

THE DEVELOPMENT OF
DURKHEIM'S SOCIAL
REALISM

ROBERT ALUN JONES



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CHAPTER I

The reform that contained all other reforms

“When a people has achieved a state of equilibrium and maturity,” Durkheim observed in his seventh lecture on moral education, “when the various social functions, at least temporarily, are articulated in an ordered fashion, when the collective sentiments in their essentials are incontestable for the great majority of people, then the preference for rule and order is naturally preponderant.” It was this moral situation, for example, that had characterized Rome under Augustus, and France under Louis XIV. By contrast, “in times of flux and change, the spirit of discipline cannot preserve its moral vigor since the prevailing system of rules is shaken, at least in some of its parts. At such times, it is inevitable that we feel less keenly the authority of a discipline that is, in fact, attenuated” (1961: 100–1).

Durkheim had no illusions about the type of society or historical period in which he was living: “Now,” he emphasized, “we are going through precisely one of these critical phases. Indeed, history records no crisis as serious as that in which European societies have been involved for more than a century. Collective discipline in its traditional form has lost its authority, as the divergent tendencies troubling the public conscience and the resulting general anxiety demonstrate. Consequently, the spirit of discipline itself has lost its ascendancy” (1961: 101). As we shall see, this was the problem for which Durkheim’s solution was social realism. But in order to understand this solution – and why it *seemed* such a plausible solution to Durkheim – we must first have some grasp of the problem itself.

THE COALITION OF THE THIRD ESTATE

In 1872 the population of France was 36,103,000. By 1886, it had risen to 38,517,000, an annual increase of only 89,700. The birth rate had begun a steady fall, while the death rate would scarcely vary

until the end of the century. By the early 1890s there would be more deaths than births, an event so unprecedented that alarmed onlookers dubbed it the “stagnation.” The traditional, fertile, Catholic family had confronted its modern, Malthusian counterpart. “Parents,” Mayeur and Rebérioux have observed, “calculated and looked ahead, concerned to rise socially and to provide a good future for their children. This ‘bourgeois’ conception of the family spread progressively to all layers of society, reflecting the aspirations of individualism and egalitarianism” – a movement which particularly affected the lower middle class (1984: 43).

The ideological response to this stagnation was mixed. Local authorities and the French Parliament remained utterly indifferent, oblivious to the notion that the state should assist the family in a liberal social order. The disciples of Frédéric Le Play, in *La Réforme social*, combined the defense of the family with “counter-revolutionary” demands, blaming the Civil Code, compulsory sharing, and revolutionary individualism while simultaneously extolling the virtues of the male-dominated family. These Le Playists exerted considerable influence on the conservative right and “social” Catholicism, but otherwise remained an isolated intellectual current. Elisée Reclus’ *Nouvelle Géographie universelle* (1877) reflected the more widespread sentiment that population decline indicated a “complete lack of confidence in the future,” a social malaise or even national decadence (Lukes 1972: 195). By 1896, Jacques Bertillon had founded the Alliance pour L’Accroissement de la Population Française, and in his classic study of suicide just one year later, Durkheim insisted that both the decrease in births and the increase in suicides were the consequence of a decline in domestic feelings, an increase in migration from the country to the towns, the break-up of the traditional family, and the “cold wind of egoism” that had ensued (1888: 463; 1897: 198–202; Lukes 1972: 194–5).

In fact, from 1871 on, 100,000 people left the countryside each year for the towns, a consequence of the difficulties of agriculture, the increase in agricultural yields (which deprived some peasants of their jobs), the decline of rural industries, better transportation, military service, and higher, more regular urban wages (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 44). But despite the fact that any agglomeration of more than 2,000 inhabitants was called a “town,” the urban population remained relatively small, forming 31.1 percent of the population in 1872 and only 40.9 percent by 1901 – a growth rate

slower than that of any neighboring industrial country. The working population thus remained largely agricultural, constituting 67.5 percent of the total in 1876, and 61 percent as late as 1896. France was also a country of low demographic pressure, and thus one from which few people emigrated. Conversely, before and after 1876, the number of foreign immigrants in France rose from 800,000 to 1 million, and the relative stability of the latter figure thereafter must be understood in light of the naturalizations produced by the law of 1889. Italians, Belgians, Spaniards, and Germans settled either just inside the French border or in the urban, industrial regions, competing with French workers and, as the economic depression of the 1880s deepened, provoking xenophobic reactions in Lyons and Marseilles.

Economic growth, which had been rapid before 1860 and steady if unspectacular for the twenty years thereafter, slowed dramatically after 1880, a consequence of the decreasing per capita productivity of the labor force and the declining rate of urbanization. With an annual growth of exports of 0.86 percent from 1875 to 1895 and her balance of payments in deficit, France, once the second largest industrial power in the world, quickly slipped to fourth (Mayeur and Rebiérioux 1984: 46). Under these circumstances, the French aristocracy retained an undeniable prestige, but retained power only through those matrimonial alliances and corporate directorships which produced effective relations with the upper middle class. The power of the latter was derived from banking and industry, the liberal professions and service to the State. Heirs to the jurists and civil servants of the monarchy, the upper middle class was ideologically divided, some maintaining the Enlightenment belief in progress and loyalty to the Republic, while others were more attached to social "order" than to individual freedom, resigning themselves to a more pessimistic view of history consistent with both experience and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The more "ordinary" middle class included bankers in small towns, industrialists with moderate-sized enterprises, unemployed landlords, members of the liberal professions, salaried magistrates, officers, engineers, and teachers like Durkheim. Enjoying a stable currency and no income tax, the urban bourgeois with an annual income of 20,000 francs paid as little as 2 percent in taxes. A doctor, lawyer, or engineer who had been prudent under the prosperity of the Second Empire could retire in his fifties with no decline in his

