THE Revolution against the Church

MICHEL VOVELLE

In Paris in the winter and spring of 1793–94, a sudden and violent attempt at "dechristianization"—a willful endeavor to eradicate religious institutions, practices, and beliefs—flared up, crowned by the effort to set up a new cult, that of Reason.

In this lively and well-researched book, Vovelle asks how we should evaluate this episode: as little more than a tragic accident, the folly of a day from which the profound faith of the masses nevertheless emerged intact? Or as a momentous break in religious history which has lasted to the present day? Or—a third possibility—as a symptom of the true state of popular indifference which had already begun with the philosophical propaganda of the Enlightenment?

Drawing on a rich body of documentary evidence, Vovelle traces the growth of the revolutionary movement against the Church and uses several indicators: the surrendering of Church silverware, the taking down of bells, acts of iconoclasm, the burning of idols, and the closure of churches. He draws conclusions from these traumatic events about the history of the "dechristianizing" mentality in early modern Europe.

Written by one of the foremost authorities on the French Revolution, *The Revolution against the Church* will be of interest to students and researchers in the history of France and the history of religion.

The Revolution against the Church

The Revolution against the Church

From Reason to the Supreme Being

MICHEL VOVELLE

Translated by Alan José

Ohio State University Press
Columbus

First published in the United States by the Ohio State University Press.
First published in the United Kingdom by Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell Ltd.
and with the assistance of the French Ministry of Culture.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress
ISBN 0–8142–0577–1

Text design by Blackwell Publishers
Jacket design by Miller, Craig and Cocking Design Partnership
Type set by Graphicraft Typesetters Ltd., Hong Kong

Printed in Great Britain by Billing and Sons Ltd., Worcester

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources. ♾

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Figures

Tables

1

The adventures of Reason

In the philosophical story from which the title of this essay is borrowed, Voltaire sketched in metaphorical terms the 'adventures of Reason' in the way that a philosopher of his time might have seen them. Hidden in a well, with her daughter Truth for company, Reason did not have many opportunities during the course of history for actually venturing out into the open. Suddenly a lull gave her the chance. In the Europe of Enlightened Princes, from Prussia to Tuscany or Portugal, she was able to set out on a journey to measure the progress of science, of law, and above all of tolerance, casting back into the darkness of a dead past butchery and torture – that is, the legacy of fanaticism and superstition. The fable ends badly. Having witnessed the persistent reversion to barbarism among men who were murdering and savaging each other, mother and daughter go back into their well, still hoping to come out one day – if not for good (Voltaire's optimism does not go that far) then at least occasionally when there is an opportunity.

It is an understatement to say that the philosopher would have been unable to recognize himself in the adventure we are now about to recount. In the space of six months – say from Brumaire to Germinal in Year 2 – Reason forced its way through, in republican France, at the time of the most intensive struggle on the fronts of both civil and foreign war, repudiating the elitist model of progress which had come from above and imposing itself as the ultimate outcome of a new world. But the conclusion is the same. It was an episode with no tomorrow, a parenthesis which was incongruous and – even worse – culpable in the eyes of enemies as well as those of many friends of the Revolution; and so the cult of Reason moved back into the ranks of memories to be concealed and forgotten.

Analysis, and still more, understanding, implies a persistent attempt in this whole area to overcome a taboo which is none the less real. Whether

intentionally or not, a silence was established, anathematizing one moment of 'delirium', associating the adversaries of the Revolution in an unconscious complicity with those who made use of it, without daring to claim back this part of their inheritance.

The impossible serenity

In the preface to a work still referred to today, which he dedicated in 1906 to the 'cult of Reason and (to the) cult of the Supreme Being', Alphonse Aulard emphasized how the historiography of the nineteenth century had been powerless to free itself from a normative interpretation of the phenomenon, leading to a value judgement which was generally unfavourable. Michelet, he recalled, condemned equally both the abstraction of the cult of Reason and the elitism of the cult of the Supreme Being, dreaming instead of a 'religion of our native land and of humanity', which would be more in keeping with popular feeling and with the spirit of France itself. Edgar Quinet, far from being shocked by the iconoclastic audacity of the 'prudent Polyeuctes'* (to use Aulard's expression) came to the paradoxical conclusion that 'all that needed to be done was simply to convert Revolutionary France to protestantism.'

