular confession. Even so, ordinary subjects still tended, however misguidedly, to see wars as confessional conflicts casting Frederick II of Prussia as a (very unlikely) Protestant champion, for the Seven Years’ War looked like a confessional conflict due to

the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 which had aligned the Habsburg and Bourbon dynasties.

It was the sheer persistence of religious minorities that defied assimilation that made toleration (however partial and restricted) a *de facto* reality quite as much as the outraged writings of the *philosophes*. The rights of Catholics in the United Provinces were deliberately limited but that did nothing to reduce their numbers, relying as they did on the long-established tradition of tolerance in the Dutch Netherlands. Elsewhere, such civilised restraint could still not be relied on, and religious homogeneity remained the norm outside Britain, France (a Huguenot presence made a nonsense of the legal pretence that they had lapsed in 1685, and Lutherans in Alsace had legal guarantees) and Prussia where the head of state was Calvinist (since 1613), the majority of his subjects were Lutheran and where there was a strong Catholic minority in Silesia, annexed to Prussia by Frederick II in 1740. Otherwise, in Catholic Iberia and Italy, Protestant Scandinavia, Orthodox central Russia, and the Holy Roman Empire (mainly solidly Catholic or Protestant principalities), uniformity persisted.

But while religious identities could act as a means of group definition they could equally provoke a sense of insecurity among those on the outside. Whatever the development of tolerance within elites, crowds were ready to use religion as a banner around which to focus discontent against minorities, especially during war or an economic downturn, as in Scotland against Catholics in 1778–9, and rational dissenters in Birmingham during the Priestley Riots of 1791. In France, the Seven Years' War rekindled the last campaigns against the Huguenots, popularly perceived as likely British allies in the event of an invasion. Even before war erupted in 1756 there were signs of persecution: at Toulon in 1754 Grand Tourists Henry Lyte and Lord Brudenell saw nine Calvinists brought in from Nîmes to be confined to the galleys for having assembled contrary to law.⁵ There as elsewhere, toleration was a precarious growth until very late in the century. Religious leaders only reluctantly conceded a place to opponents in their scheme of things, and in rural parishes the discountenancing of other faiths remained in the last quarter of the century a far stronger emotion than toleration.

The ordained ministry of the Churches

At least most men and women had the proximity to a clergyman that made sacerdotal influence a possibility in forming their reaction to other

⁵ Henry Lyte to Lord Dartmouth, 9 December 1754, *HMC, 20th Report (1887), MSS of the Earl of Dartmouth*, 331.

denominations and faiths. A sense of the black-coated presence was a background feature to most people's daily lives and underlined the continuing high ratio of clergy to laymen. Only in Catholic France was there anything approaching a 'general crisis of vocations' in the second half of the eighteenth century, and that varied considerably between dioceses. Otherwise, judged by the number of priests and ministers, the eighteenth-century Churches were in a fairly healthy state. Up to 2 per cent of the population of the states of continental Europe described themselves as clerics. Indeed, in the Iberian peninsula there was a surplus of priests (a total of about 170,000, nearly one-third more than in France) for the available benefices. Protestant ministers were generally fewer in number: about 14,000 in Lutheran Sweden, and approximately the same number in England. Among Catholic clergy, the vast majority of priests headed for the parishes rather than the religious houses. Spain was an exception. By 1768, 15,639 parish priests were confronted by 55,453 regulars in Spain, and friars frequently assisted the curate even in places where the number of parishes was adequate. Only in Poland and the Franciscan Order in Spain and Portugal were there exceptions to the international trend of declining numbers entering the religious Orders. Indeed, soon after her accession to the Portuguese throne in 1777, the pious Maria I forbade the institution of new Orders by royal decree. Between 1768 and 1782 in Milan the 5,609 individuals registered in 290 monasteries had been reduced to less than 4,000 in 141 establishments. By contrast, female vocations held up fairly well, if only because the cloister remained the standard alternative to marriage or a lonely spinsterhood, especially for women from better-off families.

The social background of the ordained ministry varied, with younger sons of the nobility dominating the upper reaches of the hierarchy in most states; these formed part of wider patronage networks where kinship and familiarity with court life were crucial to promotion. Lesser nobles predominated among the Spanish and Portuguese bishops, as well as the states of Naples, Venice and Piedmont. The French episcopate in 1789 came to number just two commoners; in the German Empire the imperial knights dominated bishoprics and canonries, and held the Electorates of Mainz and Trier; in Cologne the archbishop had to be at least an imperial count (the Wittelsbach family dominated the see for much of the century). Every Rhineland cathedral chapter and most collegiate foundations had stringent genealogical tests to exclude even nobles with an inadequate number of quarterings or the wrong kind of nobility. In Hungary the leading aristocratic families shared out the archbishoprics among themselves and so formed an exclusive clerical club. Italy went against this trend, with only about 30 per cent of dioceses in the possession

of noblemen, though the number of Venetian patricians entering the Church doubled between 1620 and 1760.