standard of living, a prospect which gave rise to the unregulated aspirations symptomatic of Durkheim's "economic anomie" (1897: 254–8). "Conservatives of the time," Mayeur and Rebérioux warn us, "like to assert that the individualism bred by the Revolution had undermined the family, but in fact family feeling had changed rather than weakened. The bourgeois family looked inward, concentrating on the child and his future. It was a family of limited births, anxious to rise in the world through birth control and saving" (1984: 71).

The lower middle class comprised those small building contractors, small employers, independent craftsmen, and retail shopkeepers who lacked the education and/or income of the ordinary middle class, yet avoided manual labor and retained an economic independence which distinguished them from the rural or industrial worker. Less independent, though still removed from manual labor, were the wage-earning clerks, accountants, civil servants, primary school teachers and tax-collectors who were paid little but enjoyed stable employment and a pension. Most important, it was this group – growing in size as the depression decimated the independent lower middle class – which, together with the small town and the provincial school, provided a largely republican road from peasantry to bourgeoisie: "The peasant's son," Mayeur and Rebérioux observe, "was a school-teacher or a clerk; his grandson could become a doctor or a graduate of a technical college and thus join the bourgeoisie proper. The lower middle classes were a half-way stage between the rural population and the elites." "It was the good fortune of the Republic," they add, "and one of the reasons why it took root, to have thus offered numerous jobs to a social stratum anxious to rise in the world" (1984: 70).

The industrial working class was very small, numbering less than 5 million in the 1870s, and only 6 million by 1900. Except for Paris and the industrial south-east, there were no real spatial concentrations of workers, and the majority were employed by extremely small industrial establishments. To speak of "the conditions of the working class" is thus quite difficult, for these conditions varied widely depending upon geographical location, skills, education, and ethnic and historical traditions. But a few conditions – the absence of savings and security, the difficulty of access to education and culture, and, above all, the spectre of unemployment during the years of the great depression – were experienced by all. The working class was thus primarily agricultural, and remained so until the end of the

century. But the living conditions, manners, and mentality of the peasants changed. Railways, especially the little cross-country lines, and improvements in local roads, went far to break down provincial isolation. The town was easier to reach, and its culture was felt through the schools, compulsory military service, mail-order catalogues, and cheap newspapers. If not for themselves, the agricultural working class could at least anticipate an easier, less trying life for their children and their children's children (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 50, 53–4, 45).

In sum, from the early days of the Third Republic until the end of the century, French society was to change very little, and least of all in its traditional social and economic inequalities. Durkheim's consistently uniformitarian view that revolutions are as rare as unicorns thus reflected not only his deeply conservative nature but also a keen perception of the realities of his own society. In fact, those who made the republican victory possible – the peasantry and the rising middle class – expected no profound transformation of social relations. What they did expect was the end of the political influence of the traditional upper class as well as the Catholic Church, for this in turn would provide them with at least the opportunity to rise socially.

These expectations were intimately bound to the precarious future of the Third Republic. On July 19, 1870, the government of Napoleon III had declared war on Prussia. By September 2, after the battle of Sedan, the technically backward French army had surrendered, and Napoleon himself was taken prisoner. Two days later, the Second Empire destroyed, Paris insurrectionaries led by Leon Gambetta and Jules Simon established a "Government of National Defense," and, following the precedents of 1792 and 1848, declared the Republic. Prussian forces laid siege to Paris and, by September 23, had severed its contact with the outside world. Paris held out for another four months, as Gambetta formed a provincial "Army of the Loire" in support; but on January 28, Paris capitulated, and a furious Gambetta resigned rather than stage a provincial coup.

Since France now possessed no government with which Bismarck could negotiate, he insisted on the election of a Constituent Assembly by universal male suffrage. The election, held on February 8, 1871, showed that again, as in 1797 and 1848, France – and especially the peasantry – distrusted republicanism. Of 645 persons elected in the various departments, 400 were monarchists, and

nearly half of these were landowners. Suspected of bellicosity abroad and instability at home, of opposition to the Church, and of egalitarian and even socialist tendencies, republicans won only 200 seats. "So now we have a republic?" observed Zola's peasant-hero Jean Macquart, in *La Débâcle* (1892). "Oh well, all to the good if it helps us beat the Prussians"; but then Macquart shook his head, "for he had always been led to fear a republic when he worked on the land. And besides, in the face of the enemy he didn't think it was a good thing not to be all of one mind" (1972: 403).