Then there were the more liberated spirits, capable of a higher vision. Aulard's initiative, written at the dawn of 1900, was seen by the erudite positivists who wrote monographs as failing to face up to the real problems. No concessions were made in this dispute, which listed in the works of clerical authors – whether ecclesiastic or not – the victims and the outrages. The works of their adversaries revealed their difficulty in extricating themselves from the ligh stakes of the anticlerical battle at the turn of the century. We have learned to be more indulgent towards these learned authors of end-of-the-century monographs, and to appreciate the documentary assets we owe them, at least when they were not blinded by passion. How many hagiographical notices have we read which are so scrupulous in praising the heroism of these confessors of the faith that they cover with Noah's mantle the realities not only of the other church – which is less heroic, or at least differently motivated – but also of a France which in 1793 was no longer the united Christendom that was the dream? Thus, to take only one example, we search in vain in the four volumes of the history of the Church in Avignon during the Revolution, by Canon Soullier, for any trace of the 200 abdicated priests from the department of Vaucluse.

* Polyeucte: a tragedy by Corneille (1606–84). Polyeucte drives away his wife unless she is willing to go to the stake with him as a Christian martyr.

Alphonse Aulard, the precursor

Aulard has the merit of wanting to distinguish himself from authors who 'have judged rather than told' by laying claim to a scientific procedure which was solidly grounded in fact and which he intended to be 'purely narrative'. In the state of knowledge of his own period, he mastered the Parisian sources, not only from the debates of the Convention, of the Jacobins, and of the Committees, which he had helped to collect, but also from the press, from pamphlets and from lampoons, which he knew well. Furthermore, he sensed the full extent of the phenomenon on a national scale, knowing how to turn to his own advantage the monographs just mentioned and yet at the same time keeping a critical stance. He brought his own contribution to local studies, since he had surveyed a series of departmental and municipal archives in south-western France, in order to try to grasp there the very act of dechristianization. At a time when the 'great' revolutionary history was essentially Parisian, he felt the need to highlight the provinces, even if the admittedly impressionistic soundings which he utilized inevitably put most weight on the large towns, and in a south-west to which he attributed much more importance than it really had. What is more serious, however, is that the positivist historian, having condemned the value judgements of his forbears, fell into his own trap: he wanted to stick to narration, and from the beginning he started to unfold his thesis, for indeed he had one. In his view, the dechristianization of Year 2, far from being 'an outrage against history and the race', was rather 'the necessary and indeed political consequence of the state of war into which the Revolution had been plunged by the resistance of the *ancien régime* to the new spirit.' Behind the exterior of the cult of Reason and then of the Supreme Being was revealed in the final instance a 'patriotic goal', not to say an 'expedient of national defence'. Recourse to the theory of circumstances (which is here significantly curtailed) in order to explain the unexpected excesses of the revolutionary march, led the author, whatever the merits of a linked narrative which maintains all its value, to misunderstand a whole aspect of the phenomenon – its impact, its successes and its failures, the density of what it represented at the level of most popular collective mentalities: in a word, everything which interests us most today. And then the attitude of Aulard, to all outward appearances very simple on the basis of this finding, is not devoid of ambiguity. He failed to maintain an equal balance between the cult of Reason and the cult of the supreme Being, two completely different formulations of a response (or so it would appear) to the same set of circumstances. His heart inclined, if you will pardon the paradox, towards Reason, the expression of the current of Enlightenment in which he recognized himself, while the Supreme

Being remained for him the megalomaniacal invention of Robespierre, even if he did not fail to recognize the stream of Rousseauistic sensibility to which he was responding.

A conspiracy of silence?

