Boston College School of Theology and Ministry

French Revolution as Felix Culpa?

Conceptions of Providence in the Wake of the French Revolution

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Abstract

The French Revolution presented the Catholic Church with her greatest political crisis since the Reformation. The crises presented by the Revolution (including: the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the death of the king, the Reign of Terror, war throughout Europe, and the imprisonment of the pope) also gave new urgency the theological problems of divine providence, the permission of evil, and the nature of predestination. However, even before the Revolution, such issues were at the heart of intra-Catholic theological debates. Beginning with the *De Auxiliis* controversy, and continuing with the growth of Jansenism and the Catholic Enlightenment, ideas of providence and predestination were hardly settled before the Revolution. But, such debates shed light on how theologians attempted to understand the Revolution.

Two prominent Catholic thinkers in the wake of the Revolution were Joseph de Maistre and Félicité Lamennais. Both saw the Revolution as the natural result of theological errors and in keeping with divine providence. Maistre, a convinced Molinist, provides the most robust account of the Revolution as a *felix culpa*, an event that God permitted to happen in order to cleanse the Church of laxity and error, punish France for theological errors, and rid the world of Enlightenment philosophy. However, as Europe became more influenced by Enlightenment thought, he began to consider that God's providential plan for the Revolution may take a form different than initially considered.

Lamennais, influenced by Maistre, saw the Revolution as a condemnation of private judgment that must be overcome through an appeal to collective knowledge. Like Maistre, he thought that the Revolution proved the necessity of papal infallibility and an independent Church. However, his embrace of liberalism eventually led to papal condemnation of his work and the beginning of the Church's combative relationship with liberalism.

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Chapter 1

Considerations of Providence before 1789

French Revolution as Theological Problem

According to Joseph Ratzinger, the French Revolution resulted in the last and greatest upheaval in European and Christian history. [1] Each of the three great upheavals (first the fall of Rome, second the combined events of the fall of Constantinople, the Protestant Reformation, and the discovery of the New World, and third the French Revolution) shaped the Church's understanding of divine providence and of the ordering of political systems. Yet, as Ratzinger argues, the French Revolution was the most dramatic and significant in that it removed all notions of divine providence from public life. While this may be true about the effects of the Revolution, and the goal of some of its proponents, the most prominent Catholic responses to the Revolution were principally concerned with understanding it in light of divine providence. Although the Church's response to the Revolution was limited due to extraordinary circumstances, an understanding of providence was central to theologians who attempted to grapple with its effects.

The French Revolution, 1789-1799, poses three particular theological problems regarding providence for Catholic theology. The first is the question of divine providence and God's permissive will in allowing the execution of a divinely appointed king, the severing of the French Church from Rome, the suppression of religious orders, the taking of Church lands, and the martyring of thousands of clergy and religious and the genocidal wars against Catholic areas of

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[1] Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Crossroad Publishing Company and Ignatius Press, 2006) 136. "The secular state arose for the first time in history, abandoning and excluding as mythological and divine guarantee or legitimation of the political element, and declaring that God is a private question that does not belong to the public sphere or to the democratic formation of the public will."

France.[2] The second problem is the liberal Enlightenment idea of nature and progress against that of divine governance in history. The third problem is the related issue of new ideas of liberty against that of predestination and divine foreknowledge. While each of these questions regarding divine providence existed long before the French Revolution, the enormity of the events and its lasting-influence framed these questions with a new relevance and urgency.

Before examining these questions in Catholic responses to the French Revolution, let us examine debates on providence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the Revolution may have been the last and greatest upheaval in Europe and Christianity, little consensus existed on the topic of providence and predestination in the pre-Revolutionary era. Stemming from the unresolved *De Auxiliis* controversy, theological schools had become settled in their division of either Molinism-Congruism or Bañezianism-Thomism. The growth of Jansenism furthered division between the Jesuits and those who claimed to follow Augustinian conceptions of providence. Furthermore, the development of the Enlightenment sought to replace the notion of divine providence with one of natural progress. These three divisions - Molinism and Thomism, Jesuits and Jansenists (and a corresponding debate over Gallicanism), and Catholicism and the Enlightenment - developed conceptions of providence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Molinism and Bañezianism

Commencing in Spain in the late sixteenth century, the formal component of the *De Auxiliis* debates on the nature of human freedom, grace, and predestination lasted over thirty years. They

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[2] Facts and figures of the Revolution are taken from Francois Furet and Denis Richet, *French Revolution*, trans. Stephen Hardman (New York: Macmillan, 1970). See also Furet's entry on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf; trans by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Belknap, 1989) 449-457. For a history of the War in the Vendee and its status as genocide, see Jacques Villemain, *Vendée: 1793-1794* (Paris: Editions du CERF, 2017).

had begun in response to petitions to censure Luis de Molina's *Concordia Liberi Arbitrii Cum Gratiæ Donis* and the explication of the Dominican Thomist position by Domingo Bañez. In 1607, after eighty-five formal debates, Paul V formally ended the controversy. His decree stated that combatants, the Dominicans and the Jesuits, were allowed to defend their respective doctrines but were not to write on the nature of efficacious grace.[3] They were also told to "mutually abstain from harsh words expressing bitterness of spirit."[4] The papal decree ending the debate stated that the issue would be resolved by a forthcoming bull. The Church still awaits its promulgation.

At issue was the relationship between divine foreknowledge and free will. Molina, who consciously departs from St. Thomas Aquinas on the nature of divine knowledge, posits the existence of a *scientia media* in God. This *scientia media* is ontologically and logically between God's natural knowledge prior to any decree and his free knowledge resulting from any decree.[5] By *scientia media*, God knows all hypothetical counterfactuals of all possible outcomes within creation. Knowing how each individual human will act in each particular situation, God orders the universe in such a way that his will is never thwarted. Divine foreknowledge is preserved through knowing all possibilities before deciding which one to create; and the freedom of the human will

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[3] Several popes had tried to rule in favor of the Dominican position, but died before doing so. The influence of St. Francis de Sales and St. Robert Bellarmine influenced Paul V's decision to not solve the argument conclusively. For a history of this debate, see R.J. Matava, *Divine Causality and Human Free Choice: Domingo Bañez, Physical Premotion and the Controversy De Auxiliis Revisited* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 16-36.

[4] Denzinger §1997 43rd Edition, Ignatius Press. "In negotio de auxiliis facta est potestas a Summo Pontifice cum disputantibus tum consoltoribus redeundi in patrias aut domus suas: additumque est, fore, ut Sua Sacntitas declarationem et determinationem, quae eodem Sanctissimo Domino serio admodum vetitum est, in quaestione hac pertractanda ne quis partem suae oppositam aut qualificaret aut censura quapiam notaret... *Quin optat etiam, ut verbis asperioribus amaritiem animi significantibus invicem abstineant*."

[5] For a complete discussion on Molina's theory of *scientia media*, see Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge (*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 79-105.

is preserved by imposing no necessity of action upon any individual. For the human will to be free, it must not be bound by any external condition, even divine action.[6]

Thomist responses to Molina, exemplified by Bañez, argued that this position introduced complexity into God, limited the efficacy and infallible nature of grace, and tended towards semi-pelagianism in attributing the difference in goodness to some quality in the individual rather than in grace.[7] Articulating what they took to be the position of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, Bañez and the Dominicans argued that God can move the will to choose the good. This movement is possible because God, as creator of the will and first principle of action, can reduce a potency in the will to act. Without participation in divine action, no potency can be reduced to actuality. Divine premotion is necessary for any movement towards the good. Employing the term *physical premotion*, Dominicans argued that grace was the sole cause of the difference in holiness between individuals.[8] It is a *premotion* as God is the principle cause of all movement, which man participates in secondarily. *Physical* is used to distinguish it from a *moral* notion, or mere attraction towards a good.[9]

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[6] Matava, *Divine Causality*, 188-191.

[7] Matava, *Divine Causality*, 117. At this time, Dominican responses did not argue against Molinism conceptions determinism in the individual, as would become common in the renaissance of this debate in the twentieth century, especially by Dominicans figures such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and Herbert McCabe. See Taylor Patrick O'Neill, *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin: A Thomistic Analysis* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 93-151.

[8] The term *physical premotion* was not used by St. Thomas himself. However, after Domingo Bañez it became the most common Thomist position. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bañezianism became synonymous with Thomism. Distinctions between St. Thomas and Bañez are a twentieth century development, under the influence of figures like Marin-Sola, Maritain, and Lonergan. See O'Neill*, Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin*, 10-11.

[9] O'Neill*, Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin*, 71-8.

Jesuit criticisms of the Dominican position argued that it limited the freedom of the human will and could lead to a Calvinist understanding of double predestination. If God can move the will infallibly (or even necessarily), then the will is not truly free to pursue the good. Human freedom would then be little more than an illusion. Dominican responses argued that acting towards the good did not diminish freedom, but perfected the will. Due to the unresolved nature of the debates, both schools were free to continue teaching their own particular doctrines. Both sides institutionalized and formalized their schools, mandating them to be taught throughout their respective orders. Congruism, which kept the position of *scientia media* but posited that efficacious grace was always efficacious because God gave it only in favorable circumstances, became the official position of the Society of Jesus in 1613.[10] Physical premotion likewise became the position of the Order of Preachers. With the exception of some attempts by French-speaking theologians, there were no attempts at finding a middle ground between the two positions.[11]

While the nature of grace has many resulting corollaries for theology, the issue of human freedom in divine governance is central to later debates. Molinism sought to establish a near libertarian conception of the human will within the ordering of divine providence. For the will to be free, it must be allowed to act without constraint. But, for the Molinist the human will could be considered free and unconditioned by any necessity and still fall under the providential ordering

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[10] See *Congruism* in the Catholic Encyclopedia: Walter McDonald, "Congruism," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04251b.htm>.

[11] St. Francis de Sales tried to pacify the situation in coming up with a middle position between *scientia media* and physical premotion. It gained few theological adherents. See Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 98-134.

of the universe. Thus, the Enlightenment concern of the unconditioned will appeared in intra-Catholic debates long before the Revolution.[12]

However, while the *De Auxiliis* debate had great differences on the nature of predestination, there was some overlap on the nature of providence. For both the Molinist and the Thomist, God's will is never thwarted. Bañez criticized Molina heavily on providence, but there are some key similarities. God is never surprised by human events. Although understandings of this divine knowledge differ, the resulting capacity in God is the same. As we shall see, Catholic responses to the French Revolution take this fact as a given. Furthermore, as both orders professed fidelity to St. Thomas, his understanding of providence provides the starting point for later debates. While something new had taken place in Europe, it was known and allowed by God to take place.

Divine Providence and Felix Culpa

In the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas treats divine providence first with respect to God's intellect and will. Playing on the etymological similarities between *prudentia* and *providentia*, both meaning "foresight," St. Thomas posits that God orders all things both as their efficient cause and as their final end. This good of ordering things towards their end is called providence.[13] Although in the divine intellect, it presupposes God's goodness in will in desiring the final good for all of creation. Just as a ruler governs his realm, God governs and effects the final good of the created

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[12] This was at the heart of Rousseau's critique of Montesquieu, Hobbes, and Locke. See Pierre Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, trans. Rebecca Balinski (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 71.

[13] Ia.22.1 Ratio autem ordinandorum in finem, proprie providentia est. Est enim principalis pars prudentiae, ad quam aliae duae partes ordinantur, scilicet memoria praeteritorum, et intelligentia praesentium; prout ex praeteritis memoratis, et praesentibus intellectis, coniectamus de futuris providendis.

world. Predestination is the particular providence of ordering souls towards their supernatural end in beatitude.[14]

St. Thomas extends this general providence to each individual person. All creatures participate in their act of being through God who is being itself.[15] God's causal power is thus at work not just in general, but in each specific case. There are no particular causes or events that fall outside of divine providence. Just as his knowledge as creator extends to particulars, so his power as providential ruler extends to the minutiae of creation. Normally, this is effected through secondary causes.[16] Particular governance over affairs is given to intermediaries in order to carry out God's will.[17] While subject to various types of powers, each individual act was ordained and foreseen by God. Although it poses no strict necessity on free beings, divine providence ordains all toward their particular good.[18]

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[14] Ia.23.1 Respondeo dicendum quod Deo conveniens est homines praedestinare. Omnia enim divinae providentiae subiacent, ut supra ostensum est. Ad providentiam autem pertinet res in finem ordinare, ut dictum est. Finis autem ad quem res creatae ordinantur a Deo, est duplex. Unus, qui excedit proportionem naturae creatae et facultatem, et hic finis est vita aeterna, quae in divina visione consistit, quae est supra naturam cuiuslibet creaturae.

[15] Ia.22.2 Causalitas autem Dei, qui est primum agens, se extendit usque ad omnia entia, non solum quantum ad principia speciei, sed etiam quantum ad individualia principia, non solum incorruptibilium, sed etiam corruptibilium. Unde necesse est omnia quae habent quocumque modo esse, ordinata esse a Deo in finem.

[16] Ia.22.3.ad2 Deus habet immediate providentiam de rebus omnibus, non excluduntur causae secundae, quae sunt executrices huius ordinis

[17] Not all of these forms of governance are benevolent types of rule. St. Thomas, following St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine, thinks demons have been given governance over certain human affairs.
Ia.22.3 Tertia vero providentia est rerum humanarum, quam attribuebat Daemonibus, quos Platonici ponebant medios inter nos et deos, ut narrat Augustinus IX de Civ. Dei.

[18] This presented Bañez with his most difficult problem in commenting on the *Summa Theologiae*. He had to both affirm that no necessity was placed on the will and that God's grace infallibly achieved its end.
St. Thomas also distinguished several types of necessity (whether something was strictly necessary or only necessary given a certain set of conditions). See Ia.81.1 and Quodlibet 11, question 3. For a discussion on this, see O'Neill's chapter on Bañez in *Grace, Predestination, and the Permission of Sin*, 68-92.

The two clear questions regarding this understanding are how divine providence can be infallibly accomplished without imposing necessity on the human will and how evil is allowed to exist which can frustrate the particular good of an individual. The former problem led to the *De Auxiliis* controversy. The second problem is answered through appeal to the *felix culpa*, or happy fault, and the unequal (or non-parallel) nature between divine goodness and the presence of evil. In brief, God permits evil to occur in order that some good may be accomplished through it. Evil is not an obstacle to the divine plan, but is allowed in order that the divine plan might be fulfilled.

The prime example of this idea in human history is that of the Fall of Adam and Eve. By their sin, the evil of death and the loss of original justice was brought into the world. Through the loss of this graced state of life, man was no longer capable of salvation. In order to repair the *malum culpae* of this sin, God sent his only son to save humanity. Through Christ's redemptive sacrifice, man is rendered capable of attaining a higher state than was possible before the Fall. The Fall thus becomes a *felix culpa*. An evil was allowed to occur in order that some greater good could be brought about. Christ came in order to save and may not have come into the world otherwise.[19]

This thought, present in St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, is adopted liturgically in the Paschal blessing of the Easter Candle. The prayer of the *Exultet* sings, "*O felix culpa, quæ talem*

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[19] Contra St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas argues that the only reasons we are given for the cause of the Incarnation is our redemption, therefore we cannot say that Christ would have come otherwise, even if there is no necessary connection between the two. Therefore, the Fall resulted in an outcome that may not have happened if Adam and Eve had not sinned.
IIIa.1.3 Ea enim quae ex sola Dei voluntate proveniunt, supra omne debitum creaturae, nobis innotescere non possunt nisi quatenus in sacra Scriptura traduntur, per quam divina voluntas innotescit. Unde, cum in sacra Scriptura ubique incarnationis ratio ex peccato primi hominis assignetur, convenientius dicitur incarnationis opus ordinatum esse a Deo in remedium peccati, ita quod, peccato non existente, incarnatio non fuisset. Quamvis potentia Dei ad hoc non limitetur, potuisset enim, etiam peccato non existente, Deus incarnari.

ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!"[20] Possibly referenced by St. Augustine in *The City of God*, this prayer dates to at least the fifth century.[21] St. Thomas employs it when speaking of Christ's incarnation and the relation to the Fall:

> But there is no reason why human nature should not have been raised to something greater after sin. For God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom; hence it is written (Rom 5:20): "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound." Hence, too, in the blessing of the Paschal candle, we say: "O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!"

Evil is not willed of its own accord, nor can evil properly even be willed. As the will is necessarily drawn to the good, anything is chosen under the aspect of good.[22] But, because nothing in the created world is good absolutely, the will can desire a false or incomplete good. This privation of goodness in the will is evil. Moral evil exists when men choose that which does not lead them to their true good. However, the presence of evil in the world is not simply a product of men choosing badly. St. Thomas does not posit that God could not have ordered the world differently. This idea of the best of all possible worlds, posited by Leibniz and ridiculed by Voltaire, had become common in the era leading up to the French Revolution.[23] God is not powerless over evil, but permits it to occur.

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[20] From the *Missale Romanum, editio typica*

[21] Charlton Walker "Exultet." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), 8 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05730b.htm>.

[22] Ia.19.1.ad3 Nihil autem prohibet ad aliquid maius humanam naturam productam esse post peccatum, Deus enim permittit mala fieri ut inde aliquid melius eliciat. Unde dicitur Rom. V, ubi abundavit iniquitas, superabundavit et gratia. Unde et in benedictione cerei paschalis dicitur, *o felix culpa*, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem.[22]

[23] Leibniz was sympathetic to Molinism, but did not believe in *scientia media*. Still, his understanding of divine allowance of evil was very influential. See Levering, *Predestinatio*n, 127-133.

It is also important for St. Thomas to maintain that while God permits evil to occur, he is not the cause of evil simply. As evil is a privation of a due perfection, God cannot will evil positively. The will can only be directed to the good. The evil of fault, *malum culpae*, cannot take its origin in God. However, God may decline to prevent evil from occurring. God allows evil to occur through the acts of secondary causes. While the Bañezians and Molinists disagree on the source of goodness within individuals, the principle that God has planned and provided for that goodness is maintained in both.

However, St. Thomas holds that God does positively will a type of evil. God wills punishment in order that a good may be achieved. The evil of pain and death, or *malum poenae*, are willed positively by God to enter the world after the Fall.[24] Punishments are only evils from the perspective of the one being punished. God wills them positively as goods for those under his providential care. The *malum culpae* of human sin results in the *malum poenae* of divine punishment.

Because God is the source of all goodness and all things are subject to his providence, catastrophes take on particular importance in understanding the divine plan. God could have caused a different outcome, but declined to prevent the evil from occurring. Or, he willed a punishment in order that it might order the world rightly. Evil has existed since the Fall, but greater evils and a significant loss of souls from the Church requires special explanation. Often the answer

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[24] Ia.15.9 Malum autem quod coniungitur alicui bono, est privatio alterius boni. Nunquam igitur appeteretur malum, nec per accidens, nisi bonum cui coniungitur malum, magis appeteretur quam bonum quod privatur per malum. Nullum autem bonum Deus magis vult quam suam bonitatem, vult tamen aliquod bonum magis quam aliud quoddam bonum. Unde malum culpae, quod privat ordinem ad bonum divinum, Deus nullo modo vult. Sed malum naturalis defectus, vel malum poenae vult, volendo aliquod bonum, cui coniungitur tale malum, sicut, volendo iustitiam, vult poenam; et volendo ordinem naturae servari, vult quaedam naturaliter corrumpi.

lies within the idea of a non-parallel relationship between good and evil. God is responsible for goodness within the world, but not for evil. Man is born into a state of *malum poenae* through original sin. God freely chooses to save some. When a great loss of souls occurs, it is not that God is willing the damnation of more. Rather it is to be seen as God, in his goodness, saving fewer.