The prospects for a restoration, however, were complicated by the fragmentation of the Right. The Bonapartists, the biggest losers at Sedan, returned only 20 supporters from Corsica and the two Charente departments. On the extreme Right, approximately 80 members of the Assembly supported the restoration of the Bourbon comte de Chambord; but these extremists, whose support came from rural France and the Catholic Workers' Circles founded in 1871 by Albert de Mun, were ultramontane on religious matters, defended the Syllabus and papal infallibility, and hoped to see Pius IX (then imprisoned in the Vatican) restored to his temporal powers. "Men of principle to whom politics were alien," Mayeur and Rebérioux observe, "they were to be awkward elements in coalitions of the right. Accustomed to read events as decrees of providence, they would not hesitate on occasion to follow the worst possible policy, being convinced that the renewal of Catholic France would only come about through catastrophe" (1984: 11). Distinguished from the extreme Right by its acceptance of parliamentary government, political and even economic liberalism, was a "center Right" of moderate legitimists. Religiously, this group had given up its Voltairian tone of the 1830s, and many had become liberal Catholics; but, while this separated them from the extreme Right (they had been disappointed with Pius IX's proclamation of the Syllabus and papal infallibility), they insisted that the State maintain respect for the Catholic Church. This in turn distinguished them from a group with which they otherwise had much in common – i.e., a "center Left" of Orléanists, suspicious of the Church, and led by Adolphe Thiers, for whom the elections of 1871 proved a personal triumph.

An elder statesman of 73, Thiers had been a leader of the Opposition and a sharp critic of Napoleon III's foreign policies since 1863. Although he refused to join the Government of National Defense (it contained far too many republicans), he had demon-

strated his patriotism by serving on several diplomatic missions on its behalf. As the only political figure whose reputation emerged unscathed from the disasters of 1870–1, he was elected in 26 different departments. In the Pact of Bordeaux of February 17, 1871, Thiers was appointed “head of the executive authority of the French Republic” and “under the control of the Assembly,” a deliberately ambiguous title and description designed to avoid prejudice with respect to the eventual form of government France might decide to adopt. The National Assembly was but temporarily a “repository of the sovereign authority,” and was to act only “provisionally” until “a decision was taken on the institutions of France.” In sum, the government was only very precariously a “republic” at all.

The French government thus established, Bismarck insisted on the harshest of terms: an indemnity of 5 billion gold francs (to be paid within three years), an army of occupation in twenty departments, and the annexation of Alsace and most of Lorraine.¹ When the newly elected National Assembly accepted these terms on March 1, 1871, the result was the outbreak of revolutionary violence known as the Paris Commune. Thiers transferred his government to Versailles, Paris was left in the hands of the Communards, and civil war ensued. When the Commune was at last suppressed and order restored on May 28, 1871, the National Assembly dealt ruthlessly with the revolutionaries: 20,000 were executed, 38,000 taken prisoner, 13,450 sentenced to various prison terms and 7,500 deported to New Caledonia. But for the Paris Commune and its ruthless suppression, however, the birth of the Third Republic might have been still more difficult than it was. On the one hand, the proscription and exile of so many “extremists” provided the nascent and extremely precarious Republic an opportunity to evolve in a more peaceful, orderly fashion, and even to attain a degree of constitutional legitimacy. On the other hand, the absence (or at least quiescence) of these same elements helped to remove the long-held association of republicanism with violence, instability, and disorder – something essential if the Republic were to win the allegiance of its hard-working, law-abiding, and largely provincial citizenry.

¹ Alsace and Lorraine contained great iron ore deposits, important textile works, rich forests, excellent soil, and a population of 1,600,000. Moreover, while the Alsatians spoke German, most of them were self-consciously French, having shared in its culture and history since the 17th century. The loss of Alsace and Lorraine was thus a particularly devastating condition of the peace, and one to which the French never reconciled themselves.

In May, 1871, however, the position of France within the larger European community was hardly encouraging, particularly by contrast with its apparent fortunes just fifteen years earlier. At the conclusion of the Crimean War (1854–6), J. P. T. Bury has observed, Great Britain was an ally, Russia had been firmly defeated, Italy and Germany were simply “geographical expressions,” and France was incontestably the foremost power in Europe. By the spring of 1871, Britain was no longer an ally (indeed, France had no allies); Russia had gained a modification of the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris; without any *quid pro quo*, France had been forced to withdraw her troops from Italy, allowing the Italian government to occupy Rome, complete the unification of Italy, imprison Pius IX in the Vatican, and end the temporal power of the papacy; and, worst of all, Germany, whose population already outnumbered France by more than 4 million people, had achieved national unity, declared itself an Empire, and would soon become the greatest industrial power on the Continent. “The hegemony of Europe,” Bury concludes, “had passed from France to Germany, and Bismarck, not Thiers, was now the chief arbiter of continental disputes” (1985: 135).

For the French, the natural consequences of this situation included a revulsion for war, a powerful desire for peace and order, the constant affirmation and re-affirmation of patriotism, the elevation of the “sacred” French army to a status beyond political argument altogether, and an utter indifference to the restoration of the temporal power of the Pope. Henceforth, public opinion would favor those like Durkheim, whose republican zeal was tempered by opposition to insurrection and revolution. In the by-elections of July 2, 1871, such republicans, including 35 radicals, captured 100 seats while the royalists gained only 12. For the most part, this was a vote for the conservative republic of Thiers, or the “moderate Left” led by Jules Simon, Jules Grévy, Jules Ferry, and Jules Favre – successful bourgeois who desired peace and rejected the Republican Union radicals led by Gambetta. But Gambetta himself was re-elected in Paris, indicating that conservatives had failed to identify the radical left with the Commune, and also that their success in February had been more the result of a desire for peace than a desire for monarchy.