If the analyst, who to this day is still the most reliable on the cult of Reason and of the Supreme Being, appears to be caught in the trap of his initial preconceptions, we must recognize that much 'Jacobin' reading, often of great merit and typified essentially by Albert Mathiez, did not seem any more open to an in-depth understanding of the dechristianizing phenomenon. Mathiez, who also wrote on Robespierre and the cult of the Supreme Being, entered into the Robespierrist logic and argument presented at the very time of these events. In the dechristianizing offensive of the winter of 1793, he noted the destabilizing effect of the Hébertist movement, even if he did not regard it as a plot. The cult of Reason, which was a fallacious means of mobilizing popular Parisian and provincial feeling against the Government of Public Safety, did not for him satisfy any deep-seated aspirations; worse, it could only raise the country people against the Republic, and Mathiez found here once again the analysis of the position which had been demonstrated since Frimaire not only by the Incorruptible but also by Danton and many others. Robespierre's enterprise of the cult of the Supreme Being was thus, if not totally rehabilitated, at least partially justified as a means of creating stability in the dangerous escalation of irresponsible actions. A similar point of view, albeit in a very different key, was expressed just before the Second World War by Daniel Guérin in his essay on 'Class struggle in the French Revolution: bourgeois and bras-nus'. Hardly sympathetic towards the middle-class democrats, of whom Robespierre was the spokesman, the author followed the struggles of the popular movement as they were expressed by the successive voices of the 'Enragés' and then – although in a more ambiguous way – through Hébertism. He saw in the emphasis placed on dechristianization a form of flight into the future, leading one section of the militants astray towards illusory objectives and away from the real problems of the revolutionary class struggle. A judgement such as this, even if it did not reduce the phenomenon to the dimensions of a plot, a puzzle, or even a manipulation, could not result in a real appreciation of the cultural dimensions of the phenomenon amongst the popular masses. And only a quarter of a century ago, a historian as well informed as Jean Dautry could still write that he had never been able to convince himself that dechristianization ever had genuinely popular roots.

This astonishing conspiracy of silence, a paradoxical union of the horrified recoil of conservative historiography with the unease of a Jacobin tradition –

itself the heir, under various different forms, of the prejudices of the period concerning a movement stamped with suspicion – has once again, after some thirty years, been called into question under the influence of converging lines of inquiry.

The re-opening of the debate

By opening a national enquiry during the 1960s into the priests who, at the heart of the crisis, renounced not only their calling but also their names, Marcel Reinhard did more than simply lift a previously stubborn taboo. He opened up the research on that line of approach, without preconceptions, which Alphonse Aulard had wanted to promote but had failed really to accomplish.

This programme of research came into being at the moment when a whole stream of Catholic historiography, renewed by the contributions of religious sociology advanced by Gabriel Lebras, was undertaking a reformulation of the problems of the past in the light of the concerns of the present. As a result of enquiries into religious practice, judged by the important actions which reflected it, the question of dechristianization assumed a particular importance in the discussions at the end of the fifties. The word itself should be understood in its widest sense. Both the term and the concept were invented by Monseigneur Dupanloup during the 1840s and came to signify that movement of drift which started in the nineteenth century and is still happening today. It signified a decline in practice, not to mention the erosion of belief, and (as it has been called) 'the eclipse of the sacred' in the Christian world. Dechristianization is a controversial notion (it has been called 'a fallacious word' and 'a false idea clearly expressed') but it is nevertheless a highly productive concept if we are to judge by the richness of the studies it generated. On the basis of an idea thrown out by Gabriel Lebras, its origins prior to the French Revolution became a subject of enquiry, raising – as Jean Delumeau did – the problem of whether certain sections of traditional rural society had ever been 'christianized' in depth. This led down a road which has amply proved its fruitfulness on the subject of religion and popular culture, and its relationship with the culture of the elite.