Upper-class bishops were by no means inadequate to their task, with colourful as well as able personalities among them: Talleyrand (bishop of Autun from 1788) was a gifted agent-general for the French Church (1780–5), Loménie de Brienne, archbishop of Toulouse, the archetypal *prélat administrateur*, and Frederick Hervey, earl-bishop of Derry (Church of Ireland), a pioneer of harmonious Anglican–Catholic relations. But scholarly or administrative gifts, though prized, were unlikely in themselves to ensure the highest Church offices, with important exceptions, such as Hontheim (a.k.a. Febronius) who rose to be suffragan bishop of Trier, and others in Spain and England. There, prelates such as Joseph Butler, Thomas Herring and Thomas Secker came from humble backgrounds but were as able as any in Europe. Another exception were the imperial monasteries where many of the abbots were also commoners. In Russia an episcopal elite of another sort was emerging, originating increasingly from talented members of the clerical estate or the aristocracy for whom a career in the impoverished monasteries was not enticing.

Few bishops served as parish priests, and the chances of the latter gaining promotion to a mitre were comparably remote. Thus Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, author of the most influential pamphlet of 1789, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers état?*, was advanced to membership of the cathedral chapter at Chartres and became secretary to the bishop but advanced no further. Most beneficed Catholic clergy in the eighteenth century were educated men from lower-middle-class backgrounds, with friends and family living close by, enjoying a high enough standard of living (particularly where they had tithing rights) to employ servants. They had little contact with their diocesan head except during visitations, confirmation tours or political occasions. Only in the Anglican Church were rectors and vicars from gentry backgrounds to be found in any significant number. Social barriers between higher and lower clergy generated limited resentment before the 1790s, reflecting as they did the kind of obstacles to preferment that had their equivalents in the secular world; it was more the poverty of so many benefices and the social disdain of the episcopate which led to the growth of Richerist sentiments in Brittany and the Dauphiné regions of France, with appreciable political consequences in the late 1780s. The bishop/parish priest divide had its counterpart in the gap between beneficed clergy and the clerical proletariat composed of those priests who had no living and were obliged to exist as best they could on the fringes of parish life. In Protestant states where clerical marriage was popular, the resulting indigency affected whole families.

There were immense variations in conceptualising the nature of ministerial vocations. Minority Protestant denominations, which emphasised the personal nature of religious commitment, looked for signs of an inward experience from their would-be pastors. In the mainstream Churches, 'enthusiasm' was frowned upon and motives could be less dramatically compelling. Younger sons from elite backgrounds with political ambitions might find the Church the right vehicle to give them the prominence that birth had denied them, as the growing number of bishops from peers' families packing the upper reaches of the Churches of England and Ireland between 1770 and 1830 testified. At a broader social level among Lutheran and Anglican ordinands, a dynastic tradition could impel young men to the cloth, and every generation would have at least one of its representatives take holy orders. A career in the Church was an appropriate and respectable occupation, especially if there were well-placed relatives to offer the newly priested a helping hand on the high road to preferment. The persuasion and example of the family also played its part in inducing young non-aristocratic Roman Catholics to seek ordination, though the vitality of religious life locally also affected the numbers coming forward. Here, as in all principal confessions, the status conferred by holy orders remained a strong inducement for men considering a ministerial vocation.

Church finances

Another one was the desire to benefit personally from the privileges enjoyed by the Churches. These survived in some number alongside their temporal counterparts and were vigorously defended throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, as will be considered later, it was customary at coronation ceremonies for new monarchs to swear to uphold existing clerical privileges. These could include tax exemptions, legal immunities, land in mortmain from the bequests of the faithful, and guaranteed seats in local Estates. In countries such as England where minority denominations enjoyed limited toleration, dissenters were quick to defend their statutory concessions and expect to see them upheld by the courts, as in 1767 when Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled that the City of London was not entitled to raise funds from dissenters to pay for its new Mansion House. Privilege was not seen as anomalous in eighteenth-century Europe but as the basis of liberty, strong enough to resist the desire of monarchs to bring about a degree of institutional levelling and centralisation in the interests of their own power. Privilege and corporate status thus went together, and ecclesiastical rights should be seen as part of a much wider and often confused jurisdictional framework that stretched across society.