The “very type of the prudent bourgeois,” Thiers approached the problems of reconstruction in a conservative, business-like manner.

The prosperous years of the Second Empire providing a substantial degree of economic resilience, the two loans raised to meet Bismarck's "crushing" war indemnity were easily and quickly covered and, by December 1873, the entire country was cleared of German soldiers. A proposal to introduce an income tax was dismissed and, under the stress of competition from the New World, Thiers initiated the first steps toward a return to the protectionism characteristic of France before 1860. "The Republic will be conservative," Thiers explained, "or it will not be at all" – an attitude no doubt reassuring to the rising middle class and its ever-swelling ranks of investors (Bury 1985: 137).

Similarly, any illusions that the demise of the Empire would result in the dismantling of the highly centralized Napoleonic administrative structure were quickly dispelled, as the traditionalist Thiers refused to allow free election of mayors in any but towns of under 20,000 inhabitants, and neither he nor his successors made any attempt to limit the powers of the Prefecture of Police. While efforts to reform the French army on the model of its demonstrably superior Prussian counterpart were always subservient to the interests of the economy, the latter were sufficiently auspicious by 1875 to permit passage of a bill providing for an increase of 150,000 men, and serious discussion of more modernized equipment and the development of a reserve. When the increasingly voluble *revanchiste* sentiments which accompanied these measures led Bismarck to rattle his sword in the German press, the Foreign Minister Decazes successfully aroused the diplomatic intercession of both Britain and Russia on France's behalf, demonstrating that for all its success in 1870–1, Germany had no *carte blanche* on the Continent.

This conservative, provisional Republic was one that moderate legitimists could at least temporarily swallow. What was less palatable was Gambetta's republican radicals, whose resurgence was increasingly evident in repeated by-election victories, the founding of the newspaper *La République française* (1871), and Gambetta's own charismatic presence at numerous political banquets throughout the country. But in fact, Gambetta, who in 1869 had subscribed to the famous Belleville electoral program, was rapidly becoming more moderate. In particular, he acknowledged the imminent rise of what he called "a new social stratum" – *petits bourgeois*, shopkeepers, clerks, and artisans – the class which had profited from the prosperity of the Second Empire, swelled the ranks of investors in

the provisional Republic, and thus accelerated the work of post-war reconstruction; and now, given the appropriate education and opportunity, this class would surely support the Republic and strengthen its institutions (Thomson 1968: 79, 82–4; Bury 1985: 150).

In short, Gambetta ceased to be a Radical and became what he himself described as an “Opportunist” – a name which would characterize the moderate Left to the end of the century. Doctrinaire tenets were shelved in the interest of practical ends, and the electorate was increasingly reassured that, if Gambetta remained a republican and an anticlerical, he was no revolutionary. In fact, those who insist on reading *De la division du travail social* as a “dialogue” with Marx’s ghost should be reminded that revolutionary socialism was virtually non-existent at the parliamentary level of French politics during the period in which that work was conceived.² The first series of Jules Guesde’s *L’Égalité* appeared only in November 1877, and the second in January 1880. Between the two, the Socialist Workers’ Congress of France was held at Marseilles (October 1879), denouncing Gambetta’s followers and adopting a Marxist program. But the actual texts of Marx and Engels were almost unknown, and only in 1885 did Guesde’s Parti ouvrier publish a complete translation of the *Communist Manifesto*.

The reasons for this quiescence, in sharp contrast to the powerful Social Democratic Party in Germany, are not far to seek. France, as we have seen, was still a country of peasants rather than urban-industrial workers, and those Paris revolutionaries who had survived the suppression of the Commune were either in prison or in exile, not to be pardoned until 1879. Even after the republican victory of 1879, when most of Gambetta’s erstwhile radicals joined the opposition in their hatred for Ferry and the Opportunists, the extreme Left remained irretrievably split. A group led by Charles Floquet and Henri Allain-Targé, which (paradoxically) called itself “the parliamentary group of the radical Left,” demanded revision of the

² In his review of Antonio Labriola’s *Essais sur la conception matérialiste de l’histoire* (1897), Durkheim acknowledged that “Either the collective consciousness floats in a vacuum, a sort of unrepresentable absolute, or it is related to the rest of the world through the intermediary of a substratum on which it consequently depends . . . [And] of what can this substratum be composed if not of the members of society as they are socially combined?” But Durkheim immediately added that there was no reason to associate this principle with the socialist movement, “of which it is totally independent. As for ourselves, we arrived at this proposition before we became acquainted with Marx, to whose influence we have in no way been subjected” (1978c: 127).

constitution, abolition of the Senate and the Presidency of the Republic, administrative decentralization, election of judges, and separation of Church and State; but their reforms remained primarily political rather than social in nature. The socialists themselves split over party organization (unitary or federal?) and tactics (revolutionary or reformist?) at St. Etienne in 1882. The Marxist followers of Guesde joined the Parti ouvrier, while the “possibilists” – those who wished to practice “the politics of the possible,” and for whom the Republic took precedence over the class struggle – formed the *Fédérations des travailleurs socialistes*. And in the rural south-east, the disciples of Louis-Auguste Blanqui and Edouard Vaillant formed the *Comité révolutionnaire central* (1881), a closed group of anarchist “companions” who rejected politics altogether. In short, apart from the conquest of a few town halls, “the various brands of socialism scarcely counted on the political level” (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 75).