Jesuits and Jansenists

The exact nature of postlapsarian man and the non-parallel relationship between divine goodness and the permission of evil forms the basis of the second great debate preceding the Revolution: that of the Jesuits and the Jansenists. Although Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638) was Dutch, his ideas had their most lasting influence within France.[25] Centered around the Port-Royal abbey, Jansenism found numerous adherents within the aristocracy and the clergy around Paris. However, it never gained royal approval and was often persecuted by the French state. Several of its proponents and leaders were imprisoned. Jansenists often blamed the Jesuits for this, as they tended to hold important court positions, including that of royal confessors. When they fell under suspicion by the king and Church, the Jesuits were the natural enemy one could pick if trying to avoid condemning either the pope or the state.

Jansen held certain opinions about the nature of man after the fall stemming from his reading of St. Augustine. His posthumous work *Augustinus* (1640) laid out what he took to be an Augustinian understanding of the Fall and divine providence. Postlapsarian man is utterly depraved, incapable of willing the good. Man is only capable of evil without the aid of efficacious

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[25] For a history of Jansenism and its controversies with France, see Dale Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits from France 1757-1765* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 1-36.

grace. This efficacious grace is also irresistible and necessarily causes a good act.[26] Holding to the position of physical premotion, Jansen argued that providence necessarily causes the salvation of those to whom God gives the efficacious grace of divine charity. To those whom God does not give efficacious grace, they are necessarily damned. *Augustinus* concludes with an argument against modern forms of semi-pelagianism, in which the tenets of Molinism are described.

Because of the papal decree that Molinism was not to be described as heretical, Jansenism fell into further controversy. Jesuit theologians attacked *Augustinus* as being Calvinist and maintaining double predestination. The French Church petitioned Rome to condemn the Jansenist position on grace, which was first done in the bull *Cum Occasione* of 1653. However, Jansenists in France refused to accept the bull. They argued that their positions were that of Sts. Augustine and Thomas - and the papacy must not have intended to condemn these two doctors of the Church.[27] Furthermore, they argued that the condemned propositions on grace were not those held by Jansen. While it was considered at the time to be a victory for Molinism, many French bishops, as well as a majority of the theology faculty of Paris, continued to hold Jansenist positions.[28]

In 1713, Pope Clement XI issued the bull *Unigenitus* which unequivocally condemned Jansenist ideas of grace and predestination (as well as Jansenist positions on the moral life and the necessity of studying sacred scripture).[29] Ostensibly condemning a French translation and commentary on the New Testament, *Unigenitus* listed and condemned 101 Jansenist propositions.

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[26] Sylvio Hermann de Franceschi, *La Puissance et la Gloire: L'orthodoxie thomiste au péril du jansénisme (1633-1724): le zénith français de la querelle de la grâce (*Paris: Editions Nolin, 2011), 11-52.

[27] De Franceschi, *La Puissance et la Gloire*, 85-86.

[28] Monique Cottret. *Histoire du jansénisme.* (Paris: Perrin, 2016), 51-53.

[29] Denzinger §2400-2502.

As French Jansenists were no longer able to hold that their beliefs were not accurately represented by the Church, they were forced to accept the bull publicly in France. However, Jansenism continued to exist in varying forms until the French Revolution.

Because Jansenist ideas of efficacious grace were condemned by *Cum Occasione* and *Unigenitus*, Molinists sought to equally condemn the Thomist position of predestination. As both Thomists and Jansenists held to physical premotion and claimed to be disciples of St. Thomas and St. Augustine, this was not a stretch. This brought about a renewed argument between the two parties. Eventually, Pope Benedict XIII declared that Thomism was not Jansenism in 1727 in the bull *Pretiosus.*[30] It was still permissible to hold to the Thomist conception because it did not hold that grace was necessarily irresistible. Even if efficacious grace infallibly caused a good act, it did not cause it to happen necessarily.

Jansenist ideas on the Fall and man's radical depravity continued to shape Catholic understandings of divine providence. Because without the aid of divine grace man could only sin, humanity inevitably tends toward destruction. And while grace necessarily causes a good act, God refrains from giving his grace in most cases. Spurred on by papal condemnations of their beliefs, Jansenists spoke of a gradual darkening within the Church.[31] The light of the early Church had become obscured by false teachings and Jesuit influences. Divine providence had allowed the Church and the world to slide back into sin and evil in recent generations. They could point to papal condemnations of Augustinian positions as evidence of such a darkening. The world was not

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[30] Denzinger §2509.

[31] Dale Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 79-80.

subject to progress, but a greater decay since the days of the early Church. Although providence was the ordering of creation to its end, God had not ordained most of humanity to attain that end.

Bossuet and Gallicanism

Despite the political and theological difficulties presented in dealing with the concept, the era was marked by several comprehensive accounts of divine providence in the created world. The preeminent account of divine providence in the seventeenth century is *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), bishop and tutor to the dauphin. Written as part of his work teaching the future king, the *Discours* considers the whole of human history in light of divine providence. Written as a new *City of God*, Bossuet describes history as a battle between the City of God (or the Church) and the City of the Devil. From the dawn of creation, beginning with Adam, history has witnessed a battle between the reign of God's mercy and justice against that of the Devil and worldly allurements. Progressively, man was prepared for the incarnation by God's working through particular peoples. Christ's advent into history inaugurates the last age of the world. However, the Church has continued to progress through its history, culminating in the Empire of France. This last epoch of history began with the reign of Charlemagne and established a true and Christian empire in the world in order to provide for the Church and the salvation of souls.[32]

For Bossuet, the primary task of studying history is to see the work of God. While in this world man cannot grasp God's full intention, he can see patterns of divine action.[33] All things

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[32] For an English translation of *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, see Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, *Discourse on Universal History*, trans. Elborg Forster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[33] Georgiana Terstegge, *Providence as idée-maîtresse in the Works of Bossuet; Theme and Stylistic Motif* (Washington: CUA Press, 1948), 50-56.

work, whether by God's perfect will or permissive will, for the building up of the Kingdom of God. Even when ignorant of God, great men and empires have advanced God's plan for humanity. This shall not be fully accomplished until the final judgment, and there are times in which the City of the Devil seems to be winning, but providence ordains all things towards creation's final end. Bossuet's understanding of divine grace at work is Thomistic, which caused him to be seen as Jansenist (or at least anti-Jesuit) by some.[34] But, contra Jansenism, Bossuet sees his contemporary French Church as a progression from early Christianity rather than a decay.

Bossuet also sees the progression of empires as evidence of God's preparation for the Gospel. God allows empires to crumble in order to pave the way for the City of God and the Church. Even the Roman Empire was allowed to fall, but Bossuet argues that this was done to allow Christianity to take its place as the true Rome.[35] Furthermore, empires are allowed to fall in order that princes may become humble. They are to recognize that their empires are also fragile.

> But even from a merely human point of view, it is extremely useful, especially for princes, to contemplate this passing of empires, since the arrogance which so often attends their eminent position is greatly dampened by this sight. For if men learn moderation when they see the death of kings, how much more will it strike them to see even the death of kingdoms! And what can teach us a more beautiful lesson of the vanity of human greatness? Thus, when you see passing before your eyes, as in an instant, not only kings and emperors, but the very empires which once filled the whole world with terror, when you see the old and the new Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans successively standing before you and then each falling, as it were upon the others, their fearful uproar makes you feel that permanence is not for men and that change and unrest are the proper lot of human affairs.[36]

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[34] Jean Meyer, *Bossuet* (Paris: Plon, 1993), 207-209.

[35] Bossuet, *Discourse on Universal History*, 301.

[36] Bossuet, *Discourse on Universal History*, 303.

Bossuet's warning that empires may fall, but that all things are subject to divine providence would be an important source for Catholics in the eighteenth century. Empires fall in order that God's reign might be more complete in the world.

Beyond his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, Bossuet also was a defender of Gallicanism. This theory held that all local Churches had particular rights, but that most Churches had surrendered those rights to Rome over the course of history. Gallicanism holds that the French Church had never surrendered these rights, and therefore was not subject to the same level of papal control. The temporal power of French kings was not subject to papal jurisdiction, and the French Church maintained some independence on matters of doctrine. Bossuet was one of the authors of the 1681 *Déclaration du clergé de France*, the French Church stated that while the Pope had spiritual authority, this was moderated by the French king's prerogative to convoke a council and the French Church's ability to appeal a papal decision to a future council.[37]

While *Unigenitus* was accepted by Louis XV, he did not agree to any limitations on Gallicanism.[38] It proved to be an issue at the heart of the papal response to the events of 1789-94. In fact, the first papal bull issued in the wake of the Revolution was *Auctorem Fidei* by Pius VI on the 28th of August 1794 (exactly one month after the death of Maximilien Robespierre and the end of the Reign of Terror).[39] Written to condemn the 1786 Synod of Pistoia, the bull catalogued and refuted 85 propositions from the published acts of this Tuscan synod. The leading bishop of the synod was a Jansenist and Gallican adherent. *Auctorem Fidei* condemned the decree from

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[37] Van Kley. *The Jansenists*, 30.

[38] Jeffrey Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment: Jean-Martin de Prades and Ideological Polarization in Eighteenth-Century France (*Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 57.

[39] Denzinger §2600-2700.

Pistoia that there had been a "general obscuring" of the faith and a darkening of the purity of the Gospel message.[40] *Auctorem Fidei* also issued the last decree reminding all that Molinism was not to be condemned as heretical.[41] In condemning the Synod of Pistoia, Pius VI also condemned Gallicanism and Jansenism.

Progress and Providence

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also saw the birth of Enlightenment philosophies and the development of alternative understandings of history and divine providence. While often considered to be "secular" or a-religious, many Enlightenment thinkers explicitly viewed their work as theological in character. While any attempt at summarizing two centuries of Enlightenment thought will fall short, several tendencies are important for this subject. Principally, the growth of the idea of progress apart from divine action as the principle for the development and maintenance of the civil and religious order is central to an understanding of providence after the Revolution. No longer was history the source of reflection for understanding divine providence, but nature was now the tool to see how progress could be accomplished.[42] It also implied a loss of an understanding of global order.[43]

From Hobbes to Locke, theories of how civilization develops and progresses were central to their thought. The state of nature became the starting point for philosophical reflection. Authorities like the state or the Church exist as necessary results of the limits of the state of nature,

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[40] Shaun Blanchard, *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II: Jansenism and the Struggle for Catholic Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 10.

[41] Matava, *Divine Causality*, 34.

[42] Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 31.

[43] Remi Brague, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 235-236.

whether imposed by the weak or the strong.[44] Understanding nature became the key to understanding how human society progresses into new and better (or worse) forms. Implicit in this conception is that providence is not a guiding principle for human society. While Bossuet had looked to history to discuss the great epochs and civilizations, prominent Enlightenment philosophers developed theories of human nature and the constraints placed upon human relationships by building societies. This development is taken further by Rousseau who considers human nature to be simply radical autonomy and freedom.[45] Human society arose in order to take man's liberty away from him.

Although liberalism as a philosophy only gained its modern form as a result of the French Revolution, implicit in Enlightenment thought is the autonomy of the will and the primacy of the individual over society.[46] And while progress is a difficult thing to measure, it was often viewed in relation to the relative liberty of the individual. In order for society to progress, the liberties of the individual must be protected. Discussions of how providence could coexist with freedom were superseded by arguments over how authority could exist with liberty.[47] The unconditioned will, long argued in the *De Auxiliis* debates, became a much broader concern.

These debates became central in Catholic theology in the eighteenth century. A certain *rapprochement* between Enlightenment thought and Catholic faculties, especially in Paris, was

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[44] Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 37-38.

[45] Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism,* 77-78.

[46] Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*: *From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 41-87.

[47] This was a principle concern of Rousseau. See Manent, *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*, 71.

attempted.[48] At both the faculty of the Sorbonne and among the Jesuits in France, Malebranche and Locke were read and defended. Locke's understanding of the human will was easily picked up by Molinists who viewed the will optimistically. Jansenists gravitated towards Malebranche's strict separation between body and soul.[49]

As philosophical thought changed, many sought to accommodate revelation to the newly developed models of empiricism. This resulted in a greater abandonment of Aristotelian-Thomism throughout France.[50] Although there were some condemnations by the French Church for these ideas, they continued to gain prominence even as the Enlightenment became more and more radical.[51] Catholic Enlightenment thinkers had sought to further establish the Gallican liberties of the French Church, but the Church was under increasing pressure from within to stop a rapidly changing society. Eventually, the Revolution would lead to the collapse of both the Catholic Enlightenment and the Gallican Church. As Jeffrey Burson has described it:

> The Enlightenment, as it unfolded in France during the last half of the eighteenth century was in part, the accidental creation of frightened theologians, and the fate of Theological Enlightenment unfolded like a murder-suicide in which the Gallican church, in an attempt to obliterate the most dangerous tendencies of a radicalizing Enlightenment, mortally wounded its own more moderate but no less valuable variants of Theological Enlightenment.[52]

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[48] This was by no means limited to France. For an overview on the broader attempts of Catholic Enlightenment, see Ulrich Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: A Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 14-46.

[49] Dale Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism*, 46-57.

[50] Jeffrey Burson, "Introduction," in *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History*, ed. Burson and Ulrich Lehner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 15.

[51] Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment,* 256-7.

[52] Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment,* 1.

As we shall see, this combined collapse of both Gallicanism and the Catholic Enlightenment became a principal argument after the Revolution to illustrate providence.

Why the Church was Unable to Respond

On July 12, 1790 the National Assembly of France enacted the *Constitution civile du clergé*, subordinating the French Church to the state. Expanding on the Gallican liberties expounded in the 1681 *Déclaration du clergé de France*, the Civil Constitution separated the French Church completely from Rome.[53] Papal decrees were no longer to be received in France, parish priests became salaried and appointed by the state, and all priests had to swear an oath to uphold the principles of the Revolution.[54] Priests who refused to take the oath were removed from their parishes or imprisoned and killed.

Within France, there were officially no Dominicans or Jesuits present to respond to these developments. Five months earlier, in February of 1790, the National Assembly had dissolved all religious orders within the country. They had already abolished religious vows. Similar decrees were made in the Austrian Empire, Germany, and Belgium.[55] Vowed religious were seen as antithetical to the spirit of liberty and possibly hostile to the nation. Many were martyred in the coming Terror. The Dominicans would not be re-established in France for fifty years.[56] This also

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[53] On July 14, 1790, two days later on the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, Talleyrand led a high Mass in Paris with tri-colored vestments.

[54] Furet, *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution,* 449-457.

[55] Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism (*Washington: CUA Press, 2005), 81.

[56] When it was refounded by Lacordaire in 1842, the religious habit was still illegal. Thomas Scannell, "Jean-Baptiste-Henri Dominique Lacordaire," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08733a.htm>.

meant a loss of Thomist schools in much of Europe. It would not be until Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (spurred on by his Jesuit education) that a rebirth of Thomism occurred.[57]

While the Dominicans were dissolved by the National Assembly, different events had already brought about the suppression of the Jesuits in France. The failure of a Jesuit run commercial venture in the New World had resulted in a bankruptcy lawsuit against the Society of Jesus itself in 1760. The Society appealed the decision to Parlement, who took the opportunity to critique the Jesuits. A combination of Jansenists, Gallicans, and Enlightenment thinkers formed a coalition against them. Each of these groups had reason to be suspicious of an order directly obedient to the Pope. Jansenists in particular had long been angry at the Jesuits over *Unigenitus*. In 1762, under heavy influence, Parlement condemned the Jesuits and sought to expel them. A compromise was sought by the king to allow them to stay if they recognized the Gallican liberties and placed themselves under the authority of the French Church. The Jesuits refused. In 1764, French Jesuits were required to either renounce their vows or be banished from the kingdom.[58] This suppression, along with similar suppressions in other European kingdoms grew into a continent-wide effort. In 1773, Clement XIV issued *Dominus ac Redemptor Noster*, suppressing the Society of Jesus throughout the Church.[59]

The loss of religious orders also meant the loss of theologians. Because of this, theological responses to the Revolution were quite limited. In certain ways, theology had to be reinvented. Catholics after the Revolution were not given the same training in schools of thought that

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[57] Romanus Cessario and Cajetan Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 126-7.

[58] Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits,* 122-150.

[59] Van Kley, *The Jansenists and the Expulsion of the Jesuits,* 238-240.

generations of theologians had been. Although aware of the tradition, they became much more *sui generis* in their theological commitments. At the start of the Revolution, the great debates that had consumed theology for two hundred years ended abruptly. Conceptions of providence had been replaced with dreams of constructing a society designed for progress and liberty. Nevertheless, these arguments are fundamental for understanding Catholic reactions to the French Revolution. The theological concerns of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would shape future ideas.

While the French Revolution may have resulted in the loss of the concept of providence from the public sphere, there was also little uniformity in Catholic thought before the Revolution. The three principal concerns for understanding catastrophe and divine providence - God's permissive will, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and arguments of human nature and progress - all lacked clear answers. These problems were not invented in 1789. Debates between Dominicans and Jesuits and the growth of Jansenism and the Enlightenment present a rather complicated picture. Stemming from the unresolved *De Auxiliis* controversy, the Church provided few definitions on these topics. While the Reign of Terror, civil war, and the overthrow of most of Europe certainly paint a vivid reality for those who speak about providence, these issues had been of great concern to Catholic theology in the centuries before the Revolution.

Chapter 2

Joseph de Maistre

With few Catholic thinkers left capable of responding to the Revolution, the first robust attempt was that of a layman, Joseph de Maistre. Deeply troubled by the French Revolution and its spread throughout Europe, Maistre sought to understand the Revolution in light of divine providence. Faithful to his Jesuit formation, Maistre was a Congruist-Molinist who attempted to maintain both the independence of the human will and the providential ordering of creation in his understanding of history and reasoning on why God allowed the Revolution to occur. He was also influenced by Enlightenment thought and Christian neoplatonism in his conception of a providential ordering. This central figure in the history of Catholic thought, connecting the pre and post-revolutionary worlds, communicated a form of Molinism that becomes important for the rebuilding of theology in Europe. While several recent surveys of his thought have emphasized his contemporary influences, his Molinism has been largely ignored.[60] However, unless he is placed within the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates on the nature of providence and his consequent Molinist system, one cannot grasp his understanding of divine providence. Molinism provides the basis for his discussion of the three principal concerns for understanding

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[60] The most recent book in English on Maistre, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and his Heirs, 1794 - 1854* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011) by Carolina Armenteros, gives a very helpful account of Maistre's political thought, sources, and influence. However, the author's theological analysis is less rigorous. Armenteros and Richard Lebrun, the other leading Anglophone Maistre scholar, recently edited a book of essays on Maistre: *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, edited by Armenteros and Lebrun. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011). While many of the essays are very insightful, the analyses of Maistre's theology tend to focus exclusively on his reading of Origen and possible heterodoxy. However, Maistre had settled opinions on providence before returning to read Origen in 1809, long after publishing *Consideration sur la France.* There is more of a convergence of thought, rather than a direct influence.
See also Aimee Barbeau, "The Savoyard Philosopher: Deist or Neoplatonist?," in *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, 161-189.

catastrophe and divine providence - God's permissive will in allowing evil, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and the relationship between providence and progress – although the influence of the Revolution and the Enlightenment results in a more original approach.