Clerical privileges were bound up with the maintenance of Church wealth. That in turn necessitated limited outgoings in the form of taxation towards the costs of running the state (whatever the risk of compromising a developing public profile for 'patriotism' in its various guises), though it was increasingly difficult for the clergy to avoid shouldering their fair share of costs. Direct tax immunities were most marked in Catholic territories, and where an offering was made, the clergy were keen to emphasise that it should be seen as recognition of a moral obligation rather than a legal requirement. In France the General Assembly of the Clergy was ready to make a voluntary contribution or *don gratuit* to ministers every five years (more in wartime), a device which formally kept the Church outside the taxation system, a preference it successfully defended against attempts to force the First Estate of the kingdom to pay the *vingtième* along with the rest of the population in 1749. Spain's war effort in the 1790s was possible thanks to the generosity of the Church. Protestant Churches, including the established religions in England and Scotland, enjoyed no such exemptions because their lesser property stakes decreased their bargaining power, and the Church of England's Canterbury and York Convocations (which anyway had no tax-raising powers) were prorogued permanently between 1717 and the 1850s.

Whatever the local custom, governments were not disposed to let the clergy escape their share of the tax burden. They were well aware that established Churches, especially Catholic ones, derived the bulk of their income from land and their complete exemption was impracticable. Thus in Austria the Church was subjected to the heavier Contribution (direct tax) introduced by Haugwitz in 1749 on the same basis as other landowners. It has been estimated that in most Catholic states the Church owned between 7 and 20 per cent of the land, rising to 40 per cent in Austria and 56 per cent in Bavaria in 1764. Even in Protestant areas of Germany, where so much had passed to rulers during the Reformation, Church estates still generated considerable income. The Churches depended on land for the maintenance of their status in societies where power was a concomitant of property ownership. Churchmen were constantly watchful of lay and royal encroachment on their estates and their seigniorial rights (where they survived), and litigation on the subject was frequent. But they could not stop the prevention of future mortmain extensions in France in 1749, the Austrian Netherlands in 1753, Venice and Austria in 1767, Naples between 1769 and 1772, Bavaria in 1764, and a statutory tightening of the regulations on that subject for the Church of England in 1736. Such continuing lay generosity and the governmental concern it provoked is one of the interesting indicators that suggests indifference to institutional religion should not be exaggerated.



1. The consecration by Scottish non-juring bishops in Aberdeen on 14 November 1784 of Samuel Seabury (1729–96) as first Anglican bishop to serve in the newly independent United States.

In Russia the restrictions went much further: all ecclesiastical revenues were secularised in 1764. The Russian parish clergy saw little or no material improvements for themselves and still had to rely on collections in kind from their parishioners and the products of the harvest from the land they tilled personally.

Like any other landlord, clergy wanted to maximise income from their holdings, and the Churches were keen to encourage agricultural proficiency on their estates in the second half of the century. In England, parsons farming their own glebe had every incentive to pioneer improvements, and throughout Europe there was appreciable profit to be derived from ecclesiastical property leased out to lay tenants. However, the mainstay of Church wealth were tithes. They were payable by parishioners to the established faith of the state in which they were domiciled, irrespective of their own confessional allegiance. Payment was traditionally in kind or, increasingly after 1750, made in cash. Tithes were levied throughout Europe, except in Russia. They corresponded to approximately one-tenth of gross production, but the variations across Catholic Europe

were innumerable. It was on average slightly less than 10 per cent in France, the Austrian Netherlands and Poland, only 4 per cent in Italy, and often as high as 12 per cent in Spain and Portugal. Tithe was intended to support the ordinary parish clergy but this was not always possible where it had been alienated to a lay impropiator (in Protestant states such as England or Prussia), or to another religious body like a monastery or cathedral chapter. They drew the profit, allowing the incumbent only a percentage for his own use. In France this was the *portion congrue*, which kept a high proportion of parish *curés* on or below the poverty line and it was correspondingly resented, despite substantial increases in 1768 and 1786. Tithe was much disliked by unbeneficed clergy who were not eligible for it, and by those who held benefices but were not entitled to the profits. Though the main representative of the Church on the ground, they could be left to struggle along on small fees levied for services of baptism, burial and masses for the dead, fees on which they subsisted, but whose insensitive imposition could easily sour relations with their flocks. These were the neglected foot soldiers of the Church whose services could too easily be taken for granted by the clerical elites.

So while tithe was essential to the Church's financial good health, enabling it to fund education and social welfare and act as a token of its institutional independence from the state, it was a burden rather than a benefit to the tithe payers. It was a heavy load on the laity who paid it at harvest time, and was crucial in fomenting rural anticlericalism. As one clerical poet put it in the early 1760s:

Too well, alas! too fatally I know –
 From whence these complicated evils flow;
 From tythes, from tythes, the clergy's woes arise
 They mar religion, nay, they rob the skies:⁶

It was especially resented where parishioners were not members of the denomination they were supporting. Thus in Ireland the vast majority of Catholics and Presbyterians were legally required to maintain the Anglican Church, whose clergy relied on professional agents or 'proctors' to collect their dues. It was against their crippling demands that the 'Whiteboys' directed their agrarian attacks in the 1760s. They were the self-appointed spokesmen for a majority Catholic community whose own priests also looked to them for a stipend. These varied with an average income of £65 at the start of the nineteenth century, the equivalent of that enjoyed by large Catholic farmers. This double burden of payments for dissenting congregations supporting their own ministers *and*

⁶ Rev. William Dodd, LL.D., *Moral Pastorals, and other Poems* (Edinburgh, 1824), 'The Parsons, An Eclogue', 106.

the established Church was a familiar story that crossed confessional boundaries. The financial sacrifices made in adhering to a cult that might be only precariously tolerated should not be underestimated.