As Mayeur and Rebérioux have emphasized, the problem of explaining the republican victory is largely one of asking the right question. If we ask why the efforts at restoration failed, for example, the answer is both obvious and unhelpful. They failed because both the peasantry and the Orléanist legitimists feared the comte de Chambord more than they feared the Republic. If we ask why the constitutional laws were passed, the answer is equally obvious and equally unhelpful. They were passed because they were a temporary expedient, providing a conservative, parliamentary form of government while the Orléanists awaited their opportunity to establish a liberal monarchy. The much better question, therefore, is why this provisional, centrist government was gradually undermined by a widening rift between republicans and conservatives, and eventually gave way to a new “coalition of the Third Estate” (1984: 36–7).

What, then, gave rise to this rift and, eventually, this coalition? The effort to depict the conflict between republicans and conservatives as one of social class is doomed to failure; for in fact, the breadth of republican appeal largely transcended such divisions. A substantial number of upper middle-class bankers, businessmen, and industrialists, for example, had long been enamored of the ideas of Saint-Simon and Comte, embraced the faith in social progress, and firmly believed that a society open to talent and ability was the best means to ensure it. No less supportive of the Republic was Gambetta’s “new social stratum” – the group produced by the economic

prosperity of the Second Empire – which now sought secular enlightenment and social advancement for their children. The support of the peasantry – more fearful of both revolution and reaction – might not be taken for granted; but republican propaganda, which succeeded in raising fears of clerical reaction and/or the restoration of monarchy, combined with republican promises of free, secular education and universal military service, proved increasingly seductive. Finally, the industrial working class – never a decisive element in the coalition in any case – voted for the Republic if it voted at all (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 37–40).

This breadth of appeal helps to explain at least two noteworthy features of the policies of the republicans once in power. The first, as both their Roman Catholic and (later) their radical socialist opponents pointed out, was that the Opportunists had no social policy whatsoever – i.e., no intention of significantly altering the traditional class structure of French society. On the contrary, aside from some early public works programs for the construction of ports, canals, and railways, the characteristic republican posture was one of resistance to State intervention in the economy, support for agriculture and protectionist industry, and aggressive colonialism (Bury 1985: 152; Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 94). When Ferry revealed his plan for a society “without God or King,” therefore, Jaurès was wont to observe that this did not exclude the factory owner (McManners 1972: 46). The reasons for this exclusively political nature of the republican reforms are obvious. France was still a land of peasants – 65 percent of the population were still country dwellers – who had little direct interest in the social problems of workers. Those who were interested (and had survived the suppression of the Commune) were either in prison or in exile, while the remaining republicans were, like Ferry and Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, themselves bourgeois who distrusted social change. Finally, the republican ascendancy itself was palpably the consequence of coalition politics, depending heavily on the gradual seduction of the peasantry and the conversion of important Orléanists like Thiers. Had serious social and economic change played a part in the republican agenda, this seduction and conversion would clearly have been undermined (Bury, 1985: 152–3). These were caveats to which Durkheim was not oblivious. Although a friend of Jaurès and sympathetic to socialism, his response to revolutionary proposals, simply and repeatedly, was “I fear a reaction” (Lukes 1972: 323).

THE NEW ANTICLERICALISM

The second noteworthy feature was the central place of laicization within these political reforms. One has to read Gambetta's speech of May 4, 1877, Langlois observes, in order to understand "what remains, after one hundred years, astonishing: that it was indeed the denunciation of clericalism that held the republican camp together" (1996: 117). In fact, the conflict between republicans and conservatives was largely an ideological one over the place of the Church in French society. In particular, the Church was held responsible for denying both the middle classes and the peasantry that "enlightenment" which had been the promise of the French Revolution. In a sense, therefore, the defeat of the conservatives and the republican ascendancy marked the culmination of the great movement which had been begun in 1789 (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 37). The historic alliance of Church and State in France was based upon the Concordat of 1801, a settlement signed by a Bonaparte wary of a Catholic reaction against a "godless" Republic and a Pius VII eager to heal the schism between "refractory" and "constitutional" clergy. Both parties gained. On his side, the pope received the right to depose French bishops and discipline pro-revolutionary clergy, thus ending the autonomy of the pre-revolutionary Gallican church. Henceforth, the head of State would nominate bishops, to whom the pope would then grant canonical institution. The publicity of Catholic worship, in such forms as processions in the streets, was again permitted; and Church seminaries were allowed to re-open.

Bonaparte gained still more. By signing the Concordat, the pope virtually recognized the Republic. The Vatican agreed to raise no questions over former tithes and former church lands, the new owners of former church properties thus gaining clear titles. Religious toleration was preserved through Bonaparte's minimal, factual, and thus harmless admission that Roman Catholicism was the religion of "the great majority of French citizens"; and while the clergy were to be compensated for loss of tithes and properties by receiving a salary from the State, Bonaparte simultaneously dispelled the notion of an established church by placing Protestant ministers of all denominations on the payroll as well. To these provisos, Bonaparte unilaterally appended his "Organic Articles" – a code of ecclesiastical law whose Gallican objectives were to increase the authority of the bishop over the parish priest, that of the State over

the bishop, and to limit the power of the pope over the French clergy (McManners 1972: 4; Dansette 1961, 129–37).