From a practical perspective, Maistre viewed the Revolution as a cleansing force in the French Church that rid her of laxities and heresies. Jansenism, Gallicanism, Protestantism, and *philosophisme* had all proved inadequate in the face of the Revolution. The Revolution was a result of theological error and needed to be fought theologically. In order to combat these errors, he proposed ultramontanism as both a theological and political solution. (His critiques of Enlightenment philosophy are also central, but will only be discussed in relation to their influence of the Revolution.) While Molinism provides the metaphysical groundwork for discussing the reality of divine providence and human nature, much of his writing on providence deals with the practical effects of the Revolution on the Church and state. From studying the providential ordering of creation in history, certain patterns emerged that justified great times of evil. Maistre also attempted to predict how God would use the Revolution in order to build up the Church. In order to see the effects of the Revolution on his life and thought, as well as his theological influences, we shall first look at his life and work before discussing his theory of providence, his analysis of the Revolution, and the possibility of the Revolution being a *felix culpa*.

Life and Work

Although his work was occasioned by the French Revolution, Joseph de Maistre was not French. He was born in 1753 in Chambery in the French-speaking Duchy of Savoy, which had

become part of the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1720.[61] His father was a recently ennobled senator. Although there are no definite accounts of his early schooling, he seems to have been educated by the Jesuits. There are records of him joining a confraternity that was under the auspices of the Society of Jesus.[62] He was also a member of a religious confraternity that accompanied and consoled those condemned to death. This confraternity had been started by another Savoyard, St. Francis de Sales. This combined Jesuit-Salesian formation played a large role in Maistre's own political and religious thought.

Maistre's library and notebooks indicate that he read broadly and initially seems to have been open to and inspired by Enlightenment ideas.[63] He knew the works of many *philosophes* well and possessed a copy of Diderot's *l'Éncyclopedie*. After completing studies in law in Piedmont in 1774, he returned to Savoy where he eventually became a senator in 1787. During this time, he joined a masonic lodge. Maistre continued to believe throughout his life that masonic ideas of progress and enlightenment in the form of illuminism were positive forces, despite eventual condemnations by the Church. Although he sought several times to reform masonry in the Europe, he continued to view it as a way out of philosophical materialism and a stepping stone to Christianity.[64]

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[61] The basic facts of Maistre's life are taken from the *Avant-Propos* by Pierre Glaudes to *Joseph de Maistre*: *Œuvres*, edited by Pierre Glaudes (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 2007), 2-6.
The most recent biography of Maistre in English is Richard Lebrun's *Joseph de Maistre: An Intellectual Militant* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

[62] Jean-Louis Darcel, "Sources of Maistrian Sensibility," in *Maistre Studies,* edited and translated by Richard Lebrun (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 101.

[63] He inherited the libraries of both his grandfather and a local priest, giving him the largest library in Savoy. See Jean-Louis Darcel, "Maistre's Libraries," in *Maistre Studies*, edited and translated by Richard Lebrun (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 3-35.

[64] Jean-Louis Darcel, "Sources of Maistrian Sensibility," 113-118.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, Maistre was initially sympathetic. Although not a republican, he wrote approvingly of the calling of the Estates General and of commemorating the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille.[65] However, as the Revolution progressed and became more radical and anti-Catholic, Maistre broke with it completely. In 1792 as the French army invaded Savoy, Maistre was the only senator who fled to the Sardinian capital of Turin. After finding little support there, he returned to Savoy in 1793 to find all of his property confiscated. In 1796, Maistre wrote his first great work, *Considerations sur la France*, where he decried the Revolution and predicted the return of the king to the French throne. When it eventually happened in 1814, Maistre was hailed as a prophet (although he was unhappy with the conditions of the Restoration). He later added a chapter on the Gallican Church, viewing the Revolution to be the definitive end of nationalist churches. The work was well received throughout Europe by those anxious of the Revolution. Different in tone and philosophy than Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, it nevertheless similarly helped form a counter-revolutionary intellectual movement.[66] While Burke provided a political and pragmatic rebuke of the acts of the National Assembly, Maistre framed the Revolution as necessary divine retribution for the errors of the preceding centuries.[67]

After serving in several posts in service of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Maistre was sent as ambassador to Russia in 1803. Separated from his family and bereft of all property, Maistre began

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[65] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 24.

[66] Maistre read and endorsed Burke's *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, but does not adopt his line of argumentation. See Darcel, "Maistre's Libraries," 22.

[67] Burke briefly mentions punishment, but not the overall theme. Maistre thinks Burke's essay is also an argument for the Anglican Church to rejoin Rome. *Sur le Protestantism* in *Œuvres,* 324-5.

composing his great work on the nature of divine providence: *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*. *Les Soirées* is a symposium of three men discussing God's temporal governance of the world. It was published posthumously in 1821, the same year as his death. While in Russia, Maistre once again became close with the Jesuits. Although suppressed throughout the Latin Church the Jesuits remained active in White Russia because the decree of suppression, *Dominus ac Redemptor* was never promulgated by Catherine the Great. The Jesuits continued to run a novitiate and several schools within Russia; and Maistre became involved with their work.[68] Maistre's notebooks and letters indicate that he was in regular communication with many Jesuits in Russia, including the master general.[69] Collectively, they became quite successful at converting Russian aristocrats to Catholicism. This success eventually led to expulsions of both the Jesuits and Maistre in 1817. Pope Pius VII had restored the Society of Jesus in Europe in 1814, but by then the Jesuits had already been allowed to return to the Kingdom of Sardinia, where Maistre's family continued to support them.[70] Maistre stated that he himself would have become a Jesuit, had it not been for his wife.[71] This devotion shows the roots of his Molinist thought.

Upon leaving Russia, Maistre travelled throughout France before returning to the Kingdom of Sardinia. By this time, the age of the French Revolution seemed to be over. Napoleon's failed

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[68] His work promoting the Jesuits' plans for education and governance in Russia interrupted his writing of Les Soirées for some time. Glaudes*, Avant-propos* in *Œuvres,* 4-5.

[69] Jean-Louis Darcel, "Maistre's Correspondence" in *Maistre Studies*, edited and translated by Richard Lebrun (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 74.

[70] The Jesuits had been restored in Sardinia in 1807. See Paul Shore, "The Years of Jesuit Suppression, 1773–1814: Survival, Setbacks, and Transformation," in *Brill Research Perspectives in Jesuit Studies*, Volume 2:1, December 2020, 1-117.

[71] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 137. Demonstrating this familial devotion, Maistre once said "Mon grand-père aimait les jésuites, mon père les aimait, ma sublime mère les aimait, je les aime, mon fils les aime, son fils les aimera, si le roi lui permet d'en avoir un."

invasion of Russia in 1812 and loss at Waterloo in 1815 had stabilized the monarchies in Russia and Austria, resulting in the Holy Alliance, and the Bourbons were back on the throne in France. While Maistre had predicted this long before, he was not pleased with the nature of the Restoration. He thought it had ceded too much to the Revolution. In 1819, he published what he considered to be his magnum opus, *Du Pape*. *Du Pape* examines the nature of government, liberty, and the Church. In it, Maistre argues forcefully for ultramontanism as a political solution and theological necessity. The horrors of the Revolution had demonstrated the failures of national Churches and the benefit of a singular authority over Christianity and European states. For Maistre, the pope must have complete and infallible authority over the Church and the rightful authority to depose despotic leaders. The papacy would become the source of liberty and truth in the post-revolutionary world.

Remarkably, Maistre began writing *Du Pape* in 1809, when the papacy was at its weakest point. Napoleon had just kidnapped Pius VII in order to force him into renouncing the Papal States and in order to retaliate against his declaration of excommunication. Pius VII would remain imprisoned until Napoleon's first abdication in 1814. Despite this weakness, Maistre saw in the papacy a solution to the political, religious, and philosophical errors of the time. The papacy alone could ensure truth against Protestantism, Jansenism, Gallicanism, and *philosophisme,* and their offspring of Jacobinism. His work helped develop theories of ultramontanism and the eventual French acceptance of Papal Infallibility in 1870 on the promulgation of *Pastor Aeternus* of the First Vatican Council.[72] Maistre had sought papal approval of *Du Pape*, but it was not granted. It

[72] John W. O'Malley, "Vatican I: Loss and Gain in the Governance of the Catholic Church" in *Church Life Journal*, https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/vatican-i-loss-and-gain-in-the-governance-of-the-catholic-church/

seems the most likely explanation for this was that it was considered unnecessary to give permission for a layman to publish such a work.[73]

Maistre as Theologian

Principally studied today as a political theorist, Joseph de Maistre is nonetheless an important figure for the history of theology. Throughout his writing, even when dealing with political issues, Maistre is concerned with describing how God accomplishes his will in the world. While he was trained as a lawyer and a statesman, Maistre recognized that the Revolution had taken from the world priests who had time for leisure and study. Therefore, others must take up the task of defending the Church and the ways of God. During a time of chaos within the Church, laymen had to begin performing the work of theologians. As he states in the opening of *Du Pape*:

> It may appear surprising that a man of the world should assume the right to treat of questions, which, until our time, have seemed to belong exclusively to the zeal and science of the sacerdotal order... In the first place, as our order was during last century egregiously criminal in regard to religion, I do not see why the same order should not present ecclesiastical writers with some faithful allies, who shall array themselves around the altar to keep at a distance from it every rash assailant, without embarrassing the Levites.
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> I doubt even whether, in these times, such an alliance has not become necessary. A thousand causes have weakened the sacerdotal order. The Revolution has plundered, exiled, massacred the priesthood; it has practiced every species of cruelty against the natural defenders of the maxims which it held in abhorrence. The ancient warriors of the sacred camp have departed to their rest.[74]

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[73] Bernard Jacqueline, "The Holy See and *Du Pape,*" in *Maistre Studies*, edited and translated by Richard Lebrun (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 232.241.

[74] Joseph de Maistre, *Du Pape*, translated by Richard Lebrun (Intelex Past Masters Series, nlx.com), preliminary discourse.
All English citations of Maistre's work are taken from the Past Masters' *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre* online series.

In taking their place, Maistre became the most important Catholic thinker of his generation and, as Henri de Lubac described him, the first post-medieval theologian.[75] In the years of the Restoration, Maistre's thought guided Catholic understandings of the role of the Church within the modern state.

A re-evaluation of the thought of Joseph de Maistre has occurred over the past thirty years. Formerly derided as a "forerunner to fascism," new work has sought to situate him within the broader intellectual movements of the Enlightenment.[76] He is still considered the father of modern European conservatism, but one open to the philosophical and scientific arguments of his age. However, recent studies have still had trouble pinning his thought down. Described as anything from a "reactionary" to an "Enlightenment thinker" to a "postmodern," his political thought has defied modern categorization.[77] Similarly, his theological ideas have been described as anything from "traditionalist" to "heterodox," and from "nominalist-neoplatonist" to "Pelagian".[78] Although his work could lend itself to such readings, situating Maistre within the existing Catholic debates of providence provides the most helpful and complete account of his thought. In doing so, his Molinist leanings become evident. Maistre rarely mentions Molina or Molinism in his work,

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[75] Henri de Lubac, *La postérité spirituelle de Joachim de Fiore* (Paris: Lethellieux, 1979), 306.

[76] Isaiah Berlin's frequent assertion that Maistre is proto-fascist has been consistently critiqued by Maistre scholars. See Jean-Yves Pranchere, "The Negative of the Enlightenment, the Positive of Order," in *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, edited by Armenteros and Lebrun. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), 48. Nevertheless, Berlin's characterization continues to have purchase in popular histories. See Edmund Fawcett, *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 9-10.

[77] Barbeau, "The Savoyard Philosopher", 161-162.

[78] Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 193.

and seems to have never mentioned Bañez, but the arguments of the *De Auxiliis* controversy form the metaphysical basis of his understanding of Divine action in the world.[79]

Maistre may be popularly known as the principal force of counter-Enlightenment and counter-Revolution, but his thought is not simply a product of debates regarding the French Revolution. While it was certainly occasioned by it, it is unintelligible apart from earlier debates on providence and predestination. And while Maistre wrote on many theological issues - including: the nature of prayer, sacrifice, divine justice, ecclesiology, church-state relations, and the priesthood - these issues will only be discussed below in relation to providence. Following our pattern of the three problems regarding providence posed by the French Revolution (notions of liberty and divine foreknowledge, God's permissive will and the nature of punishment, and conceptions of progress against providence) let us examine Maistre's theology, including his debt to the seventeenth and eighteenth theological century debates. While mention will be made to other works, the three works mentioned above (*Considerations sur la France, Les Soirées du Saint-Pétersbourg,* and *Du Pape*) will form the basis of our look at Maistre's Molinist understanding of divine providence and the *felix culpa* of the French Revolution.

Maistre's Molinism

As a result of the upheaval, Maistre was led to consider the working of providence within the temporal order. Eager to defend the existence of providence and to understand God's purpose in allowing the Revolution to happen, Maistre constructed a form of Molinism influenced by both

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[79] The only place Maistre mentions Molinism or Molina in his published writings is in defending both against Pascal and his Jansenist critiques of the Jesuits. Maistre, *De l'Église Gallicane*, Chapter IX.
The published work has a footnote stating that it is not necessary to be a Molinist to be a Catholic, one must simply not be a Jansenist. However, in Maistre's manuscript, the claim that it was "not necessary to be a Molinist" was struck out! See *On the Gallican Church*, translated by Richard Lebrun, in the Past Masters series.

neoplatonic and Enlightenment thought. While he is clear that the Revolution is evil, he also thinks it serves as proof of God's providence in cleansing the world of error. Through Jacobinism and the Revolution, Maistre believes God will bring about the end of the evils of Protestantism, Jansenism, Gallicanism, and *philosophisme*. However, he also recognizes that there is no return to a pre-revolutionary world. Akin to Noah and the Flood, the Revolution necessarily entails a new era upon the earth.[80]

In each of Maistre's three great works, his understanding of providence is primarily historical. He attempts a project similar to that of St. Augustine and Bossuet in describing God's will through an examination of history. But, his understanding of grace is quite different from both of them. Maistre shows proper piety and deference towards St. Augustine and *De civitate Dei*, but is suspicious of Augustinian understandings of predestination.[81] Maistre considered St. Augustine to be the source of Jansenist errors on grace and human nature. He also thought that these Jansenist errors had infected the work of Bossuet, even if Maistre still made frequent use of Bossuet's work. Maistre's harshest accusations against Bossuet, accusing him of Jansenism, had to be censored before they were published in France.[82] Similarly, Maistre professes a devotion to St. Thomas, but is critical of Thomistic theories of predestination.[83] He is against the idea of physical premotion, as he states clearly in his private notebooks:

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[80] Maistre, *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 594.

[81] Douglas Hedley, "Sacrifice, Suffering, and Theodicy in Joseph de Maistre," in *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, edited by Armenteros and Lebrun. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), 135.

[82] Armenteros*, French Idea of History*, 119.

[83] For example, the Second Dialogue of *Les Soirées du Saint-Pétersbourg* contains a defense of St. Thomas on the basis that while he was unable to foretell future developments, his thought was a gift to the Church in the thirteenth century. Maistre, *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 510.

> I have never liked the term *physical premotion*, which is used by some schools to designate the divine action of God on man. One could say that these two words burn with fear to see each other together.[84]

Broadly speaking, Maistre's criticisms of St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and Bossuet were political rather than theological. St. Augustine had long been preferred by both Protestants and Jansenists, two of Maistre's principal enemies. St. Thomas was defended by Jansenists against Jesuit Molinists; and Bossuet was a Gallican who was also lenient towards the Jansenists. Maistre makes use of their work continually - they are the three of the most cited theologians in his work - but rarely endorses their positions without reserve.[85] While they are sources for Maistre's great work on providence, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, they are not employed uncritically.

Les Soirées begins with the three characters on the Neva river passing by a boat of a wedding party that carries a horn band.[86] The style of horn, apparently common in Russia at the time, plays only a single note. A band consists of some twenty to thirty horns, with no one horn capable of performing the entire chord or melody. The melody is governed by the inventor, someone capable of creating and arranging all the notes into a harmonious unity. The individual instruments have no knowledge of the whole, but are capable of participating within it.[87] Whether

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[84] From his notes on Locke. Found in Marc Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010), 110. "Je n'ai jamais aimé l'expression de *prémotion physique*, dont on s'est servi dans quelques écoles pour désigner l'action divine de Dieu sur l'homme. On peut dire que ces deux mots brûlent d'effroi de se voir ensemble."

[85] St. Augustine is the most-cited theologian, Bossuet is the second, and St. Thomas is the most-cited scholastic. His other common theological sources are Bossuet's contemporaries (Fenelon, Huet, and Bergier) and Origen. Richard Lebrun, "Maistre's Reading," in *Maistre Studies*, edited and translated by Richard Lebrun (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 47-7.

[86] Maistre*, Les Soirées* in *Œuvres,* 455.

[87] "*Qu'importe à l'œuvre que les instrument sachent ce qu'ils font: vingt ou trente automates agissant ensemble produisent une pensée étrangère à chacun d'eux; le mécanisme aveugle est dans l'individu: le calcul ingénieux, l'imposante harmonie sont dans le tout.*" *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres,* 456.

the instruments desire it or not, they act in accord with the plans of the inventor. Maistre is fond of such mechanistic metaphors. *Considérations sur la France* begins:

> We are all attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a supple chain that restrains us without enslaving us. Nothing is more admirable in the universal order of things than the action of free beings under the divine hand. Freely slaves, they act voluntarily and necessarily at the same time; they really do what they will, but without being able to disturb the general plans. Each of these beings occupies the center of a sphere of activity whose diameter varies according to the will of the Eternal Geometer, who can extend, restrict, check, or direct the will without altering its nature.[88]

Although this can seem similar to the Enlightenment idea of the divine watchmaker (opposing divine involvement in the world, an analogy that Maistre himself employs to describe divine providence) Maistre uses the image to demonstrate how man can be free within a system of providential governance.[89] God has formed the boundaries and conditions of human freedom. Man acts according to the nature that he has been given. While men may try to rebel against divine governance, no one is capable of frustrating the divine will. It would be akin to a one-note-horn playing a different melody. Within the ordering of divine providence, man is free to act how he sees fit. Nevertheless, man's nature and the circumstances of the universe are so ordered that God's plans will always occur.