The papacy

The government of the Churches was based on hierarchical gradations that had their counterparts in the secular sphere. The keystone of the Roman Catholic Church was the papal office, the spiritual head of the Church holding the powers bequeathed to his descendants as bishop of Rome by St Peter himself. That, at least, was how the pope's co-religionists justified his authority, one that had been rejected by the Greek Church in the eleventh century (except as first bishop among equals) and subsequently by the Protestant reformers. Even within the Roman communion, papal power continued to slip away to lay rulers and the higher clergy within their realms. Catholic monarchs were willing to subscribe to the pope's *de jure* headship of the Church, and his scope for definitive rulings in the spiritual domain, but otherwise the independent operation of his power in the day-to-day government of the Church was unwelcome. Acceptance of royal patronage inside Churches with their own distinctive national traditions had been the price paid by the papacy for continued princely allegiance at the Reformation; in return, governments had discarded the risky device of summoning general councils of the Church (a feature of European high politics in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) to impose their preferred policy on the pope. There were signs that their return might be imminent. Indeed, in 1786 the Punctuation of Ems subscribed by the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne, Trier and Salzburg – the most powerful prince-bishops in Germany – pronounced that only a general council of the Church could wield supreme power, and denounced alleged extensions of papal authority.

Conciliarism was actually an irrelevancy when pope and cardinals were willing to endorse national policies, seen, most spectacularly, in the reluctant dissolution of the Jesuits decreed by Clement XIV in the brief *Dominus ac redemptor noster* (Our Lord and Redeemer) of 1773. That still left Catholic states with a requirement to obtain papal approval for episcopal nominations and other senior appointments (governed by the Concordat of Bologna (1516) in the case of France), but experienced members of the foreign diplomatic corps resident in Rome (themselves often holding a cardinalate) were usually on hand to guard against any rupture in relations with the Holy See. Devout Catholics expected the state to uphold their Church. When monarchs wavered, it was enough to encourage renewed interest in the uses of papal authority, as in France

during the 1750s and 1760s when the Crown failed to buttress Church authority against Jansenism in its judicial guise. But if ultramontanistism was not, after all, a nineteenth-century innovation, neither was it a serious policy option for Catholic states before 1789. Only when the French government and its satellite states turned decisively against the Church at the revolutionary end to the century was there a fundamental conflict of loyalties for laymen between Church and state, and the need to reinvent the interventionist potential of the Vatican. Even then, as will be seen, conservative monarchs were reluctant to admit the necessity.

Scholars have presented the eighteenth century as the nadir of the papacy's international power and prestige, but caution is advisable: despite limitations in power politics, the later eighteenth-century papacy remained the symbolic hub of the Catholic world, with a prestige inseparable from a continuous existence co-terminal with the Christian era. Indeed, the very fact that the Catholic powers sought a papal decree dissolving the Jesuits rather than relying on the sufficiency of national expulsion was an unwitting recognition of the unique standing of papal decrees. In intelligent hands, the office still counted for much, and a continuing prominence in Italian politics was some compensation for a reduced impact elsewhere in Catholic Europe. The pre-revolutionary popes generally made the most of their opportunities to influence policy and patronage in the arts as well as official appointments, drawing on the resources of the extensive Vatican bureaucracy and guidance from their secretary of state who, like Cardinal Pallavicini in Clement XIV's reign, was often a former diplomat himself (he had been nuncio to Madrid). Clement XIII (1758–69) tried hard to make the papacy a dominant force within Italian politics and fought a long rear-guard action throughout his pontificate to block the all-out offensive against the Jesuits that originated in Portugal, including a defence of the Society with the constitution *Apostolicum pascendi* of 1765. He declared the Jesuits to be a fit instrument in every way for the Church's mission, a cradle of saints, and a powerful influence for good on the laity; any attack on the Society was in error against the Church. The Order had still not been dissolved at his death.

He was succeeded as supreme pontiff by Lorenzo Ganganelli, a man of gentleness, benevolence and lively conscience whose virtues were obscured in his lifetime by the unrelenting clamour directed at the Jesuits. Taking the name Clement XIV (1769–74), this Franciscan friar and physician's son prevaricated on this overriding issue for a further four years to within fourteen months of his death, a stance ridiculed in the cynical comedies performed on the Roman stage. He finally had to give