'The two dechristianizations'

Amidst this flourishing multiplicity of investigations a new axis of research was opened up by the meeting of this new religious history, reinvigorated by its contact with religious sociology, with the sweeping wave of the history

of mentalities. In questioning the evolution of collective sensitivities and appearances – attitudes towards life, the family, love or death – a number of historians were led to revise the accepted framework of their original hypotheses. I myself was part of an initial investigation into the origins of dechristianization in the century of Enlightenment, based on an analysis of the spiritual clauses contained in wills made in Provence, and I do not know if, as has sometimes been said, I committed a sin of imprudence by titling my research 'Baroque piety and dechristianization'. I did not have recourse to prudent periphrases – secularization, laïcization, or developing worldliness – but in all honesty that did not worry me unduly as I was aware that I had grasped a fundamental change in the way that the people of Provence viewed their own death in the years around 1750. Death changed, life changed, the festival – a heady time and a paroxysmic expression – was no longer the same. Significantly, after 1968, great interest developed in the different aspects of the festival, and what it represented in the collective imagination.

And it is there, at the end of an apparent detour, that we shall find 'the other' dechristianization, that brief period, not a slow, secular drift but an incongruous blaze of winter and spring, between 1793 and 1794. The scandal is unchanged, even if we do not see it in the same terms as we did in the past. For religious historians, already cautious regarding long-term dechristianization, a process which moves gradually and silently, and reveals itself by fragile or doubtful indications, this is indeed a different dechristianization. The word has a formidable multiplicity of meanings. This other dechristianization was not spontaneous, or diffuse, but was imposed by violence, a wilful endeavour to eradicate institutions, practices, and beliefs, crowned by the attempt to set up a new cult, that of Reason, which would prolong the one of the Supreme Being even while denying it. How should we evaluate this episode? A tragic accident, the folly of a day, which left intact the real depth of faith of the masses who bowed their heads under the storm? Or rather, on the other side of the coin, the great interruption in religious history, at least in French religious history, which separated a state of Christianity characterized by unanimity of practice from one in which the participation of the laity caused the appearance of a gradual advance in disaffection, lasting from the nineteenth century right up to the present day? Unless – a third hypothesis – this brutal dechristianization, suddenly flaring up, simply brought to light the true state of indifference which had already begun, doubtless the result of philosophical propoganda during the Enlightenment: the fault of Voltaire, the fault of Rousseau? In the long history of religious beliefs, the episode of Year 2 seems like the paroxysmic moment of a crisis which, in its way, was just as profound as that of the Reformation.

The historian of mentalities sees in this episode a number of related but different questions. Accustomed to operating in this 'longer time'

(R. Mandrou) which is supposedly appropriate to the study of mentalities, in order to follow long-term trends in collective behaviour, he is ill at ease in tackling these sudden breaks. Are these really events in the history of mentalities? Putting the question this way forgets that one of the outstanding books in this area – the 'Great Fear' by Georges Lefebvre, which is still referred to today – deals with an event of precisely this type, that is, the last great panic in the old style, which spread through the whole of France during the second fortnight of July 1789, arousing the population of villages and towns with an illusory fear of brigands. This was a formative event, which went far beyond a spectacular but fleeting shiver. We know that the villagers, no longer deceived by their illusions, turned against stately homes in order to set fire to the registers and papers which were the legal foundation of seigneurial dues; and in this way they determined the movement which on 4 August saw the abolition of feudalism.

Georges Lefebvre, who was a most painstaking researcher, reconstituted the waves of dissemination of the Great Fear, based on those centres initially affected. More than twenty years ago, when I attempted to reconstitute the wave of the dechristianizing campaign, reference to this pioneering study was obligatory. The objection to this is immediate and self-evident: the Great Fear was the panic diffusion, by word of mouth, of a rumour which became both a watchword and deep-seated subversion. It therefore travelled post-haste, spreading through the greater part of France in less than three weeks. At first glance the dechristianization of Year 2 was not a comparable phenomenon. It was not a panic but a watchword and a disturbance of a purely political order, affecting a social body which was both mature and aware, and a public opinion already formed. Its progress was also different: from September 1793 to August 1794, but writ large or reaching its climax from Brumaire to Germinal in Year 2, that is to say over six months. We have known for a long time that it was neither wanted nor even wished for by the governing wing of the revolutionary movement then in power, and that the Robespierrists denounced it. It was not an 'imposed' movement; nor was it a spontaneous movement, as the Great Fear had been. It was like the Federation movement of 1790, but the adventure here was much more traumatic. It was an impetus which was spread abroad and either welcomed or rejected depending on the area.