In order to account for the coexistence of Divine foreknowledge and free will, Maistre argues like a traditional Molinist. He takes it as an absolute that the will must not be bound or forced in any way. If a free choice were necessitated by some outside influence, the choice would no longer be free. He states this explicitly in *Les Soirées*:

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[88] *Considérations sur la France,* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 1.

[89] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 199.

> Now if you consider that even God cannot force the will, since a *forced will* is a contradiction in terms, you will appreciate that the will can be moved and led only by *attraction* (an admirable word that all the philosophes together would not have known how to invent). Moreover, attraction can have no other effect on the will than that of enhancing its energy by making it want to will more, so that attraction could no more harm liberty or the will than teaching of any kind could harm the understanding.[90]

For the will to act, it cannot itself be acted upon by an outside source. God acts on the will not by force or premotion, but by attraction. Grace is the presenting of a supernatural good before the will so that it desires it by nature.[91] Because God has ordered the world, and knows all hypothetical counterfactuals, the choices of an individual will are always known to God. God perfects the will by attracting it towards the good, rather than by impelling it.[92] Through *scientia media*, God orders the universe infallibly towards its end. In providence, even obstacles are proven to be means of God accomplishing his will.[93] Nothing occurs that God has not previously foreseen. The claims that Maistre is Pelagian seem to be modern versions of the Bañezian critique of Molinism. Thus, a Molinist causal structure, along with an emphasis on the attraction of grace, forms the theological grounding for Maistre's conception of providence.

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[90] *Les Soirées*, in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Sixth Dialogue.

[91] Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 116-9. This attraction, which according to St. Francis de Sales is Divine love, is the working of grace. As mentioned in the previous chapter, St. Francis de Sales attempted to pacify the conflict between the Dominicans and Jesuits through avoiding the issue altogether. He emphasized charity as the movement of the will towards a good. His emphasis on the attraction of charity, rather than the efficacious nature of grace, lent itself to fit within the Molinist system much more easily than the Thomist account. Maistre, as a fellow Savoyard, adopts this position on the movement of the will as desiring love.

[92] Maistre compares this Molinist idea of grace to that of other human actions. For example, knowledge is perfected through a movement towards an object outside the self, rather than by divine infusion. See *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres,* 618.

[93] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 472. "La Providence, pour qui tout est moyen, même l'obstacle, ne s'est pas moins servie du crime ou de l'ignorance pour exécuter cette justice temporelle que nous demandons."

Maistre rejects the idea of efficient grace as infallibly resulting in the perfection of the will. God only gives grace to those who will accept it. When speaking of providence and the punishment of the guilty, Maistre argues that God often does not punish because he knows it will not be accepted.

> It often happens that in our blind impatience we complain of the slowness of Providence in the punishment of crimes, and yet by a singular contradiction we also accuse it when its beneficent swiftness represses vicious inclinations before they have produced crimes. Sometimes God spares a known sinner because the punishment would be useless, while he chastises the hidden sinner because this chastisement will save a man.[94]

Divine action upon the individual perfects the will only when the will is open to receiving such action. Maistre, like all Molinists, attempts to avoid semi-pelagianism by asserting that God himself has created the conditions for man to be open to receiving grace. The given nature of an individual orders it providentially.[95] All movements of the will are subject to the first movement of the Creator. Even if the will cannot necessarily be moved by God, it is God who has ordered the universe in such a way that all things happen according to his plan. The conceptions of causal chains, efficacious grace, *scientia media*, and Divine foreknowledge are all thoroughly Molinist in his thought.

While a Molinist, Maistre was hardly a strict scholastic in the Jesuit-Suarezian mold. He also looked for theological inspiration elsewhere. He read many Church fathers and developed a fascination with Origen. Maistre's notebooks indicated that he read several works of Origen beginning in 1809, the same time he was writing *Du Pape* and *Les Soirées*. The works of Origen,

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[94] *Les Soirées*, in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre,* Ninth Dialogue.

[95] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 577. "C'est une des lois les plus évidentes du gouvernement temporel de la Providence, que chaque être actif exerce son action dans le cercle qui lui est tracé, sans pouvoir jamais en sortir."

although long available in the West, had been retranslated in the eighteenth century.[96] Politically, Origen had been criticized by *philosophes* and Protestants, which made him a natural ally to Maistre.[97] Origen's neoplatonist ideas of providence and the progress of the universe fit well with Molinist ideas. Recent articles have attempted to show that Origen and neoplatonism form the basis of his theology of providence.[98] However, Maistre argues that Origen is a worthwhile source because his thought is so similar to that of Molina. Molinism is the measure by which Origen's thought is judged. Maistre takes Origen's theory of predestination as foreseen good works to be a type of *scientia media*:

> Origen had very similar ideas about predestination to those which Molina made famous. On these words of Saint Paul: *Quos autem praedestinavit* (Romans, VIII, 29), he says "God who knows the future and the use that we will make of our freedom, knows those who will give themselves to virtue and he predestines them. by virtue of this knowledge ... We must not therefore believe that this premonition is the cause of actions, but it is a result of these freely produced actions."
>
> This is precisely *scientia media*. He then observes with great truth that what does occur does not necessarily have to happen; for he adds "suppose we are really free; will God prevent or not prevent our actions? If we say no, that completely ignores the divine nature. If we answer yes, it follows that this knowledge in no way harms our freedom."[99]

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[96] Pierre-Daniel Huet had re-edited Origen's Latin commentaries and found a previously unknown *Commentary on Saint Matthew.* Huet, who Maistre read and admired, became the principal source for Origen's thought in Europe. Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 172.

[97] Maistre holds to the Thomistic conception of secondary causality and participation in Divine governance. Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 104-5.

[98] Marc Froidefont, "Joseph de Maistre, Lecture d'Origène," in *Autour de Joseph et Xavier de Maistre: Mélanges pour Jean-Louis Darcel*, edited by Michael Kohlhauer (Chambéry: Université de Savoie, 2007), 112.

[99] Quote taken from Froidefont, "Joseph de Maistre, Lecture d'Origène," 115. "Origène avait sur la prédestination des idées tout à fait semblables à celles que Molina a rendu célèbres. Sur ces paroles de saint Paul: Quos autem praedestinavit (Romains, VIII, 29), il dit 'Dieu qui connaît l'avenir et l' usage que nous ferons de notre liberté, connaît ceux qui se donneront à la vertu et il les prédestine en vertu de cette connaissance. Il ne faut pas donc pas croire que cette prénotion soit la cause des actions, mais elle a lieu à cause de ces actions produites librement.' Ce qui est précisément la science moyenne. Il observe ensuite avec beaucoup de justesse que ce qui arrive certainement n'arrive pas pour cela nécessairement; puis il ajoute 'supposons que nous soyons réellement libres, Dieu préverra-t-il ou ne préverra-t-il pas nos actions? Si l'on dit que non, c'est méconnaître entièrement la nature divine. Si l'on répond affirmativement, il s'ensuit que cette connaissance nuit aucunement à notre liberté.'"

Thus, Maistre argues both for *scientia media* and the usefulness of Origen. While he may rarely mention Molinism, its understanding of divine knowledge forms the basis of Maistre's judgment of other theories of providence and predestination.

While Maistre did make use of new sources in his theology, he is almost constantly critical of Enlightenment thinkers. His principal theological arguments against them were regarding errors of the Enlightenment account of human nature and its relation to providence. For Maistre, nature forms man's reception of reason and revelation; and each individual nature provides the means for God to act in the world. God acts through secondary instruments. Because of this, Maistre argues continually against false ideas of human nature.[100] Nature is the means by which God providentially ordains each individual to the good. Human nature is anything but a *tabula rasa*. It is a given reality that is capable of participating in providential governance.[101] As we shall see below, he views the Enlightenment to be one of the principal causes of the Revolution. Therefore, it became a mission of his to refute its principles.

However, despite his criticisms, Maistre did cautiously employ Enlightenment thought in service to his work. The historical narratives of Hobbes and Rousseau, Malebranche's and the Cambridge Platonists' theory of innate ideas, and Leibniz's theodicy are all used by Maistre to refute false opinions.[102] While he critiques each of these opinions, he also used these thinkers

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[100] False ideas of nature form Maistre's harshest criticisms of Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau (though he is more sympathetic to Rousseau's criticism of the Enlightenment.) Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 44.

[101] Maistre argued most forcefully for secondary causality against the occasionalism of Malebranche. See *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 742.

[102] For Maistre's use (and hatred) of Rousseau, see Carolina Armenteros, "Maistre's Rousseaus," in *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, edited by Armenteros and Lebrun. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), 79-104
See also Phillipe Barthelet, "The Cambridge Platonists Mirrored by Joseph de Maistre" in the same volume, 67-78.

against those he considered to be the true enemies of truth and tradition: Bacon, Locke, and Voltaire.[103] He also recognized that in attempting to solve the problems posed by Enlightenment thinkers, he gave their concerns pride of place. For example, when speaking of liberty, he tries to show why the traditional state is the best source of true freedom. He eventually came to regret how deeply Enlightenment ideas had shaped his own work.[104]

Thus, Maistre is a Molinist open to neoplatonic ideas and influenced by Enlightenment thought. As we examine his particular understanding of and response to the French Revolution, we see this eclectic Molinism at work. By it, Maistre believes that God providentially ordered the world in such a way that this upheaval would occur. The task for the Catholic thinker is to understand the good that God will accomplish through such events. In fact, he believes that such upheavals teach us far more about God than times of tranquil harmony.

> In short, the more one examines the apparently most active personages in the Revolution, the more one finds in them something passive and mechanical. We cannot repeat too often that men do not lead the Revolution; it is the Revolution that uses men. They are right when they say it goes all alone. This phrase means that never has the Divinity shown itself so clearly in any human event. If the vilest instruments are employed, punishment is for the sake of regeneration.[105]

Providential Causes of the Revolution

Following Bossuet, Maistre believed that France is the most divinely favored nation.[106] Because of this, she had a destiny to influence Europe and the world. France's Christianity,

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[103] Maistre wrote an entire work attempting to refute Bacon's scientism and divorcing history from reason. Much of *Les Soirées* is spent arguing against Locke. But, Maistre disdains Voltaire more than anyone. A particularly colorful rant against Voltaire by the Count contains the striking line "Paris le couronna, Sodome l'eût banni.*" Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 557.

[104] Armenteros*, The French Idea of History*, 155.

[105] *Considérations sur la France* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 1.

[106] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 203.

language, and culture were guiding lights of civilization. God had blessed and guided her with the duty to bring all to salvation.[107] France, more than any other nation, was responsible for the greatness of Europe and the Catholic Church.[108] But the Revolution had destroyed this character. It was satanic, a removal of divine favor.[109]

> There is a satanic quality to the French Revolution that distinguishes it from everything we have ever seen or anything we are ever likely to see in the future. Recall the great assemblies, Robespierre's speech against the priesthood, the solemn apostasy of the clergy, the desecration of objects of worship, the installation of the goddess of reason, and that multitude of extraordinary actions by which the provinces sought to outdo Paris. All this goes beyond the ordinary circle of crime and seems to belong to another world.[110]

Although satanic, this did not mean that God was uninvolved in what was occurring. There was still a causal chain linking human action and divine action. The Revolution carried men along, swept up in passion as they destroyed what was good. This was *miraculous*. Men thought they were becoming freer, but one after the other their leaders were killed. The chain of action connecting God to the individual will was "tightened," dramatically reshaping what had taken generations to build.[111] After the Reign of Terror, Maistre saw the entire event as a sweeping punishment of the errors present in the Church and the state of France.

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[107] *Du Pape*, 11-2.

[108] *Du Pape*, 15.

[109] Pierre Manent believes Maistre's claim that the Revolution is satanic to be his preeminent focus throughout his work. Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 445.

[110] This quote first occurs in *Considérations sur la France,* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre,* Chapter 1. Maistre cites it again in *Du Pape* (15).

[111] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 200. "Mais dans les temps de révolution, la chaîne qui lie l'homme se raccourcit brusquement, son action diminue, et ses moyens le trompent".

Maistre follows St. Thomas in affirming that God is not the cause of *malum culpae* but is the cause of *malum poenae*.[112] He is not responsible for moral evil, but is the cause of a loss of divine favor. However, Maistre thinks that many forms of punishment and evil in the world are the natural effects of bad choices. They exist as remedies for the bad choices of free creatures. In providence, God has designed that moral evils naturally result in physical evils. While virtue and vice are not perfectly rewarded in this life, God has designed human nature to suffer when moral evils occur. Surprisingly, Maistre thinks that all sickness has its cause in some moral evil (although Christians can use sickness in order to grow in holiness).[113] He gets this idea from both Bossuet and from Origen. It is not just that the world has become subject to pain and death after the Fall. Rather, most sickness possesses a more proximate cause, often a cause of the person who is sick.

> I recall that Bossuet, preaching before Louis XIV and his whole court, called on medicine to testify to the deadly consequences of sensual pleasure. He was largely correct to cite what is most obvious and most striking, but it would have been right to generalize the observation. For my part, I cannot disagree with the opinion of a recent apologist who held that all illnesses have their origin in some vice proscribed by Scripture, and that this holy law contains true medicine for the body as well as the soul, so that if a society of just men made use of it, death would be no more than the inevitable term of a sane and robust old age. This opinion was, I believe, that of Origen.[114]

There is a direct cause and effect, outside of any divine intervention or occasionalism, between moral evil and suffering. This can be extended beyond the individual to a city or even to

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[112] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 466. "Votre saint Thomas a dit avec ce laconisme logique qui le distingue: Dieu est l'auteur du mal qui punit, mais non de celui qui souille."

[113] It was actually a common conception that sickness was tied to moral evil even among Enlightenment thinkers, such as Locke and Voltaire. See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 43.

[114] *Les Soirées* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, First Dialogue.

a nation.[115] The culture of a people is a part of a shared nature. Just as human nature rebels against moral evil by becoming sick, so a culture becomes sick as a result of its errors. In the normal course of events, these errors take generations to be punished. Cultures gradually rise and fall as a result of their ideas and morality. But what is seen in the French Revolution is far more dramatic. Maistre argues that God has suspended the usual time frame of punishment for a people in order that they might be punished far more severely and quickly.[116]

The errors of the French were principally theological. Protestantism, Jansenism, Gallicanism and *philosophisme* each caused the false ideas of Church and state at the heart of Jacobinism and the Revolution. Each were movements against the legitimate authority of revelation, placing the determination of truth in the individual. If culture provided the means for the providential governance of a people, each of these errors rejected culture in an attempt to determine one's own future. Each exalted the individual over the community. They were revolts against the legitimate authority of God, the Church, and nature making revelation subservient to some other principle.[117]

For Maistre, the Revolution began with the Reformation. The reformers placed authority in the will of the people against the authority of the Church. Protestantism is the error of placing

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[115] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 211. "La Providence, qui proportionne toujours les moyens à la fin, et qui donne aux nations, comme aux individus, les organes nécessaires à l'accomplissement de leur destination."

[116] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 662.

[117] Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 335-340.

the individual over tradition and unity.[118] It denied legitimate and necessary authority. It was natural that such an idea would be extended from the religious realm to the political.

> The rebels of the sixteenth century attributed sovereignty to the Church — that is, to the people. The eighteenth century did only transfer these maxims to politics; the system and the theory are the same, even to their remotest consequences. What difference is there between the Church of God, guided solely by His word, and the great republic, one and indivisible, governed solely by the laws and by the deputies of the sovereign people? None. It is the same folly, renewed only at a different time and under another name.[119]

Although France had rejected Protestantism definitively at the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, she was nonetheless responsible for the spread of Protestantism throughout the world. Maistre blames her for Calvinism and its offshoots.[120] Furthermore, an analogous error had crept into the French Church. Gallicanism placed the Church in a position subservient to that of the state. In all Protestant countries, the state had become the safeguard of Protestant practice and the arbiter of what type of Protestantism would be adopted. In both Protestantism and Gallicanism, the political superseded the religious. Under Bossuet, the French Church could claim that it was sound due to its example of saints and continual evangelization. Maistre, in his youth, had been sympathetic to this idea; Savoy had adopted Gallican principles of ecclesiastical governance.[121] But the Revolution showed how harmful this was. The National Assembly had quickly made the clergy subservient to the state.

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[118] Carolina Armenteros, "Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821)," in *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History*, edited by Jeffrey Burson and Ulrich Lehner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 139.

[119] *Du Pape* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 1.

[120] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 210.

[121] From the Introduction to the 1975 English edition of *Du Pape* from Richard Lebrun in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*.

Arguing against the nationalization of the French Church required acknowledging an authority outside of the state. Gallicanism could not withstand the Revolution. As we shall see in the next chapter, Gallicanism did not initially die out completely, but it did begin its decline. Jansenism would fall too by the same logic. It had sought refuge against Papal decrees through the French state. Those mechanisms had failed. Maistre's theology is constantly critical of them throughout his work.[122] He views them as irredeemably Protestant and influenced by the same pride that infected Enlightenment philosophy.[123]

Philosophisme is Maistre's term (adopted from Voltaire) for inflated reasoning disconnected from the given reality of a people and culture.[124] Seventeenth-century empiricism and eighteenth -century Enlightenment philosophy were the antithesis of Christianity, pitched in a battle to unseat the truths of revelation.[125] The Enlightenment exalted a form of reason which was considered scientific. In doing so, it became divorced from reality. It had cried out for the exaltation of reason and liberty, ignorant that their projects would result in the death of both.[126] Bacon, Locke, and others are all refuted on the grounds that they have created ideal worlds of

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[122] Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 21-7. However, by today's standard Maistre's pessimism about the state of humanity and the fallenness of our nature seems almost Jansenist. For an example, see his discussions on human nature in *Les Soirées*, Second Dialogue. That his writing can seem Jansenist at times is representative of a larger shift in theological anthropology.

[123] Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 333-4.

[124] Jean-Yves Pranchere, "The Negative of the Enlightenment, the Positive of Order," 50-1.

[125] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 229. "La génération présente est témoin de l'un des plus grands spectacles qui jamais ait occupé l'œil humain: c'est le combat à outrance du christianism et du philosophisme. La lice est ouverte, les deux ennemis sont aux prises, et l'univers regarde."

[126] *Du Pape*, 285-7.

reason.[127] Similar to Protestantism, the Enlightenment had also separated itself from tradition and history. They were parallel errors.

At the heart of Maistre's critique of these errors (Protestantism, Gallicanism, Jansenism, and *philosophisme*) is that each possessed a false understanding of providence. For Maistre, history was the source of understanding God's action in the world. To divorce oneself from tradition and unity was to attempt separate oneself from history and divine governance.[128] Maistre has been described as a fanatical supporter of tradition, but his understanding is much more nuanced.[129] Tradition and history provide insight into how God orders the universe and accomplishes his will. In his Molinist understanding, providence accomplishes its means through the ordering of unbound wills. For the will to attempt to rebel against tradition and history, when unjustified, is to rebel against truth and against God himself.[130] The Reformation began this process. It was completed by the Revolution.[131]

For Maistre, Protestantism, Jansenism, and Enlightenment materialism also led inevitably into fatalism. The double predestination of Calvin, its echoes in Jansenism, and the rigid system of invariable laws in materialism all destroy the liberty of man.[132] The irony is that the Revolution

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[127] Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 89-95.