During the First Empire and the regimes that followed, McManners observes, either side could have made the Concordat unworkable. The Vatican might have looked askance at changes of government, while French rulers might have asked in what sense the majority of citizens were Roman Catholics. But the Church believed in an alliance with the State on principle, and anticlericals were happy to see ecclesiastics bridled by specific agreements. Both sides thus had an interest in making the settlement work, and by 1870, “custom and compromise under successive regimes had filled the interstices of the original Concordat until the structure had acquired a venerable air, hallowed by time and seemingly irreplaceable” (McManners 1972: 5). To those who would eventually fill the ranks of the Opportunists, however, the Church seemed a growing and increasingly threatening presence. In the syllabus of 1864 which accompanied the encyclical *Quanta Cura*, Pius IX startled the modern world by condemning propositions which seemed self-evident to reasonable persons, including the suggestion that the Roman pontiff should reconcile himself to “progress, liberalism and modern civilization.” “In this enigmatical form,” commented the duc de Broglie, the pope seemed “to embrace in the same condemnation the press, railways, telegraphs, the discoveries of science” (McManners 1972: 19). And on July 18, 1870, the bishops assembled in St. Peter’s voted the constitution *Pater aeternus*, declaring the pope preserved from error when he speaks *ex cathedra* in matters of faith and morals. However ambiguous the Syllabus, and however limited the definition in *Pater aeternus*, McManners observes, in the eyes of other Christians as well as unbelievers, the Church “was irretrievably set on the path of absolutism in ecclesiastical government and, by analogy and from the experience of the present pontificate, of reaction in matters social and political” (1972: 1).

Despite this reactionary posture, the Church enjoyed at least an ephemeral rise in popularity as a consequence of the Franco-Prussian War. The clergy had distinguished themselves as chaplains and orderlies, and some of the Catholic gentry as military officers. Bishops had defied the victorious Germans and denounced their demands for hostages, the Archbishop of Rheims demanding to be the first of the sureties they put on trains against the possibility of derailment. As the Commune decreed the separation of Church and

State, confiscated ecclesiastical property, occupied church buildings and storehouses, and “executed” more than fifty priests as well as the Archbishop of Paris, the Church gained further respect and sympathy from respectable society. As the Empire collapsed and Paris made war on Versailles, all who had anything to lose embraced an institution long regarded as the last bastion of conservatism (McManners 1972: 32–3).

Was Catholicism still the religion of “the great majority of French citizens”? Official statistics of the 1870s suggest that it was, listing 35,000,000 people as Catholics, in contrast to 600,000 Protestants, 50,000 Jews, and only 80,000 “free-thinkers” (McManners 1972: 5). There was a diocese corresponding to almost every department, and 36,000 parishes, an average of one to every thousand inhabitants. Each had its *curé* or *desservant* (priest in charge), and some had *vicaires* or other assistant clergy – a total of 51,000 priests engaged in the parochial ministry. These were supported by 4,000 other secular priests who were canons, directors of seminaries, or schoolmasters. The supervision of religion was, in terms of the numbers of people dependent upon it, one of the principal civil ministries. The annual budget for religion exceeded 50 million francs (McManners 1972: 20, 78). Although the Concordat had not provided for the return of the religious congregations, they had in fact returned in force, including traditional orders like the Trappists, Benedictines, and Dominicans, and a variety of new organizations reflecting the idiosyncrasies of local environments. Male congregations – only 5 of which enjoyed state authorization – had increased from 59 (in 1856) to 116 (embracing 30,000 members) by 1877. Among them were the 60 houses and 2,000 members of the Society of Jesus, active again as schoolmasters despite a Restoration decree prohibiting them from teaching. In their 29 colleges, the Jesuits taught 11,000 pupils, approximately one-fourth of all pupils in colleges run by religious orders. Congregations of women, enjoying authorization under a law of 1825, multiplied even earlier and more rapidly. By 1875 there were more than 127,000 nuns, or one to every 280 members of the population – 3 times more than on the eve of the Revolution (McManners 1972: 20–1; Bury 1985: 157; Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 78). In addition to the sheer numbers of Catholics and the strength of their clergy, a variety of social services seem to have been almost entirely in Church hands. In 1880, for example, the hospitals and hospices run by the religious orders dealt with 114,199 persons in need of assistance. More than

60,000 children were received in Catholic orphanages and work-rooms; and to these must be added the Catholic apprenticeship schools, Church clubs, rest homes, and lunatic asylums (Mayeur and Rebérioux 1984: 79). But it was in education that the power of the Roman Catholic Church in France seemed to be at its height.