New curiosities, new sources

To my mind, this is what makes the subject always alive and interesting. Things have changed a lot since the time of Alphonse Aulard. Not only are sources and methods of approach defined differently, but so are lines of inquiry, as we have just seen. At one level, thanks to the enrichment of the

corpus of documentary evidence, it is possible today to go beyond the inevitably impressionistic view which existed in 1900. The valuable publication of the Parliamentary Archives, which is still going on at present, and has currently reached volume 95 (that is, the end of Thermidor in Year 2), covers the entire period with which we are concerned. This collection is bringing together not only the official reports and outlines of the Parisian revolutionary Assemblies but also the entire flow of correspondence, petitions, accounts and addresses which converged on Paris from all over France. In this way, therefore, all the provinces appeared at the bar of the Convention, giving a significantly enlarged picture of all France. Some twelve years ago I analysed these addresses in the framework of the south-east quarter of the country, that is to say twenty-one departments. With the help of students whom I have supervised, the whole of the country has now been analysed, yielding a detailed and not inconsiderable balance sheet: almost 5000 original documents (4963 to be exact), of which 3728 deal with the dechristianizing campaign and the cult of Reason, and 1235 are addresses on the cult of the Supreme Being. We have therefore gathered together a rich profusion of insights and facts, on a national scale. (See figures 1–4.) These range from the briefest of notes or the simplest of accounts through to the most minutely recorded official reports, setting out speeches, songs, and descriptions of festivals.

This source does of course have its limitations, which we make no attempt to conceal, for this reflection of revolutionary France, seen from the standpoint of Paris, is selective and cannot claim to be exhaustive. These 5000 texts represent only the visible fringe of an activity whose richest remains have yet to be found in departmental and municipal archives. Nor are we unaware of the fact that some sorting out or selection had already been done, perhaps even more strictly because the Committees and the Convention adopted a reserved, even a hostile, attitude towards a movement which at first they had warmly welcomed. Still, we can legitimately assume a proportional, relationship, however crude, between the flow at source of the information which 'rose' to Paris and the reflection of it given in the records.

Such as it is, this information retains the significant merit of suggesting with precision both a movement and a space. We can see in it clearly (with a legibility which confirms *a posteriori* the viability of the procedure) the contrasting map of the epicentre of the movement, or simply the areas most affected, against which those sites which rejected it or were spared from it, are equally visible. But we can also follow from one month to the next both the propagation and the diffusion (sometimes by direct contact and sometimes based on localized centres) of a wave which swept through France in ten months. Priests abdicated, in Paris and in Cher, during Brumaire; but also (albeit ten months later) between Messidor and Fructidor, in Aude and in the Pyrénées Orientales.

This procedure, such as it is, does not in any way contradict the necessary basic study, through monographs set in the context of a department, a district, or a town. Responding to the objections which were put ten years ago (in *Religion et Révolution*) when I proposed the first experiment in this method, set in the framework of the south-east, I have to say that I believe the two approaches are complementary. Only the monograph takes into account the complexity of life as it was lived in a particular locality, and all the aspects of a given site. But it runs the risk of short-sightedness, of not seeing the wood for the trees; and only a wider view, taking into account the whole national scale, allows us to appreciate by comparison the overall significance of the results in the context of a total flow.