[128] Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 280-5.

[129] This characterization was popularized by Isaiah Berlin. See "Introduction" to *Joseph de Maistre and the Legacy of the Enlightenment*, edited by Armenteros and Lebrun (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011), 2.

[130] *Du Pape*, 16. "Le protestantisme, le philosophisme et mille autres sectes plus ou moins perverses ou extravagantes, ayant prodigieusement diminué les vérités parmi les homme, le genre humain ne peut demeurer dans l'état où il se trouve."

[131] *Du Pape*, 359. "La structure du philosophisme ne pouvait être érigée que sur la vaste base de la Réforme."

[132] Froidefont, "Joseph de Maistre, Lecture d'Origène", 114.

began by demanding more liberty, justice, and power. But when followed, they would inevitably result in their contrary. Their aims would prove to be their own punishment.

> One may even notice that it is an affectation of providence, if I may be permitted the expression, that the efforts of a people to obtain a goal are precisely the means that providence employs to keep them from it. Thus, the Roman people gave themselves masters while believing they were opposing the aristocracy by following Caesar. This is the image of all popular insurrections. In the French Revolution the people have continually been enslaved, outraged, ruined, and mutilated by all parties, and the parties in their turn, working one against the other, have continually drifted, despite all their efforts, towards breakup at length on the rocks awaiting them.[133]

Thus, Maistre thought that France deserved punishment. False theological opinions had become accepted and needed to be cleansed of. These opinions had infected the nobility and the clergy. Both had become enamored with the Enlightenment and dismissive of the value of tradition.[134] Both had neglected the proper authority of the papacy, tradition, and divine providence.[135] Maistre also thought on a natural level that the clergy had grown lax as a result of their wealth. But, with the loss of property, God would bring forth men to the priesthood who were only concerned with the good of the Church rather than material advancement. The errors of the clergy and state in France were all the more serious because France had a role in guiding the rest of Europe. France had a divine vocation to uphold the faith and spread culture. That same cultural spirit that spread the faith was responsible for spreading the evils of the Revolution. France would

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[133] *Considérations sur la France* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 9.

[134] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 209-10.

[135] *Du Pape*, 10. "Par sa monstrueuse alliance avec le mauvais principe, pendant le dernier siècle, la noblesse française a tout perdu; c'est elle qu'il appartient de tout réparer. Sa destinée est sûre, pourvu qu'elle n'en doute pas, pourvu qu'elle soit bien persuadée de l'alliance naturelle, essentielle, nécessaire, française du sacerdoce et de la noblesse."

be punished first and most severely in order that Europe might find a surer foundation in tradition and religion.

> Providence, which always proportions the means to the end, and which gives to nations as to individuals the necessary organs for the accomplishment of their goals, has given the French nation precisely two instruments, two arms, so to speak, with which it stirs up the world-the French language and the spirit of proselytism that forms the essence of the nation's character. Consequently, France constantly has both the need and the power to influence men.[136]

The errors of the French had become evident. The Revolution was a swift and drastic punishment. Miraculously, the Revolution accomplished in a matter of a few years what would have usually taken generations to undo. A generation before, Voltaire had mocked the idea of divine justice in regard to a terrible earthquake in Lisbon. He questioned whether Lisbon really deserved such a punishment more than Paris. But now, with four million dead, Maistre argued that God has shown that France really was more deserving of punishment.[137] Beginning with the death of the king, God has punished the French though their own designs.[138]

All of Maistre's analysis on the causes of the Revolution fits within a Molinist conception. By divine foreknowledge, God was not surprised by what occurred. He had created a world in which false ideas resulted in negative effects. In attempting to rebel against tradition and the Church, the French merely initiated a punishment against themselves. Four million dead was a fitting and natural punishment for such errors.[139] Yet, God had also preordained that such drastic

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[136] *Considérations sur la France* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 2.

[137] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 566.

[138] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 204-5. "Or, tous les crimes nationaux contre la souveraineté sont punis sans délai et d'une manière terrible; c'est une loi qui n'a jamais souffert d'exception."

[139] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 205. *"*Chaque goutte du sang de Louis XVI en coûtera des torrent à la France; quatre millions de Français, peut-être, payeront de leurs têtes le grand crime national d'une insurrection anti-religieuse et anti-sociale, couronnée par un régicide."

punishment would have positive effects. While this takes varying forms in Maistre's work, he is continually confident that God aims to bring about good through the Revolution. In his Molinist system, grace is only at work when man is capable and ready to receive it; therefore the Revolution was a time of opening man to once again receive grace in order to bring about a later good.[140]

Progress, Providence, and Felix Culpa

Maistre is by no means the purely negative reactionary that some accounts have portrayed him to be. While he thinks the Revolution is unquestionably evil and satanic, he believes it was a necessary punishment. As he states that God only punishes those who are able to accept it, God must be punishing France in particular, and Europe as a whole, for some good purpose. The Revolution is a *felix culpa*. The *malum poenae* resulting from the *malum culparum* of the many theological errors will help bring about a new and reborn Europe. An upheaval meant a new order would begin. "*Si la Providence efface, sans doute c'est pour écrire*."[141]

Because providence orders all things, it is only the imperfect and the doubting who complain about God's temporal governance of the world.[142] Certainly, in this life the just may be punished and the wicked rewarded, but that is only according to a limited view of the working of providence. When one is able to see the entirety of history, the pattern becomes apparent. To speak of the current disorder is to assume a loss of a given order of providence. Certain extraordinary times let one glimpse God's plans more clearly. When disorder occurs, the nature of God's

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[140] Froidefont, "Joseph de Maistre, Lecture d'Origène", 117-8.

[141] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 210. "If providence erases, it is, without doubt, in order to write anew."

[142] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 544.

providential order is seen more clearly. Maistre thinks that the Revolution has shown the existence of providence more definitively than any other time in history.[143]

Having studied the patterns of history in order to know God's providence, conclusions can be drawn about God's intent for the future. If God has punished France, it is in order to glorify her. If the Church, nobility, and king have been destroyed, then surely God intends to have them ascend to a higher position. He approaches the question of the positive nature of the Revolution in a rigorous manner. If France really is the source of civilization and the Church, then Revolution must ensure its eventual glorification.

> If one wants to know the probable result of the French Revolution, it suffices to examine that which united all parties. They have all wanted the debasement, even the destruction, of the universal Church and the monarchy, from which it follows that all their efforts will culminate in the glorification of Christianity and the monarchy.[144]

Through Jacobinism, the disorder of modernity is made manifest. Jacobinism took the errors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to their logical conclusions. In killing their king and unleashing terror, France is cleansed of such errors. France could only be saved by Jacobinism.[145] It began the healing punishment upon the nation and continent in order to make it anew. After the punishment of the Revolution finished, it could eventually come into a greater future. That greater future would include a renewed Church. The very policies that the Revolution enacted to destroy the priesthood would be their source of regeneration.

> In the period immediately preceding the Revolution, the clergy had gone down, nearly as much as the army, in the place it occupied in public opinion. The

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[143] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 700-1.

[144] *Considérations sur la France* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 9.

[145] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 207. "Qu'on y réfléchisse bien, on verra que le mouvement révolutionnaire une fois établi, la France et la Monarchie ne pouvaient être sauvées que par le jacobinisme."

> first blow to the Church was the invasion of its properties; the second was the constitutional oath, and these two tyrannical measures began the regeneration. The oath sifted the clergy, if it may be put that way.[146]

For the priests and religious who opposed Jacobinism, the Revolution also gave birth to countless martyrs and refugees. This would give witness to the French and to all of Europe.[147] Because of this, Maistre also hoped the Revolution would bring about the end of Protestantism. Many bishops and clergy had left for England. Now, those English who had been long hostile to the Church would come to form closer ties, ushering a new era in the Church.[148] The Anglican Church, being part French-Catholic and part French-Presbyterian, could form a link to bringing the whole Christian world back under the auspices of the pope.[149] The natural French characteristic of proselytism would bring about a rebirth of Christendom.

Maistre held this belief about a coming renewal of Christendom in *Considerations sur la France* in 1796 during the era of the Directory. As the Revolution progressed through Europe, and its ideals became moderated and stabilized under Napoleon, Maistre's optimism diminished. The style and content of his predictions changed over the course of his writings as he became progressively more pessimistic about how deeply the Revolution had become a part of European society. In accord with his Molinist thought, he was convinced that good will still happen and that all is done according to God's will. But Maistre gradually began to understand that those good

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[146] *Considérations sur la France* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Chapter 2.

[147] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 773. "Je crois que, pour la gloire de l'intrépidité sacerdotale, la Révolution a présenté des scènes qui ne le cèdent en rien à tout ce que l'histoire ecclésiastique offre de plus brillant dans ce genre. Le massacres des Carmes, celui de Quiberon, cent autres faits particuliers retentiront à jamais dans l'univers."

[148] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 210. "L'émigration considérable du clergé, et particulièrement des évêques français, en Angleterre, me paraît surtout une époque remarquable. Surement, on aura prononcé des paroles de paix!"

[149] *Considérations sur la France* in *Œuvres*, 210.

effects may not occur for generations. The Restoration of the Bourbons was far from what Maistre had hoped for.[150] It had not resulted in the end of Revolutionary ideas, but rather an institutionalization of false principles in the guise of monarchy. But his belief that the papacy would play a role in a new Europe was maintained. As people clamored for liberty, it would only be the pope who could maintain it.

His vision for a new Europe centered on a renewed power of the papacy. The pope was the only guarantor of faith and truth. He argued this historically. Against Rousseau, Maistre argues that Christianity had been the source of civilization and freedom throughout history. Only Christianity had liberated the world and provided culture. It is not true that man was born free and is now everywhere in chains.

> The opposite of the foolish assertion, man is born free, is the truth. At all times and in all places, until the establishment of Christianity, and even until this religion had sufficiently penetrated into the hearts of men, slavery was essential to the government and political state of nations, in republics as well as monarchies; whilst it never came into the head of any philosopher to say there should not be slaves, nor into that of any legislator to attempt their abolition, either by fundamental laws or by such as circumstances might give rise to.[151]

It was the Church that granted what the Revolution and the *philosophes* claimed they wanted. Therefore, it could only be the Church that would guarantee the positive results of the Revolution. That Church necessarily involved a central authority. Infallibility was a consequence of this authority. Just as a king is sovereign, so a pope is infallible.[152] If he were not infallible, he

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[150] Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 135.

[151] *Du Pape*, in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre,* Book 3, Chapter 2.

[152] *Du Pape*, 20. “L'infaillibilité dans l’ordre spirituel, et la souveraineté dans l’ordre temporel, sont deux mots parfaitement synonymes. L’un et l’autre expriment cette haute puissance qui les domine toutes, dont toutes les autres dérivent, qui gouverne et n’est pas gouvernée, qui juge et n’est pas jugée."

could be disobeyed. The consequences of disobeying the pope were to descend into another eventual Revolution, as the Reformation had demonstrated. Making the Church subservient to the state had resulted in the state becoming a religion.

Maistre thought the exaltation of reason of the *philosophes* had proven false. They had divorced thought from culture and reality. History provided the means of knowing true governance and right action. To plan abstractly like the Enlightenment philosophers, or to distort history into a criticism of culture like Rousseau, had resulted in collapse. A nation with no history or tradition enslaved men and resulted in terror. Thus, the common faith and sense of the people would prevail. This would prove to be one of Maistre's most important contributions to Catholic thought, as we shall see in the next chapter.

While most of his influence was political, his theological work continued to inspire theologians in the generation after his death. Beyond his Molinism, Maistre does present some ideas of a possible future from Origen and from masonic-illuminist influences that had purchase. In *Les Soirées*, Maistre has one character, a Russian senator, speculate about a possible new order of things.[153] Careful to refrain from stating that a new "Age of the Spirit" would dawn upon the Earth, the ideas presented by the Senator nonetheless echo Origen's universalist ideas of salvation

[153] There are three characters (a Savoyard count, a Russian senator, and a young French officer) try to understand the evils that have befallen Europe and the purpose that God may have had in allowing them. The count, who is undoubtedly Maistre himself, presents the Molinist-Catholic view of providence. The senator argues for illuminist ideas, consistent with the masonic schools with which Maistre was familiar. The young officer is led by the other two to reject Enlightenment ideals of progress.

and Joachimite beliefs in a final age of the world commencing in his time.[154] The Church may prevail until the end, but it may take a new form.

> "God will be with us until the end of time, the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, etc." Very well! Does it follow, I ask you, that God has forbidden himself all new manifestations, that he is not permitted to tell us anything beyond what we already know? It must be admitted that this would be a very strange way of reasoning... Does it seem to you that this state of things can last, and that this great apostasy not be at the same time the cause and the portent of a memorable judgement?[155]

The senator argues from current events - including: the failures of Protestantism, the unreasoning of Islam, the spread of the Bible, and the witness of the Revolution - that a renewed type of Church would emerge in the modern world. In *Les Soirées*, Maistre does not state explicitly that he agrees with the conclusions of the senator, but does acknowledge that they come from masonry and illuminism.[156] The world did seem like it was coming into a new age. Just as the *philosophes* and Jacobins had thought they were creating a new City on a Hill, so too Christians reasonably hoped God would accomplish the same through them.

It is impossible to say whether Maistre himself believed a new world and a new type of Christianity would emerge, but it is certainly reasonable to assume he took it to be a possibility. His initial hopes of a restored French monarchy and Church had come, but it fell far short of the type of restoration he had hoped for. The Revolution had not been defeated in his lifetime. In fact, many of its ideals had been enshrined in the French government under Louis XVIII. In *Du Pape*,

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[154] Henri de Lubac identifies a Joachamite strain in Maistre's thought. Unbeknownst to Lubac, Maistre used Joachim of Fiore as a pseudonym when entering masonry. However, as Lubac acknowledges, Maistre refrains from stating that a new revelation will come or that the Church will cease. Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 23. See also Froidefont, *Théologie de Joseph de Maistre*, 445.

[155] *Les Soirées* in *Œuvres*, 768.

[156] *Les Soirées* in *The Collected Works of Joseph de Maistre*, Eleventh Dialogue.

Maistre repeats the ideas that a renewed Church will result from the Revolution, but his hopes are placed in the far distant future. He recognizes that God has allowed the Revolution to succeed in many ways, despite its manifold evil. Maistre long acknowledged that the Revolution was irreversible, but he hoped God would use it more swiftly to punish the evils of the world.

Conclusion

Through all of Joseph de Maistre's analysis of the causes of the French Revolution, its effects through Europe, and its possible good outcomes, Molinism guides his thought. He is firmly convinced of the reality of a providential ordering of creation, even in the midst of upheaval. In fact, the existence of such chaos proves that the world has a typical order. Furthermore, man's freedom remains fully at liberty to choose. While the Revolution has diminished individual freedom by carrying men along in a fury of passion, God has imposed no necessities on the will. Known from all eternity, the Revolution will be a source of renewal and cleansing for the Church and the state.

By studying history in order to know the ways of God, Maistre approaches the particular challenges of the Revolution systematically and rationally. France had been the source of culture and the most faithful Catholic country. When God allowed France to collapse, it must have been in order to make her stand anew. Evil actions and beliefs have real consequences. The errors of *philosophisme*, Protestantism, Jansenism, and Gallicanism had resulted in Jacobinism and the Revolution. These were natural consequences. God may be the author of *malum poenae*, but the punishment is written into the very nature of cause and effect in creation. Even if the period of change is miraculous, these errors almost necessarily result in the death of millions, a collapsed Church, a murdered king, and a continent plunged into war.

While Maistre is certainly enamored with Origen, and seeks to defend him, Maistre's thought is best understood as a development of Molinism. Therefore, it is also susceptible to the critiques of Molinism. Although Maistre mentions grace (rarely), events, including the future growth, stabilization, and glorification of the Church, are broadly understood as being naturally caused.[157] These are events that will necessarily spring from the Revolution, rather than from efficacious grace. This is certainly a position that falls within the acceptable bounds of the decrees regarding the *De Auxiliis* controversy, but it is a position that also is susceptible to a type of *rapprochement* with the Enlightenment, particularly on the issue of human liberty.

By necessity, this chapter has only briefly looked at Maistre's engagement and critiques of the Enlightenment, choosing instead to situate his understanding of providence within existing Catholic conceptions. But, Maistre himself recognized that he had ceded too much to Enlightenment ideas. In *Du Pape*, the separation of powers, the emphasis on liberty, combatting of tyrants, and limits of authority were Enlightenment concerns. In arguing for the Church's role in guaranteeing them, he had accepted their criticisms and ideas. He had merely transferred the role of guaranteeing them to the pope. This is perhaps one reason Maistre regretted that *Du Pape* would only ever do harm.[158] Despite his efforts, the Enlightenment seemed to have become even part of his thought. It surely would influence Europe for generations to come.

Leaving the *De Auxiliis* controversy unresolved had real consequences as well. As Maistre's thought became influential in the generation after his death, his understanding of natural

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[157] As mentioned in the first chapter, in the Molinist system, efficacious grace is not the sole cause of variation in sanctity or faithful adherence to the divine will.

[158] Armenteros, "Joseph de Maistre," 140.

effects of choices became associated with progressivism and liberalism. This father of European conservatism attempted to avoid fatalism and progressivism in his writings, but his thought was susceptible to such interpretations. In fact, Maistre became more widely read by the European "left" than the "right".[159] Also, his suspicion of the efficacious grace and its associations with Jansenism resulted in him ignoring the topic almost entirely. He is certainly not a Pelagian, but in his effort to distance himself from Sts. Augustine and Thomas on predestination his work can tend towards an overemphasis on the power of the individual will.

Maistre's theological thought, like his political and historical ideas, deserve a reassessment. This first "modern theologian" continues the existing debates of the pre-modern period, but in a way that is open to other influences. He is not the nominalist-neoplatonist or the Pelagian that some have painted him as. Rather, he was a Molinist who sought to condemn the Revolution unequivocally and to understand its causes and effects. For Maistre, the French Revolution is a real *felix culpa*. There were serious errors that had to be corrected by the most drastic punishment in European history. But, he had no doubt that God would use it to bring about good. The resulting Church and state would be greater than they had ever been before. However, he eventually came to accept that such results may not occur until long after his death.

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[159] Jean-Yves Pranchere, "The Negative of the Enlightenment, the Positive of Order," 57-8.

Chapter 3

Félicité Lamennais

The next influential Catholic response to the Revolution was found in the work of someone heavily influenced by Joseph de Maistre, Félicité Lamennais. Lamennais' work, and the responses it elicited, mark a turning point in the Catholic response to the French Revolution. He was initially critical of the Revolution and its precipitants in the Reformation and the Enlightenment and it was well received by Catholics throughout Europe. However, Lamennais eventually came to view revolutionary developments and the exaltation of liberty as tools to be used by the Church in order to advance her mission in the modern world. Lamennais believed that providence had allowed the Revolution to happen, and therefore the Church must use the effects of the Revolution in order to create a more perfect society. The pre-revolutionary arguments over providence and predestination become reduced to discussions of creating a better future. In the thought of Lamennais, the concepts of progress and providence become one.