In spite of the anticlericalism which survived the First Empire and continued into the 1830s and 1840s, the Church had repeatedly tried to improve its position by undermining the university monopoly of higher and secondary education. Its struggle, eloquently served by the new school of Liberal Catholics led by the Comte de Montalembert, was rewarded in 1850 by the Loi Falloux – a gesture of domestic politics by Louis Napoleon to French Catholics which would secure the position of Catholics in education for the next thirty years. The State monopoly was broken. Henceforth, there were to be two categories of school: the public schools founded and maintained by communes, departments, or the State; and the already flourishing free schools founded by private individuals or associations. In effect, this meant that any authorized or tolerated religious association could open a school, and be subject only to the most nominal State inspection. Until the Second Empire stopped the practice, local authorities could hand over their own schools to the charge of religious orders; and since monks and nuns required no salaries, frugality repeatedly overwhelmed anticlericalism in the deliberations of rural councillors. The religious orders – and particularly the Jesuits – came to play an increasingly important part in education (Bury 1985: 81–2; McManners 1972: 21). By 1870, almost 40 percent of the nation's children were educated in Church schools.³ The sons of the aristocracy, magistrates, and army officers were consistently sent to the *collèges* of the orders – particularly those of the Jesuits, who specialized in training young men for the Polytechnique and the naval and military academies. The education of women came even further under the influence of the Church. Three-fifths of all girls were taught by the sisters of the congregations, and even in anti-

³ McManners estimates that in more than 300 *collèges* and in 80 or more "Little Seminaries," there were 70,000 pupils, by contrast with 116,000 in the lay establishments of secondary education. In primary schools of the orders, approximately 1,500,000 of the country's 4,000,000 children received their education. Even the State schools, with exclusively lay personnel, were much under the influence of the Church. Their day began with prayers, there were crucifixes on the walls, the bishop sat in the Conseil Académique of the Department, and there were representatives of the episcopate on the Conseil Supérieur de l'Instruction Publique (1972: 21–2).

clerical areas, there was a widespread belief that nuns should be in charge of feminine education. When an attempt was made under the Second Empire to establish State secondary schools for girls, Mgr. Dupanloup protested that many of the teachers would be men, some irreligious, and some even youthful. The project collapsed when clerical journals published the names of the girls attending (McManners 1972: 21–2). As late as 1930, André Siegfried could still observe that there was no type of Frenchman more typical than the anticlerical deputy whose wife was a devout Catholic and whose daughters were educated in a convent (Bury 1985: 159).

In higher education, a law of July 12, 1875 was to increase the Church's influence still more. It allowed the opening of "free institutes of higher education" – in short, Catholic universities – and allotted the award of degrees to mixed boards of examiners consisting of professors from State faculties and from their Catholic counterparts. Instantly such universities appeared at Paris, Lille, Lyon, Angers, and Toulouse, and with substantial means at their disposal, they soon attracted first-rate faculties and competed effectively with the State universities. Bishops continued to sit on the Conseil Supérieur, while priests sat on the academic boards. Religious instruction, given by chaplains, formed part of the timetables of *lycées* (Mayeur and Reberiou 1984: 79). "Au point de vue sociologique," Durkheim would say in 1905, "l'Eglise est un monstre" (1905: 369). If so, in 1870 it was a very large *monstre* indeed, and one that threatened to grow still larger.

Not surprisingly, the 1870s and 1880s became a period of renaissance Catholic spirituality⁴ and mass pilgrimages, the latter inspired in part by the desire to offer reparation for sins reputed to have brought on the Prussian defeat and the horrors of the Commune. The chief resort for such journeys was the shrine of Paray-le-Monial, where the faithful made "the consecration of a penitent France to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." The Augustins de L'Assomption, a brotherhood founded in mid-century, set the pattern by negotiating cheap railway fares, printing song sheets, and publishing a newspaper, *Le Pèlerin* (McManners 1972: 22). Revelations, prophecies, and miracles multiplied. Yet despite its popularity after the War and the

⁴ Even the youthful Durkheim did not escape. Davy tells us that, while a student at the Collège d'Épinal in the early 1870s, he experienced a brief crisis of mysticism under the influence of an old Catholic schoolmistress – something he rapidly surmounted (Lukes 1972: 41).

Commune, its 35,000,000 followers, the strength of its clergy, its control of social services, its power over French education, and its renascent spirituality, the Catholic Church in France was a deeply troubled institution.

Some of these troubles were internal, others derived from the social and economic changes of late 19th-century France, and still others could be attributed to the increasingly zealous activities of non-Catholic or anti-Catholic groups. But whatever the causes, they were sufficient to render the Church extremely vulnerable to the attacks of anticlericals like Durkheim after 1879. Not least among the Church's internal difficulties, for example, was its lack of a central organization or a distinctive French voice. Nothing had replaced the Assembly General of the Clergy of the *ancien régime*, the Concordat had been negotiated by the Pope alone, and after 1811, there had been no more plenary meetings of the French episcopate. If the Church of France was to speak as a unity, therefore, the lead would have to come from the Vatican, where Pius IX, having lost the protection of French troops to the Franco-Prussian disaster, had declared himself a "prisoner" of the new kingdom of Italy. The history of the French Church in the 1870s and 1880s, therefore, was one punctuated with ultramontanist calls – most of which fell upon deaf republican ears – for the "liberation" of the Pope. A second difficulty was that French clergy themselves were divided in their degree of ultramontanist zeal. McManners notes that, by 1870, the social gulf between the lower clergy and the French episcopate had largely evaporated, but that a cultural and intellectual gulf had endured. The parish clergy came consistently from the less-educated classes, while the bishops typically possessed literary and classical educations, and were utter strangers to the parochial ministry.⁵ Enjoying a salary 20 times that of a *curé*, a bishop inevitably appeared to those below as an aloof, superior figure. By contrast, only one secular priest in ten enjoyed security of tenure; the others could be moved by the bishop at will and, if accused of offences, disciplined without due process (1972: 25).