Following Maistre, Lamennais argued that the evils of the Revolution stemmed from private judgment and a rejection of tradition and authority. In order to combat this, Lamennais constructed what he took to be the counterpart to individualism, *sens commun*. *Sens commun* is the general knowledge of truth, given by God to all people in every culture. Relying upon rational forms of thought had resulted in the Revolution and chaos. Lamennais thought these events proved that man needed some authority beyond reason to come to know truth. He appealed to the general sense that all seemed to possess that the ideas of the Revolution were wrong and harmful. While they might be difficult to reason against logically, one could recognize that Revolutionary and Enlightenment ideals were not false. This sense was the given idea of truth from God. *Sens commun* forms the epistemological grounding for all his work. He attempted to prove *sens commun*

by pointing to agreement of many cultures throughout history on fundamental topics like morality, providence, and the existence of the soul. In turn, he sought to justify his own beliefs by appealing to examples in history of various cultures holding similar opinions. The initial enthusiasm which greeted Lamennais' works shows how his anti-rationalism made sense in post-revolutionary France.

While studying the thought of Lamennais is certainly worthwhile in itself, the condemnations he received also clarify doctrine. The Church's response to him began her combative relationship with the principles of liberalism. In condemning Lamennais, the Church professed not just to be against the Revolution, but also against the principles of liberalism which it had advanced. The thought of Lamennais is also difficult to summarize - there exist no comprehensive intellectual biographies on him - but he consistently relies on foundational principles of a distrust of private reason and a need for some authority to determine truth. However, without a grounding in either Molinist-Congruism or Bañezian-Thomism, Lamennais' idea of *sens commun* lacks the philosophical rigor required to address divine providence, the existence of evil, and human free will. There is little metaphysical reasoning present in his thought. This results in him paying no attention to the particular providential ordering of souls to beatitude and the nature of predestination. Providence becomes solely a general ordering of the world towards a progressively greater and more liberal future.

Lamennais' conclusions changed dramatically over the course of his work. He claimed that this was merely due to the fact that he slowly came to understand *sens commun* better.[160] In order

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[160] Sylvain Milbach, "Introduction," in *Lamennais: A Believer's Revolutionary Politics*, edited by Richard Lebrun and Sylvain Milbach (Boston: Brill, 2018), 2.

to grasp his thought better, let us begin with a brief overview of his life before turning to discuss the foundations of his thought, his understanding of providence in light of the Revolution, his turn towards liberal progressivism, as well as how his conception of *sens commun* shaped his thought.

Life and Influence

Hugues-Félicité Robert de La Mennais was born in Saint-Malo, Brittany in June of 1782 to a recently-ennobled merchant family.[161] At a young age, his mother died; he and his elder brother, Jean-Marie, were sent to live with an uncle.[162] The uncle believed in Rousseau's principles of education, locking Félicité for long hours in his immense library. Féli (as he was known) became an autodidact who read broadly and came to possess a working knowledge of many philosophers and theologians, but seems not to have had a deep devotion to any one particular thinker.[163] While the family was devoutly Catholic, he did not take his first communion until the age of 22.[164]

As the Revolution progressed, the northwest of France remained Catholic and hostile to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. With the execution of Louis XVI and mass conscription under the revolutionary government, revolts broke out in the Vendee and in Brittany, resulting in

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[161] While born de la Mennais, he later dropped the "de", indicating his rejection of aristocracy. Towards the end of his life, he changed the spelling again to "Lamennais" (he considered the separated definite article to be pretentious). In contemporary literature, he is universally referred to by this form. Alexandre Dumas remarked that the thought of Lamennais could be three ages: de la Mennais the Catholic apologist, La Mennais the Catholic liberal, and Lamennais the citizen. Sylvain Milbach, "Introduction," 2. Other biographical facts have been taken from: Aimé Richardt, *Lamennais: Le révolté 1782-1854* (Paris: Groupe Artège, 2016).

[162] His brother was declared Venerable Jean-Marie de la Mennais by Pope Paul VI in 1966. Jean-Marie became the founder of several missionary institutes.

[163] Féli knew at least five foreign languages fluently, all self-taught.

[164] His brother was much more devout and made his first communion at the age of 10.

genocidal retaliations by the state (1793-4).[165] Lamennais' family housed non-juring priests and facilitated their escape out of France. His father was arrested, but escaped the guillotine. His experience of the Revolution, and its brutal effects in Brittany, shaped his work. As he wrote in his first book (co-authored with his brother):

> The mass of clergy, while dispersed in strange countries, deposited there the seeds of Catholicism which may bear fruit in time and could develop one day a great number of ecclesiastics, prepared for martyrdom, would brave in France all dangers in order to distribute to the faithful the saving help of the sacraments and the consolations of hope. What heroic traits! What sublime devotion could I not bring to mind? Never has religion appeared more magnanimous and beautiful! And if the triumphant philosophy imagined new crimes, persecuted Christianity gave birth to new virtues.[166]

After the Concordat of 1801, the Bishop of Rennes ordained his brother, Jean-Marie, to the subdiaconate and eventually to the priesthood in 1804. Jean-Marie began to influence Féli in practicing the faith. At this point, Féli made his first confession and communion and became an enthusiastic critic of the rationalism of the Revolution. He came to see the necessity of an authority to guarantee truth, which he identified with the pope. Despite interest in joining the family commercial business, Napoleon's embargo on English goods had nearly bankrupted the family and made the prospects of a merchant career seem dim. Instead, he was sent to study at Saint-Sulpice for six months in 1806 and returned to teach mathematics with his brother at the minor

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[165] Lamennais makes mention of the heroic example of Bretons and Vendeens several times in work. See *Œuvres Complètes de F. de la Mennais (*Paris: Paul Daubrée et Cailleux, 1836-7), Vol 9, 47-8. This edition of his complete works is available on Google Books.

[166] Tandis que la masse du clergé, dispersée dans des contrée étrangères, y déposait des germes de catholicisme, qui fécondés par le temps, se développeront peut-être un jour, un grand nombre d'ecclésiastiques, préparés au martyre, bravaient en France tous les dangers pour distribuer aux fidèles le secours des sacrements et les consolations de l'espérance. Que de traits héroïques, que de sublimes dévouement ne pourrois-je pas rappeler! Jamais la religion ne parut plus magnanime et plus belle; et si la philosophie triomphante imaginait des crimes nouveaux, le christianisme persécuté enfanta de nouvelles vertus. - *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. 6, 69-70.

seminary. He began considering the priesthood.[167] Despite the circumstances, his conversion and interest in the priesthood seems to have been genuine.[168]

In 1808, the de La Mennais brothers published *Réflexions sur l'État de l'Eglise en France Pendant le 18ème Siècle et sur sa Situation Actuelle* anonymously. Similar to Maistre's work, it blamed the Revolution on the Reformation and the growth of Enlightenment philosophy. In 1811, Féli received tonsure. In 1814 the brothers published their second work, *De la Tradition de l'Église sur l'Institution des Evêques*, condemning Napoleon's appointment of the new archbishop of Paris. Strongly against Gallicanism, they argued for the independence of the Church from government oversight and the complete submission of the French Church to the pope. Both brothers welcomed the Restoration of the Bourbons later that year. Upon Napoleon's escape from Elba in 1815, Féli fled to England. After Napoleon's second fall, he returned to Paris where he received the subdiaconate and, a year later, the diaconate. After a profound crisis of faith, and full of self-doubt, he was ordained to the priesthood in Brittany in 1816. Apart from brief forays to Saint-Sulpice, he never attended formal schooling and was never technically a seminarian.[169] The Revolution had overturned priestly formation, so he was hardly the only example of this type of priestly preparation in France. However, the influence of his eclectic formation would be widely felt.

After his ordination, he began writing a refutation of Enlightenment philosophy and modern deism. The first volume of *l'Essai sur l'Indifférence en matière de religion* was published

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[167] He also briefly considered moving to Kentucky to become a Trappist of Gethsemane, as religious orders were still banned in France.

[168] Later in life, he described his thought as always "wanting to believe" rather than strictly "believing." Louis Girard, *Lamennais ou le devoir de croire* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2010), 11.

[169] Most of his priestly formation was from his brother and from two French priests whom he met while in exile in England.

in 1817. *L'Essai* argues against the natural religion of Rousseau and the privatization of religion and judgment as advanced by the Reformers and *philosophes*. For Lamennais, indifference is an attitude of either treating religion as a political matter or of rejecting revelation as a source of true knowledge. In order to combat this, he appeals to the common experience of tradition. Common experience (*sens commun*) and judgment showed how foolish rationalism of the Revolution was. Because it was difficult to directly argue against rationalism, a general appeal to the authority of *sens commun* could be made to refute it. *L'Essai* was an immediate sensation throughout Europe. He was hailed as a new Bossuet or Maistre, combining an encyclopedic knowledge with an eloquent and captivating style.[170] Maistre himself wrote that "*Ce livre est un coup de tonnerre sous un ciel de plomb*."[171]

In 1824 Lamennais formed a private school and grew to have a devoted following among younger French Catholics. Among these was Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, the future re-founder of the Dominican Order in France, and Charles de Montalembert, who became a father of Catholic democracy and liberalism. In 1829 Lamennais published *Des Progrès de la Révolution et de la guerre contre l'Église* to argue against the hierarchy in France who had officially readopted the Gallican articles of Bossuet. He called for strict ultramontanism and predicted a coming revolution. When it came the following year, he was hailed as a prophet. In 1830, along with Lacordaire and Montalembert, Lamennais founded *l'Avenir*, a daily newspaper carrying the slogan "God and Liberty!". *L'Avenir* argued that the Church should utilize and advance liberal principles in order

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[170] Bernard Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition: Aspects of Catholic Thought in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 67.

[171] "This book is like a thunderbolt under a leaden sky." - Richardt, *Lamennais*, 45.

to pursue her mission. The paper lasted less than a year but garnered great attention, including hostility from the French episcopate.

Seeking papal approval for their combination of ultramontanism and liberalism, Lamennais, Lacordaire, and Montalembert traveled to Rome. After several months, they were finally granted an audience. They left Rome without any guarantees that their project would be supported. Soon after, Gregory XVI issued *Mirari Vos* (1832) which among a host of condemnations, included warnings against liberal ideas such as freedom of the press and the strict separation of Church and state.[172] Fundamentally, it was an anti-liberal document, produced by a papacy still reeling from the effects of revolution in Europe.[173] While Lamennais was not mentioned by name, and it did contain a condemnation of indifferentism, it was clear that parts of the encyclical were written against *l'Avenir*.[174] This left Lamennais in the strange position of being an ultramontanist with positions condemned by the pope. While Lacordaire and Montalembert immediately submitted, Lamennais only did so reluctantly. He then retreated to Brittany where he composed a new work, *Paroles d'un Croyant* (1833).

In *Paroles d'un Croyant*, Lamennais stated that he submits to the pontiff in matters of faith and morals, but in matters of politics he is free to act as a citizen of France. In *Paroles*, all authority that limits liberty is evil and can be ignored. Ironically, the man who began his career arguing for the impossibility of indifference towards religion in a state and the necessity of papal supremacy was now strictly separating matters of religion from politics and opposing the pope. *Paroles* was

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[172] Denzinger §2730-2.

[173] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 95.

[174] Milbach, "Introduction," 7.

an immediate sensation throughout Europe. It has been called the first great publishing success of the nineteenth century.[175] At this time, he publicly ceased functioning as a priest.[176]

Forced to respond, Gregory XVI issued *Singulari Nos*. This time, Gregory XVI condemned Lamennais' work specifically:

> It hardly seemed believable that he whom We welcomed with such good will and affection would so quickly forget Our kindness and desert Our resolution...However, We have learned of the pamphlet written in French under the title *Paroles d'un Croyant*, for it has been printed by this man and disseminated everywhere... Though small in size, it is enormous in wickedness.
>
> We have studied the book entitled *Paroles d'un Croyant*. By Our apostolic power, We condemn the book: furthermore, We decree that it be perpetually condemned. It corrupts the people by a wicked abuse of the word of God, to dissolve the bonds of all public order and to weaken all authority. It arouses, fosters, and strengthens seditions, riots, and rebellions in the empires. We condemn the book because it contains false, calumnious, and rash propositions which lead to anarchy; which are contrary to the word of God; which are impious, scandalous, and erroneous.[177]

Lamennais never reconciled with the Church and became increasingly hostile towards the government under Louis-Philippe. From 1841 to 1846 he published his grand synthesis, *Esquisse d'une Philosophie*. While maintaining a belief in the Trinity, he denied the Incarnation, revelation, or any type of divine intervention in the world. Authority was placed in the *sens commun*, extended to all people. Because of this, he rejected the doctrine of original sin and the origins of *felix culpa*. But, he still maintained a belief in providence and the promise of a greater future.

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[175] Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics: France's Postrevolutionary Generation in Search of a Modern Faith* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 143.

[176] Carolina Armenteros, "Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais (1782-1854)," in *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History*, edited by Jeffrey Burson and Ulrich Lehner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 153.

[177] https://www.papalencyclicals.net/greg16/g16singu.htm

After the Revolution of 1848, he was elected as a representative to the Constitutive Assembly (along with Lacordaire who sat on the far left of the chamber in his recently-acquired Dominican habit). Lamennais acted as a political party of one, trusted by neither the liberals (who considered him too Christian) nor the Catholics (who considered him too liberal). After the coup of Napoleon III in 1851, Lamennais retired from public life and spent his last years translating the *Divine Comedy*. He died in 1854, refusing the sacraments and requesting to be buried without funeral rites.[178]

Although his students left him (or rather chose not to cooperate in schism) after *Singulari Nos*, he still had a wide influence. Besides influencing the re-founder of the Dominicans, his work was admired and read by the re-founder of the Benedictines and father of the liturgical movement, Dom Prosper Gueranger, numerous French public figures (such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, and Auguste Comte) and by many figures in the Oxford Movement (including John Henry Newman).[179] He has been credited with founding the idea of Catholic liberalism, spreading ultramontanism, and indirectly encouraging a return to Thomism.[180] Similar to Maistre, he serves as a mediating point between the pre-revolutionary and the modern worlds.

> He stood at the parting between two worlds. He strove to arrest the onset of forces he was at the last driven to recognize as irresistible. It is the dramatic quality

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[178] A recent piece has attempted to explain these large swings in belief by diagnosing Lamennais with "Histrionic Personality Disorder." If true, it would explain his reluctance to submit to the Church. See Armenteros, "Lamennais," 161.

[179] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 67, 78, 86.

[180] W. Jay Reedy, "Maistre's Twin?: Louis de Bonald and the Counter-Enlightenment," in *Joseph de Maistre's Life, Thought, and Influence*, edited by Richard Lebrun (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 173.

> of his challenge to those whom he had so splendidly led which gives him in the nineteenth century a place at once exceptional and important.[181]

These dramatic turns in his life shape his understanding of providence and his analysis of the Revolution. As we examine his understanding of both, these changes in belief must be kept in mind. But, there is still a consistency of thought throughout his work. He continually appeals to authority and providence as answers to the evils present in his time. The center of authority and the goal of providence changes, yet the reasoning is remarkably similar. While treating the entirety of Lamennais' work as a consistent whole may be unwise, there are fundamental principles in his work that remain the same. Lamennais himself believed that he had not radically changed theologically, he only gradually came to see the results of his thought.[182]

Mennaisian Ideas of Providence

We find in Lamennais someone who (unlike Maistre) was not a rigorous disciple of a specific theological school, resulting in a *sui generis* approach to providence. To prove the existence of a providential ordering of creation, Lamennais makes an appeal to what will become the foundation and authority for all of his work: the common reason of the people, or *sens commun*. *Sens commun* is the understanding of all people, known through history. Lamennais does not prove the existence of providence per se, but rather demonstrates that it is an idea that has been held by various cultures throughout history.[183] The pre-socratics, the stoics, the scholastics, and the

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[181] Christian Marceal, *La Famille de La Mennais sous l'ancien régime et la Révolution*, translated by Bernard Reardon (Angers: Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest, 1913), 165.

[182] Milbach, "Introduction," 2.

[183] While similar to the conception of *sensus fidelium*, it is not based upon the gift of faith. All cultures, not just Catholic civilizations, have been given *sens commun*.

contemporary Church all teach that the world is governed providentially.[184] With such a wide source of agreement, it must be true.

Lamennais' exact understanding of *sens commun* is impossible to define precisely. He bases the concept on the imprinting of the Word of God upon each individual.[185] Man participates in the gift of reason and truth given him by the Trinity.[186] *Sens commun* is the collective participation in the Truth given by the Creator. The concept shares similarities with natural law, but is also a source of revelation. In practice, it proves to be a nebulous idea that he appeals to continuously. It is more of a general sense of truth than an exact calculation of it.

An individual may not be capable of arguing directly against Luther, Calvin, Descartes, or Rousseau, but one can appeal to the general sense that their ideas are dangerous and wrong. Their effects were obviously evil. And if the evils of the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Revolution were based upon individual judgment, then they could be overcome through an appeal to the collective *sens commun*. All could plainly see that rationalism led to catastrophe. But, arguing logically against the *philosophes* was a daunting task. Instead, one could see from tradition, history, and the collective knowledge of all people that such ideas did not work. Lamennais uses it to argue for a host of apologetic aims. By *sens commun*, Lamennais attempts to justify truths of the faith against prideful reasoning:

> In the same way the sensible man, who takes *sens commun* as the rule of his judgments, sees easily and with certainty, as by himself alone, the most important truths, such as: the existence of God, his providence, the immortality of the soul, and the need for

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[184] *Œuvres Complètes* Vol 3, 186.

[185] Girard, *Lamennais*, 315-6.

[186] Louis le Guillou, *l'Évolution de la pensée religieuse de Félicité Lamennais* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1966), 250.