Under these circumstances, one can see why that "ghostly

⁵ Of 167 holders of episcopal office between 1870 and 1883, McManners observes, only 21 were of noble birth, 56 were from bourgeois or rich peasant families, and 90 were of "the people." Only 18 had spent significant time in the parochial ministry before their elevation, 23 had risen through diocesan administration, and more than 90 had been teachers in seminaries or holders of academic chairs (1972: 25).

Gallicanism which lingered on in the episcopal palaces after 1870” had largely disappeared from the presbyteries. In fact, under Pius IX the Roman *Curia* consistently lent a sympathetic ear to the complaints of French parish priests, who were further encouraged by Louis Veuillot’s *L’Univers*, the principal Catholic newspaper. Widely read in rural districts, *L’Univers* denounced Gallicanism and Liberal Catholicism alike, while simultaneously demanding allegiance to the Chair of Peter, and rendered compromise with even a moderate republicanism unthinkable (McManners 1972: 23). While it is difficult to imagine that a country with a priest for every 639 inhabitants might lack an effective parochial ministry, this was the principal thesis of the abbé Bougaud’s *Le grand péril de l’Eglise de France* (1878), which noted the decline in annual ordinations from 1,753 (in 1868) to 1,582 (in 1877). The aristocracy and bourgeoisie were still interested in the religious orders for their daughters; but 9 out of 10 candidates for the ministry came from the families of peasants and artisans. With his 850 francs, McManners observes, a *desservant* earned the wage of a *gendarme*; a *vicaire* received less than half as much; and even a *curé*, of whom there were only 5,600, could rise only to 1,500 (1972: 27). Respect for apostolic poverty notwithstanding, the ministry was a low-status occupation.

As the intellectual foundations of Christian belief came under increasing attack from Biblical criticism, natural science, and the comparative study of religion, it is understandable that a ministry thus recruited would be found wanting; and to compound the problem, the educational program of the seminaries was limited to meditation, pious exercises, and the rehearsal of antiquated dogma: “In ancient manuals written in dog latin,” McManners observes, “seminarists studied theological courses consisting of fragments of the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the Councils tacked together. The chronological difficulties of Genesis were still explained by the theory of ‘jour-époques,’ the millennial ‘days’ of creation, and the implausibility of the Flood story was overcome by confining it to a segment of the earth’s surface” (1972: 27–8). McManners finds only two diocesan prelates who, in the 1870s and 1880s, had any first-hand knowledge of the new German biblical criticism that had already inspired Robertson Smith and, largely through Smith, would influence Durkheim; and McManners adds that even Mgr. Dupanloup, the great Liberal Catholic, was helpless in the face of Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* (1863).

Even the figure of 35,000,000 French Catholics seems dubious. Many of these, McManners insists, "accepted no obligation beyond making their Easter communion, many merely attended mass occasionally, or came to church to be married or were brought there to be buried, many were nominal Catholics whose allegiance did not extend beyond the census forms" (1972: 5). A more certain guide, he adds, are the statistics of voting in national elections. In every instance, when the country had a chance to pronounce on the anticlerical policies of the 1870s and 1880s, it endorsed them. "True," he admits, "the issue was never clear-cut; even so, the voting could not have consistently gone this way unless there had been large numbers of 'Catholics' of various kinds who refused to put institutional loyalty before what they regarded as the best overall decision for the political administration of the country." Catholicism, it seems, was not unmixed with an anticlericalism of its own. Clemenceau could thus refer to a France "qui a des habitudes culturelles, mais qui a en horreur le gouvernement des curés" (McManners 1972: 11).

Quite aside from its internal difficulties, the Church faced serious problems adapting to the social and economic transformation of France in the late 19th century. The population of the diocese of Paris, for example, rose from 1,953,000 (in 1861) to 2,411,000 (in 1877) to 3,849,000 (in 1906); and as the conditions of the Concordat made it difficult to endow new parishes, and the government made no provision for moving priests from old ones, the traditional parochial system foundered.⁶ Similar problems afflicted Marseilles, Lille, Saint-Etienne, and Lyon. In *Le Présent et l'avenir du Catholicisme* (1892), the duc de Broglie thus argued that the Church was being defeated not so much by skepticism as by administrative breakdown under the sheer weight of numbers. To this, one must add the indifferent knowledge of an urban, working-class world possessed by a clergy of rural origins, whose language, values, and morals were largely those of an earlier age. The traditional palliative of alms-giving, widely endorsed and practiced, was ill-fitted to cope with urban discontent and misery. In Lille where, under the Second Empire, 30 percent of the deaths were from consumption and diseases of the lungs, rickets and syphilitic debility, the Catholic "Society for Good Books"

⁶ In 1861, McManners observes, there were 134 parishes and 661 priests; in 1877, 159 "parishes" (including new chapels) and 723 priests; and in 1906, 185 "parishes" and 866 priests. In the XII^e and XX^e *arrondissements*, parishes of 50,000 souls were common (1972: 7).