> another life. The common sentiment of mankind is as clear as day on this. However, the philosopher, who prefers his particular reason to *sens commun*, sees only fleeting shadows and can no longer retain even what we call the first truths, no longer find what to submit to, and finally sees no refuge from error but a doubt impossible to nature. [187]

Over the course of his life, Lamennais became gradually less particularly Christian in his approach to providence. In grounding his understanding of providence in history and the *sens commun*, he came to see divine action and truth in all cultures, rather than in the particular Christian claims of revelation. In arguing against the rationalism of the Revolution, Lamennais sought to ground everything in the collective experience of a people. Providence and the divine will are evident throughout the world, not just through sources of authority (like the Church). Until *Mirari Vos*, Lamennais consistently appealed to history to discover God's providence. If *sens commun* were based upon direct revelation given by God, then there would be evidence in history of the truths of revelation. He attempted to find proofs of Christian belief, including the Incarnation, in pre-Christian and Eastern religions.[188] The implicit assumption was that a broader consensus made it more likely that some particular doctrine would be true. After his condemnation, he simply turned the source of authority from the singular person of the pope to the collective authority of *sens commun*. Eventually he came to reject the necessity of the supernatural, or even its possibility. Grace, miracles, direct revelation, and other forms of divine intervention were deemed impossible

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[187] De même l'homme sensé, qui prend pour règle de ses jugemens le sens commun, voit facilement, et avec certitude, comme par lui seul, les vérités les plus importantes, telles que l'existence de Dieu, sa providence, l'immortalité de l'âme, la nécessité d'une autre vie; parce que le sentiment commun du genre humain est aussi clair là-dessus que le grand jour: tandis que le philosophe, qui préfère au sens commun sa raison particulière, n'aperçoit plus que des ombres fugitives, ne peut plus retenir même ce qu'on appelle les premières vérités , ne trouve plus à quoi se prendre, ne voit enfin de refuge contre l'erreur qu'un doute impossible à la nature. - *Œuvres Complètes* Vol. Vol 5, 275; from *Défense de l'essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1821)

[188] Carolina Armenteros, *The French Idea of History: Joseph de Maistre and His Heirs, 1794-1854 (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 308.

and contrary to divine governance. Predestination of souls to beatitude was completely rejected: the problem of evil was overcome by universalism.[189] Instead, he embraced a providential deism that closely resembles that of the Enlightenment *philosophes* that he claims to despise.

French Revolution and Providence

Lamennais' attitude towards the French Revolution changed throughout his life, especially after the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, which he welcomed enthusiastically, and the condemnation of his ideas by Gregory XVI. Lamennais was initially quite critical of the Revolution - his family had suffered greatly because of it - but he eventually came to exalt the power of the will of the people against the oppression of absolute rule. He continued to believe the Revolution had demonstrated the errors present in pre-revolutionary France, and in this sense the French Revolution was a true *felix culpa*, and eventually came to view uprisings as a manifestation of the divine will and tools of progress. The Revolution, although evil, began a process by which the greater good of liberty would be able to flourish in the world. Such liberty would allow the Church (variously understood) to perform her mission without hindrance from tyrannical oversight.

Following Maistre, whom Lamennais read and communicated with, Lamennais identified the growth of individualism as the principal cause of the Revolution. The two sources of individualism and private judgment in the modern world, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, caused this great punishment.[190] A direct causal connection linked the Reformation with the events of the late eighteenth century. The growth of the Reformation resulted in the Enlightenment, while

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[189] Armenteros, *The French Idea of History*, 309.

[190] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 64-7.

the Enlightenment in turn caused the Revolution. Similar to Maistre, Lamennais believed the Revolution had natural causes under providence. When one rejected proper authority, catastrophe followed.

Lamennais saw the first and greatest evil in the modern world to be the Reformation (despite his own later abandonment of the Catholic Church). The Reformation was evil because it replaced necessary spiritual authority with individual judgment. For Lamennais, Protestantism is nothing but an "*individual doctrine, a variable and uncertain opinion*."[191] It is akin to pagan idolatry, believing and worshipping in what one chooses.[192] While the Protestant professes that his faith is moderated through the Gospel, he nonetheless rejects the authority of the Church. To reject Christian authority is to slide into atheism, and inevitably begin revolution.

> It is always necessary that a revolution begins in the Church, then follows into the state, and in turn establishes itself in the Church. This is what we have seen being born and established in Europe, governments of despots or republicans, national or civil religions, which are only atheism in disguise. [193]

Revolution is not primarily a political issue. Its cause, evident in Europe, is always theological. The French Revolution was a result of theological error. [194] False ideas of God and the Church give rise to false ideas of politics. When the individual judges what is proper authority, anarchy occurs.

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[191] *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 3, 24.

[192] Girard, *Lamennais*, 63-5.

[193] Toujours et nécessairement la révolution, commencée dans l'Église, passe ensuite dans l'État, qui à son tour l'achève dans l'Église. C'est ainsi qu'on a vu naître et s'établir en Europe, avec des gouvernements ou despotisques ou républicains, les religions nationales ou civiles, qui ne sont qu'un athéisme déguisé. - *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol 7, 19; from *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre civil et politique* (1826)

[194] Unlike Maistre, Lamennais does not explain why France was punished in particular for the errors of the Reformation.

> The French Revolution, whose causes go back much further than one generally imagines, was only a rigorously exact application of the final consequences of Protestantism. It was born of the unfortunate discussions which led to the schism in the West, and in turn gave birth to the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Power had been denied in religious society; it was necessary to deny it also in political society. The individual reason and will were substituted for the reason and the will of God, who is the unchangeable universal basis of all truth, law, and duty. From this, each person was dependent only on himself, had to enjoy full sovereignty, had to be his master, his king, his God. All the links which unite men among themselves and with their author being thus broken, there remained no religion but atheism, and anarchy for society. [195]

While the Enlightenment was the more proximate cause of the Revolution, it could have never taken place without the groundwork laid by the Reformation.[196] Both were rebellions against the authority of the Church. The Reformation had made revelation subject to private authority. The Enlightenment had simply carried this further and made reason itself subject to private judgment. The Revolutionaries had continued this logic and replaced both temporal and spiritual authorities.

For Lamennais, the greatest philosophical enemy was Descartes. He was the philosophical parallel to Luther and Calvin, beginning a rationalist movement of individualism that became gradually more divorced from *sens commun*. Descartes had established that certitude only came with correct private judgment. If the individual were the measure of truth, then no external

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[195] La révolution française, dont les causes remontent beaucoup plus haut qu'on ne se l'imagine généralement, ne fut qu'une application rigoureusement exacte des dernières conséquences du protestantisme, qui, né des tristes discussions qu'excita le schisme d'Occident, enfanta lui même à son tour la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle. On avoit nié le pouvoir dans la société religieuse, il fallut nécessairement le nier aussi dans la société politique, et substituer dans l'une et dans l'autre la raison et la volonté de chaque homme à la raison et à la volonté de Dieu, base immuable, universelle de toute vérité, de toute loi et de tout devoir. Chacun dès-lors, ne dépendant plus que de soi-même, dut jouir d'une pleine souveraineté, dut être son maître, son roi, son Dieu. Tous les liens qui unissent les hommes entre eux et avec leur auteur étant ainsi brisés, il ne resta plus pour religion que l'athéisme, et que l'anarchie pour sociéte. - *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 7, 30; from *De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre civil et politique* (1826).

[196] *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 2, 176.

authority could properly judge.[197] The Enlightenment had witnessed ever-more confident claims on what reason alone could establish. Modern appeals to reason had resulted in nothing but chaos and confusion.

Nevertheless, God allowed the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Revolution to occur in his providential care.

> The principle of dissolution or of anarchy, which is developing daily in political society, successively eliminates from the scene of the world, in the midst of so many other destructions, all that the past contained that was inert, vitiated, and worn out, all that which cannot find a place in the new order which is being prepared and which is contrary to its establishment. Providence uses the very evil of which men are the instrument to cure them, according to a great law of the moral universe, by suffering and punishment. The necessary expiation of crime still constrains them. Though they believe that they obey only their own passions, they are contributing, in another respect, to the execution of God's designs. [198]

The Revolution was a natural punishment of the errors of the preceding centuries. Similar to Maistre, Lamennais believes that the very causes of the Revolution would be its own punishment. Grace, or the supernatural, has little role in effecting such change in the world. Providence proceeds through natural causes alone. While God has ordered the world, providence is fulfilled through the necessary correction of error. For Lamennais, God is neither the author of *malum poenae* nor *malum culpae*. Moral evils result in their own punishment. While such a

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[197] *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 5, 20.

[198] Tandis que le principe de dissolution ou d'anarchie, qui se développe de jour en jour dans la société politique, fait disparaître successivement de la scène du monde, au milieu de tant d'autres destructions, tout ce que le passé contenait d'inerte, de vicié, d'usé, tout ce qui ne sauroit trouver place dans l'ordre nouveau qui se prépare et en contrarie l'établissement; la Providence qui se sert du mal même dont les hommes sont l'instrument pour les guérir, suivant une grande loi de l'univers moral, par la souffrance et le châtiment, expiation nécessaire du crime, les contraint encore, alors même qu'ils croient n'obéir qu'à leurs passions, de concourir, sous un autre rapport, à l'exécution de ses desseins. - *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 9, 87; from *Les progrès de la Révolution et de la guerre contre l'Eglise* (1829).

tendency is present in the work of Maistre, who recognized Lamennais use of his work, Lamennais presents a purely natural working out of providence in the world.[199]

For Lamennais, the Revolution is evil because it rejects *sens commun*. This was the fundamental error of the modern world. However, even in his early writings, Lamennais was no supporter of the *ancien regime*.[200] Pre-Revolutionary France had become infected with modern errors. The Revolution occurred to rid Europe of the evil of individualism. Lamennais' exact preference of government was malleable, but he continued to advocate for a system that elevated the *sens commun* over private judgment. While *sens commun* differs from collective polling, it would eventually lead to an easy transition to supporting radical democracy.

In the period of the Restoration of the Bourbons, Lamennais came to believe the Revolution had yet to achieve its full effect. While *sens commun* argued for a universal religion, and thus Catholicism, against private worship, France had returned to a form of Gallicanism under Louis XVIII and Charles X.[201] The four Gallican articles of Bossuet had been officially reintroduced by the hierarchy. This once again made religion subservient to the state, becoming one type of indifferentism among several: reducing religion to a merely political institution.[202] These errors, which again found their source in private judgment stemming from the Reformation and the Enlightenment, were present in the post-evolutionary Church. With oversight of the Church from the state, religion was reduced to a tool.[203]

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[199] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 235.

[200] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 86.

[201] Alex R. Vidler, *Prophecy and Papacy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 122.

[202] Richardt, *Lamennais*, 42.

[203] Although he makes frequent use of Bossuet, Lamennais is also harshly critical of his Gallicanism. See *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 4, 80.

The Revolution is a *felix culpa* because it has exposed the results of private judgment. It is not a graced occasion for repentance, but a natural occurrence of what results when the *sens commun* is denied. However, the Revolution had yet to achieve its final end. The indifferentism and Gallicanism present in France must be further purged. In order to do this, the Church must be separated from state control. The first fruit of the Revolution would be the exaltation of the Church through liberation from the king. The Bourbon Restoration, and even the Revolution of 1830, had yet to free the Church. Therefore, indifferentism had yet to be conquered. Providence would be proved in the future when the Church was finally free in France. Understanding providence was no longer simply explaining past events in light of divine governance and God's desire for the good of creation, but was a concept to explain how God would work in the future. Providence became progressively more a concept to explain what would happen, rather than what has happened.

The Necessity of Authority and Catholic Liberalism

For Lamennais, if private unaided reason had caused the Revolution, then surely it must be abandoned in order to return to the sanity of tradition. Some external authority must have the final say on truth. To combat rationalism, Lamennais turned to fideism. Man has been given reason by God, but the sole purpose of this faculty is to recognize its limitations.[204] In doing so, reason turns to seek out an authority.[205] Lamennais identified this with *sens commun*:

> The only motive human reason has to admit something is true is that it seems true. If this motive could deceive, man's beliefs would no longer have a

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[204] *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 2, 200-4.

[205] Si la raison n'est pas infaillible, si elle peut se tromper, jamais elle ne sera certain qu'elle ne se trompe point. Les croyance des lors deviennent de pures opinions; les opinions, de simple doutes; la religion et la morale, un grand problème éternellement insoluble. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 2, lxxciii.

> basis; and God, by giving man the invincible desire to know the truth, would have refused man the means of arriving at any certain truth, which is contradictory. Therefore, general reason is infallible. It is not the same with individual reason, and we can see why: infallibility is not necessary for individual reason. When it is mistaken, it can always correct its errors by consulting general reason. [206]

Man knows innately that he cannot judge everything for himself. Therefore, he turns to someone greater than himself. Nearly all cultures have recognized some need for a supreme priest or ultimate authority. In looking for the highest authority on Earth and in searching for the true religion, one inevitably turns towards Catholicism and the pope.[207] Catholicism professes the highest religious precepts that are attested to in all religions and cultures, and overcomes the particular errors of each false religion.[208] *Sens commun* points all in the direction of the pope. Therefore, the pope must be the protector and arbiter of infallible knowledge. Only the Catholic Church can overcome private reasoning and judgment. One must either be a skeptic or a Catholic who obeys all laws of the Church.[209]

Lamennais' first large intellectual battle was ironically not with rationalists or Protestants. Instead, the restored French hierarchy came to see him as a looming threat. This was for two

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[206] L'unique motif qu'ait la raison humaine d'admettre une chose comme vraie, c'est qu'elle lui paraît vraie . Si ce motif pouvait être trompeur, ses croyances n'auraient plus de base, et Dieu, en donnant à l'homme le désir invincible de connoître la vérité , lui auroit refusé le moyen d'arriver à aucune vérité certaine, ce qui est contradictoire : donc la raison générale est infaillible . Il n'en est pas de même de la raison individuelle, et l'on voit pourquoi: l'infaillibilité ne lui est pas nécessaire, parce qu'elle peut toujour , lorsqu'elle se méprend, rectifier ses erreurs en consultant la raison générale. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 1, 232; from *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* (1817).

[207] Assurés du moyen par lequel nous pouvons discerner la vraie religion, il nous sera maintenant facile de la découvrir; sans discuter aucun dogme, il s'agit uniquement de savoir quelle est la société spirituelle et visible que possède la plus grande autorité. Cette société une fois reconnue, toute incertitude s'évanouit. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 2, 203.

[208] Girard, *Lamennais,* 62-3.

[209] Nous ferons voir ensuite, en résumant notre argument principal, que le principe de l'autorité conduit nécessairement à la religion catholique, et que sa négation conduit au scepticisme absolu, sans que la raison puisse s'arrêter entre ces deux termes extrêmes. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 2, 203.

reasons: his embrace of ultramontanism against the authority of the French bishops and his growing affinity with liberalism. Lamennais saw the issues as related. In *Les Progrès de la Révolution et de la Guerre Contre l'Eglise* (1829), Lamennais criticized the French episcopacy for not recognizing that the Church could not return to a pre-revolutionary state. The world had irreversibly changed. But, the bishops had been happy to return to the Gallican articles, while the state had become progressively more secular (or indifferent). They had embraced similar articles that led to Revolution. Surely another would soon follow.[210]

The Bourbon restoration had maintained certain revolutionary practices, such as paying priests as state employees. Louis XVIII and Charles X were both inclined to support the Church, but they also felt the need to maintain the revolutionary ideals of secular education and liberty. The French state had continued to forbid religious congregations and the wearing of religious garb. Few Catholic schools had been opened, Catholic universities were not allowed, and suspicion of the Jesuits remained. The Jesuits had returned to France, but with no legal recognition from the state. In 1828, all Jesuit schools in France were closed once again. Lamennais became the Society's most outspoken supporter.[211] He openly criticized the bishops for acquiescing to the demands of the National Assembly. In doing so, Lamennais cemented himself as a primary voice of the post-revolutionary Church, especially among the younger clergy.[212]

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[210] Milbach, "Introduction," 2.

[211] Armenteros, "Lamennais," 150.

[212] Lamennais enjoyed popularity outside of France as well, especially in Belgium. That nation, which attempted a combination of liberalism and Catholicism, found Lamennais' work suitable for their project. He was read in most seminaries there. Vidler, *Prophecy and Papacy,* 122.

In *Les Progres*, Lamennais argues that the time has come to separate the Church from the state. When the government had control, the Church was unable to perform her work. While France was a liberal state, it did not afford liberties to the Catholic Church. Post-revolutionary liberalism, an era which saw the birth of modern liberalism, saw no contradiction between allowing freedom of assembly and condemning Catholic schooling and religious orders. Other groups were allowed to assemble, speak, and print freely, but the Catholic Church was not. Lamennais looked to the recently-formed nation of Belgium, which was both Catholic and liberal, as the example for the French state. They had recently separated from the Protestant Netherlands and espoused the separation of Church and state, freedom of worship, and the right to establish Catholic schools. "We are asking for freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, freedom of education: this is what Belgian Catholics, oppressed by a persecuting government (the Dutch), are asking for like us."[213]

Coupled with embracing the growth of liberalism as a political ideology, Lamennais believed that the Church would only flourish in the modern world if left to achieve her mission without state interference. Before he eventually left the Church, Lamennais believed that the principles of liberty and autonomy could be effectively employed by the Church in order to spread the Gospel message. When free of all state interference, the Church could Christianize the Revolution and the principles of liberalism in order to bring about a new era of religious fervor. He believed that the Church should embrace the new order, rather than pine for a world that fell with the Revolution. The principles of liberalism would build the modern world, so the Church must embrace them in order to thrive.

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[213] Nous demandons la liberté de conscience, la liberté de la presse, la liberté de l'éducation : et c'est là ce que demandent comme nous les catholiques belges, opprimés par un gouvernement persécuteur. - *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 9, ix-x.

He was initially not a convinced liberal on philosophical grounds, but practical ones. The Church could not return to its pre-revolutionary status. The Church had to be freed from state control in order to educate, worship, and speak as she ought. Liberalism was here to stay. The Church had to adapt to liberalism in order to work in the modern world. The episcopacy was afraid of these developments, so Lamennais attacked their cowardice. "Liberalism scares people. So, catholicize it, and society will be reborn".[214] And as he wrote in a letter to the Archbishop of Paris "I am convinced that as nothing can henceforth arrest the advance of political and civil liberty one must try to combine with it order, right and justice unless one wishes society to be rent from top to bottom."[215]

Providence in Liberalism and Ultramontanism

His turn from fierce critic of the Revolution to a proponent of liberalism was not seen as a rejection of his earlier work. He still believed that the Church was necessary for society and that unguided liberalism was harmful. As Peter Stearns has argued, "Before he had seen the Church as a force to expel the Revolution from society; now he asked it to adopt the main revolutionary principles and guide them to an orderly and stable realization."[216] His supreme confidence in providence and *sens commun* precipitated his turn towards liberalism. Liberalism professed to allow all to speak and think freely. If people were able to think and speak freely, gradually private judgment would give way to general knowledge.[217] Liberalism would provide the means for the

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[214] Harrison, *Romantic Catholics*, 113.

[215] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 97.

[216] Peter Stearns, *Priest and Revolutionary: Lamennais and the Dilemma of French Catholicism* (New York: Harper Row Publishers, 1967), 56.

[217] Julio Meinvielle, *De Lamennais à Maritain: Du Mythe du Progrès à l'utopie de la nouvelle chrétienté (*Bouère: Editions Dominique Martin Morin, 2001), 250-1.

sens commun to ascend as the guiding force for truth. It would allow the voice of the general reason to be made known.

Providence had given the world the Revolution and liberalism. Neither could not be overturned. A new order had been established throughout Europe. God would use it to bring about a new era of Christianity free from the tyranny of state control and indifferentism. In order to guarantee this arrangement of Catholicism and liberalism, the pope would take on the role of liberal protector and infallible witness to the truth. The Church must embrace liberalism in order to guarantee the rights of all people and proclaim general reason.

Lamennais' rejection of reason and criticism of the episcopacy attracted further criticism. Among the first figures to recognize the danger in appealing to *sens commun* and the rejection of private reason were Maistre and several French Jesuits. Both were initially sympathetic to Lamennais - Maistre noticed early on how much Lamennais had borrowed from his own work and Lamennais had almost entered the Jesuits but was reluctant to make a novitiate - but came to see how his strict anti-rationalism would damage the faith.[218] Despite both the Jesuits' and Maistre's ultramontanism, they were quick to see how such attempts to combat rationalism would eventually lead to error.[219] Nevertheless, Lamennais continued to work out the consequences of appealing to *sens commun*.

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[218] On Maistre's criticism, see Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 235. On Jesuit criticisms, see Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 81.

[219] In a private letter to Lamennais from Maistre, he warns "Je voudrais cependant, Monsieur l'abbé, vous dire un mot essentiel, vous voulez saisir la *raison sur son trône* et la forcer de faire une belle révérence mais avec quelle main saisirons-nous cette insolente?... Prenez garde, Monsieur l'abbé, allons doucement, j'ai peur, et c'est tout ce que je puis vous dire" *Correspondance Générale (*Paris: Librairie Armand Colin 1971), Tome 2, 595.

The French bishops grew gradually more hostile to Lamennais and sought to have several of his works placed on the Index. Lamennais continued to have confidence that his work would bear fruit, and started the influential newspaper *l'Avenir* in the wake of the Revolution of 1830. The paper argued, among other things, for this combination of liberalism and ultramontanism. As indicated by the title of the paper, Lamennais was sure that the future of the Church lay in using liberalism.[220] Providence had given Europe liberal states. It was time that the Church was given the liberty to act as she must. In fighting for her own liberties, the Church would bring the world towards a more just and perfect future.

> By defending their scandalously violated rights, Catholics are therefore not fighting only for themselves; they form, let me use this word, the vanguard of humanity marching to conquer the future: they lead it, through the arid desert of purely human institutions, to the city which is the only habitable one, where God reigns over man and where man obeys only God; they raise the altar on which the peoples, freed and again become brothers by the union of order and freedom, will join hands. They will found on the most perfect principles of our nature the last society that will be seen on Earth. [221]

With increasing pressure from the French bishops, Lamennais placed his hope in the newly-elected Gregory XVI to endorse his project. He became confident that the pope would confirm his beliefs, condemn Gallicanism, and providentially order the Church to a new harmony with the modern liberal state. As he wrote in *l'Avenir* in 1830:

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[220] Stearns, *Priest and Revolutionary,* 56.

[221] En défendant leurs droits scandaleusement violes, les catholiques ne combattent donc pas uniquement pour eux-mêmes; ils forment, qu'on me permette ce mot, l'avant-garde de l'humanité marchant à la conquête de l'avenir: ils la conduisent, à travers l'aride désert des institutions purement humaines, a la cite seule habitable, où Dieu règne sur l'homme et ou l'homme n'obéit qu'à Dieu; ils élèvent l'autel sur lequel les peuples affranchis et redevenus frères par l'union de l'ordre et de la liberté se donneront la main, ils fondent sur les bases les plus parfaites que comporte notre nature présente la dernière société qui sera vue sur la terre. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 10, 370; from *l'Avenir* (1831).

> Because of the very fact that a state religion does not and can no longer exist, government intervention in matters of religion is altogether absurd and illegal. The Concordat is therefore implicitly abolished, as well as all the laws and regulations which were a consequence of it. When the bishops have explained to the Sovereign Pontiff the situation of our Church, when they will have expressed their vows to him with that emphasis of conviction, disinterestedness and charity, which will resonate in his father's heart, all the difficulties which will arise from previous commitments will be promptly ironed out on his part. What does he want the salvation of faith? Ah! It is not he who will bear what the freedom of the priesthood may cost, and who will doubt providence! [222]

When Gregory not only declined to endorse Lamennais but instead condemned liberalism, Lamennais rebelled. In condemning liberalism, Gregory XVI solved the issue of whether one could be an ultramontanist and a liberal. In response, Lamennais abandoned ultramontanism.

While *Mirari Vos* condemned indifferentism, it also condemned several positions that Lamennais held. Among these were liberty of conscience, liberty of the press, the separation of Church and state, and the growing revolutionary spirit in Europe. However, in both *Mirari Vos* and *Singulari Nos*, the reasoning given by Gregory XVI was rather simplistic. The Church had yet to understand how to answer the root problems of liberalism. Ironically, the justification given for condemning many liberal positions was that they had not worked in history. In *Mirari Vos* Gregory XVI employed an appeal to a type of *sens commun* to reject liberalism. “Experience shows, even from earliest times, that cities renowned for wealth, dominion, and glory perished as a result of

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[222] Par cela même qu'il n'existe et ne peut plus exister de religion d'État, l'intervention du gouvernement dans les choses de la religion est tout ensemble absurde et illégale; et le Concordat dès-lors est aboli implicitement, ainsi que toutes les lois et réglemens qui en étaient une conséquence. Quand les évêques auront exposé au souverain pontife la situation de notre Église, quand ils lui auront exprimé leurs vœux avec cet accent de la conviction, du désintéressement et de la charité , qui retentira dans son cœur de père, toutes les difficultés qui paîtront d'engagements antérieurs seront promptement aplanies de sa part. Que veut- il que le salut de la foi? Ah! Ce n'est pas lui qui supportera ce que pourra coûter la liberté du sacerdoce, et qui doutera de la Providence! *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 10, 194; from *l’Avenir* (1831).

this single evil, namely immoderate freedom of opinion, license of free speech, and desire for novelty."[223]

Lamennais' rejection of ultramontanism is not entirely surprising or inconsistent, even ignoring the personal attacks leveled against him in *Singulari Nos* (1834). Lamennais had based his ultramontanism upon an appeal to *sens commun*. History, and thus providence, had shown the need for some infallible spiritual authority. If the pope rejected *sens commun*, then he was not the infallible authority that Lamennais had argued for. Instead, the papacy had become an enemy of the people and a tyrant of private judgment.[224] Ultramontanism had been a political solution for Lamennais.[225] He felt free to abandon it as a private citizen of the post-revolutionary state. After his refusal to submit to *Singulari Nos*, Lamennais was at liberty to let his thoughts develop.

Progress Against Providence

After his condemnation, Lamennais became progressively less interested in history as a source of knowledge. After identifying it with nature, his work became principally about the future of society and the Church.[226] In *Paroles d'un Croyant*, written in response to *Mirari Vos*, we see the beginnings of this turn to futurism.

> Christianity is essentially a liberating religion, favorable to all progress. To use her to stop progress would therefore be to oppose her to herself: a disastrous contradiction in its immediate effects. But, from which providence would derive an immense good, as always, by the separation which would release the pure Christian principle that attracted her momentarily.[227]

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[223] https://www.papalencyclicals.net/greg16/g16mirar.htm

[224] Harrison, *Romantic Catholics*, 105.

[225] Reardon, *Liberalism and Tradition*, 290.

[226] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 308.

[227] Le christianisme est essentiellement une religion affranchissante , favorable à tous les progrès. Se servir de lui pour les arrêter, ce seroit donc l'opposer à lui-même: contradiction funeste dans ses effets immédiats,mais dont la

For *sens commun* to be infallible, mankind could not be fallen. If man were a fallen creature with fallible reason, some central authority was needed to guarantee truth. After the pope condemned him in *Singulari Nos*, Lamennais avoided the need for a central authority by simply denying original sin.[228] Individual reason could still err, but the collective capacity to understand truth must remain fully intact. Natural revelation had been given to all mankind from the foundation of the world. *Sens commun* easily turns into a purely natural religion. In condemning him, the Catholic Church had chosen to repress the infallible knowledge. Lamennais saw this as providential.[229] The Church had shown herself to be an enemy to the modern world that God was intending to bring about. The people, liberated from external constraints, would become agents of providence for establishing a new world order.[230]

After denying original sin, Lamennais proceeded to deny the need or possibility for grace.[231] The principle of the particular providence of an individual was completely lost. Natural religion and the natural ordering of creation provided man with everything necessary to strive for liberty and achieve a more perfect world. All supernatural intervention by God in creation became illusory and contrary to the divine nature. He maintained a vague spiritual sense (*Esquisse d'une Philosophie* contains numerous quasi-mystical reflections and appeals to divine love) but refused

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providence tirerait, comme toujours, un immense bien, par la séparation qui dégagerait le principe pur chrétien de ce qui l'attirait momentanément. *Œuvres Complètes,* Vol. 11, 266; from *Paroles d'un Croyant* (1834).

[228] Gouillou, *Pensée*, 305.

[229] Vidler, *Prophecy and Papacy*, 136.

[230] Meinvielle*, De Lamennais à Maritain,* 251.

[231] Gouillou, *Pensée*, 314.

to believe in any direct punishment by God upon creation. This resulted in a final reappraisal of the Revolution in his work.

If creation were eternally progressing towards the divine, then events like the Revolution could no longer be seen as a great upheaval. It was a moment that would help bring religion back to its natural, unbound state. It was only one of many moments in history that helped the world progress.[232] The private philosophy and rationalism that he had despised even became a tool of progress. Providence, and the Revolution, had become means for forming an earthly utopia.

> Philosophy cannot be denied either its immense influence on the progress of law, on the notion of justice, or on the feeling of humanity. Its errors, in this regard, were fleeting, limited as to time and place, while one observes, in the generality of peoples, an uninterrupted improvement. Man, raised in his own eyes, is daily becoming more sacred to man.[233]

Conclusion

The concept of *sens commun* is hardly a metaphysical basis on which to build an entire theology. But, anti-rationalism has a certain appeal to it. It is not hard to grasp why Lamennais' initial work garnered such a broad following. Anyone could see the damage that the Revolution had caused. Arguing rationally against its principles was difficult, so one could avoid the situation entirely by appealing to the vague sense that foundations of the Revolution were wrong. But in making *sens commun* his basis to argue for providence, the Catholic faith, papal infallibility, and a host of other topics, he had little rational basis for believing any particular doctrine. *Sens commun*

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[232] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 311.

[233] On ne saurait non plus contester a la philosophie son immense influence sur le progres du droit, de la notion de la justice, du sentiment de l'humanite. Ses erreurs, a cet egard, ont ete passageres, bornees quant au temps et aux lieux, tandis que l'on oberserve, dans la generalite des peuples, un perfectionnement non interrompu. L'homme eleve a ses proprs yeux, devient de jour en jour plus sacre pour l'homme. Lamennais, *Œuvres Complètes (*Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1981), 36; from *Esquisse d'une Philosophie* (1841).

became little more than an authority that agreed with whatever Lamennais thought. Logically, he argues on constant appeal to authority. In the end, that authority proves to be nothing but his own intuition.

In each step of the development of the thought of Lamennais, at least until *Mirari Vos*, his intention seems to have been to respond to the errors of the Revolution and build up the faith in the modern world. In his early work, in attempting to argue against the Revolution, Lamennais argued forcefully against the rationalism that caused it. In his turn to liberalism, he sought to free the Church from state control and inconsistent laws. While his fideism and liberalism were condemned, they were avenues pursued in order to overcome the Revolution. After his condemnation, the same anti-rationalism and liberalism, when divorced from ultramontanism, led him completely away from the faith. While he continued to maintain his strong anti-Enlightenment and anti-Reformation principles, his conclusions became nearly indistinguishable from Enlightenment deism.

Lamennais illustrates the damage that the developments discussed in the first chapter had on the Church. With the suppression of the Jesuits and the expulsion of the Dominicans, Lamennais had little guidance. His work is impressive in its scope, but entirely lacking in the philosophical rigor necessary to discuss the nature of providence, evil, grace, and free will. The lack of clear dogma on these teachings after the *De Auxiliis* controversy and a lack of established theological schools in France (and a personal lack of seminary formation) left Lamennais rudderless. His attempt at formulating a complete response to the Reformation, Enlightenment, and Revolution is impressive, but entirely divorced from sound theological traditions.

While Lamennais received no formal schooling, his thought is heavily indebted to the work of Bossuet and Maistre.[234] As we saw in the first chapter, Bossuet demonstrated the working of providence through an appeal to history and the advancement of the French nation. Bossuet presented the possibility of the overthrow of kings as means of humbling the proud in order to further the Kingdom of God. And similar to Maistre, Lamennais described the Revolution as divine punishment for the errors of the French Church and the false reasoning of the Enlightenment. Maistre had hoped it would bring about a restored and glorified Christian nation. Lamennais' thought presents one possible conclusion of their ideas of providence: that divine providence is principally about the temporal advancement of the state and perfection of the created world. Without firm ideas of predestination, providence is reduced to a general conception of earthly progress.

Similar to Bossuet and Maistre, Lamennais demonstrates providence through history. But, Lamennais goes much further than the former two. Bossuet and Maistre demonstrated *how* God worked in history, given that providence is a necessary fact of creation. For Lamennais, history becomes the source of knowing *that* providence exists. In showing that many cultures had believed in providence, Lamennais believed he had demonstrated the providence exists. Fact-collecting became a substitute for reason.[235] In his later work, this appeal to history becomes a tool to predict how providence will continue guiding the temporal world. Historicism, certainly present in Bossuet and Maistre, easily turns to futurism in Lamennais. While futurism and an appeal to the

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[234] Gouillou, *Pensee*, 48-68.

[235] Armenteros, *French Idea of History*, 308.

sens commun are present in his work written before his separation with the Church, it becomes explicit when no longer professing to be obedient to the pope.

The Church's response to Lamennais, in *Mirari Vos* and *Singulari Nos*, helpfully teaches Rome's hostility to liberalism. Gregory XVI saw the liberties to speak, assemble, and worship as one wished to be contrary to both the spiritual and political good of society. The condemnations of revolution and separation of Church and state demonstrated that the Church could have no congress with the principles and actions of the French Revolution or the modern liberal state. More robust Catholic responses to the modern liberal state awaited formulation.[236]

Nonetheless, Lamennais remains an important figure in Catholic thought. His attempt to try and understand the Revolution providentially and respond to its root causes spurred further development. The force of his personality and eloquence of his style drew many to him. In an era without strong theological traditions, his influence became widely felt. However, his fideism proved incapable of responding adequately to the challenges presented by the Revolution. This in turn spurred a return to scholasticism in subsequent generations.[237] But, some of his early solutions, including ultramontanism and the separation of Church and state, eventually found wide support in the subsequent two ecumenical councils.

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[236] For an analysis of *La Civiltà Cattolica* and the first robust Catholic response to liberalism, which began in the 1850's, see John Rao, *Removing the Blindfold: 19th Century Catholics and the Myth of Modern Freedom* (Saint Marys, Kansas: Angelus Press, 2014).

[237] Reedy, "Maistre's Twin," 173.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

As Charles Taylor has shown in *A Secular Age*, the transition in the modern world to a form of providential deism is complex and multifaceted.[238] Nevertheless, the French Revolution played a key role in reshaping ideas of divine governance, the relationship between Church and state, and conceptions of freedom and liberty. Due to numerous factors, including the suppression of the Jesuits, the expulsion of religious orders, and the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, Catholic responses to the Revolution were limited. The Revolution also exposed weaknesses in Catholic theories of providence and predestination.

The historical narrative of the exaltation of the French state, as eldest daughter of the Church, proved incapable of incorporating such an upheaval. While Bossuet's demonstration of providence in history may have been convincing in the pre-revolutionary period, it was less forceful after the Reign of Terror. And while Maistre may have predicted the coming Bourbon Restoration and the end of Gallicanism (at Vatican I), it was hardly a stable arrangement. Two hundred years after his death, it would be difficult to argue that the Church has found the position of strength and unity that he predicted. The Revolution has not proven to be the death of liberalism, as Maistre had hoped. Lamennais' own prediction of a future of Catholic liberalism may have more purchase. However, the institution of laicité in 1905, once again banning all religious orders in France, illustrates the continuing difficulty the Church has had with liberalism.

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[238] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 221-69.

The years after Maistre and Lamennais saw renewed attempts at understanding the Revolution and the growth of liberalism in the light of divine providence. Lacordaire's famed sermons at Notre Dame and Newman's understanding of historical development are the best examples of this. But Lacordaire's most lasting theological influence - and thus Lamennais' as well - was the reintroduction of the Order of Preachers in France. Few Dominicans followed Lacordaire's attempted synthesis of Catholic liberalism. Instead, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw a rebirth of the *De Auxiliis* controversy, with Dominicans and Jesuits once again defending their inherited positions. However, the new debates on grace and free will proceeded with the Church occupying a far less prominent place in public intellectual life than in the pre-revolutionary world.

Leaving the *De Auxiliis* controversy undecided affected the Church's ability to respond to the Revolution. Of course, there is irony in discussing why providence would have let arguments on providence and predestination go unsolved. But, a lack of clear understanding of the nature and purpose of grace and free will clearly had an impact on attempted apologetics after the Revolution. While Maistre adopted a form of Molinism, albeit influenced by Enlightenment thought, he tended to minimize the necessity of grace and the supernatural influence of God upon the temporal order. Lamennais had little to no metaphysical grounding in his thought. Some understanding of predestination, whether Bañezian-Thomism or Molinist-Congruism, would have served him well.

The Revolution illustrates, as St. Augustine showed in *De civitate Dei*, the danger of discussing providence primarily in temporal or political terms. As the source of *felix culpa*, St. Augustine demonstrated the need to understand a fall in terms of man's final end in beatitude. Catholic responses to the Revolution were well intentioned. Maistre and Lamennais represent the two most comprehensive attempts at understanding this upheaval. But, without a grasp of God

ordering souls individually to salvation, discussions of providence result in predicting future events where all will end well temporally. Maistre and Lamennais both resorted to describing impending earthly utopias, rather than the grace of punishment or salvation.

The prominence of Gallicanism and Jansenism fade in the generations after the Revolution. Greatly influential in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, the Revolution proved to be their downfall. Presumably, Jansenists would have argued that the Revolution was proof of man's radical depravity and the reality that few would be saved. The providential nature of the Revolution as punishment would have taken on a different character in a Jansenist system. But, with Jansenism tied closely with Gallicanism, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy proved to be the beginning of the end of the Gallican privileges. This, for both Maistre and Lamennais, would have proved to have been a true *felix culpa*. Beyond cleansing the Church of laxity and calling men and women to heroic deeds for the faith, the Revolution became a source for ending theological heresies.

As Ratzinger argued, the French Revolution was the last and greatest upheaval to the faith.[239] It certainly overturned ideas of providence and separated them from the public sphere. But, it also demonstrated the fragility of conceiving providence as earthly progress. Maistre and Lamennais both attempted to demonstrate the Revolution as a *felix culpa* to predict earthly glories. But there are few Maistreans or Mennaisians now. Instead, we find a Church that has continued to struggle with liberalism. If the established theological schools had existed in France during the Revolution, perhaps Catholic responses would have been more robust. But, such are the inscrutable workings of providence. As both Lamennais and Maistre would have argued, all things inevitably work according to God's providential design.

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[239] Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval*, 136.

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