The signposts of the movement

The complex reality of revolutionary dechristianization can be followed through the discovery of a number of phenomena – signposts, one might say, of the vitality of the movement. For example, among the most significant were the surrender of plate from churches, and taking down their bells, both of which were gestures of municipal conformity to national legislation. More spontaneous and therefore more revealing, however, were the acts of iconoclasm, the *autos-da-fé*, the burlesques, which did more than prolong the giving up of the 'remnants of fanaticism and superstition'. We can follow the 'adventures of Reason' step by step, through the whole of France, from the closure of the churches to the opening of the temples of Reason, the celebration of its cult, and the great festivals which marked its high point. These events occurred from Vendémiaire to Germinal, and occasionally beyond that. We can compare them with the much more rapid growth of the cult of the Supreme Being, which occurred between Floréal and Thermidor, and was a response to a demand which had come from above. (See figure 4.)

In the case of some of these manifestations, we are fortunate enough to be able to move from an indirect assessment of their intensity and progress based on the collected addresses in the Parliamentary Archives, to a detailed analysis of the events which is both direct and, as far as possible, exhaustive. Using the precious list of revolutionary names in the Communes of France put together more than a century ago by the amateur historian Figuères, we can therefore attempt to draw up a toponymical map of revolutionary France. This was a France which forbade everything pertaining not only to the *ancien régime* and to feudalism (from kings to castles ...) but also to fanaticism and superstition (saints and monasteries), and which dreamed of replacing them with the exaltation of the new republican values and the heroic martyrs of Liberty. (See figures 22 and 23.)

This type of inventory process may be applied to draw up an account of the prime victims of dechristianizing activism – the parish priests, curates, and religious, who during this period abdicated both their priestly function and indeed their very vocation, often under duress. Local authorities – most often districts, but sometimes also municipalities or departments – sent to the Convention both the official reports of the proceedings and also the lists of names and summaries. It was these documents which in 1964 were the basis of the inquiry into abdicated priests instigated by Marcel Reinhard. Rich in information though they are, these exceptional documents are a long way from covering all the districts, but we can fill them out from local sources, including items published in local monographs, or valuable departmental or diocesan lists of revolutionary clergy. These complete our studies in a number of places, and are frequently based on collections of the notes of patient ecclesiastical scholars. We cannot claim to have drawn up an exhaustive balance sheet of all the abdicated priests. The very diversity of their status, from those who abdicated their title or simply resigned their function to those who returned their letters of priestly authority or to the simple 'abdicators in fact', makes it even more difficult to reach these statistics. In the south-east quarter of France I had identified some 4500 abdicators. Research conducted nationally enables us today to propose an estimate of 17,000 to 20,000 as the total, and to follow the progress of their careers and subsequent destinies, from the Directoire to the Concordat and beyond. (See figures 5 and 6.)

Another group of priests, who were affected by the dechristianizing campaign but should not be confused with the abdicators, are the married priests. We cannot without preliminary examination simply rank them with the victims, as the movement clearly began before the main dechristianizing campaign, culminated during Year 2 in a wave of marriages which were often forced, and continued into the years which followed. The archives give us access to a collective document of quite outstanding richness in the correspondence received by Cardinal Caprara, the Papal Legate. He was the man responsible for examining the case histories of more than 3200 married priests – that is, a good half of the presumed total of this group – in order to assess whether they might be reconciled with the Church. Between these confessions which are sometimes very direct (Mathiez, who discovered them, wrote that he knew of few documents of such gripping interest) and the replies of the Legate lies a mine of information which today can be turned to account even more usefully than it was in the past, thanks to the availability of more detailed information. We ourselves profited from it so that we could complete in a somewhat different way the portrait of the group of abdicators. (See figures 7, 8 and 10.)

This last group is fascinating and yet still comparatively unknown, in spite of the worthy investigation into it launched by Marcel Reinhard. Because I devoted to it an important part of my essay *Religion et Révolution*, I have been

suspected by some analysts of seeing the dechristianization of Year 2 only through the eyes of this group of lost children of the Church, and therefore even of harbouring Machiavellian thoughts of secret anticlericalism. This type of archaic thinking should perhaps be imputed more to those people who have so badly misunderstood me rather than to myself. However, we are not concerned here with awarding good and bad points. We all know today, and I believe I have made a contribution to establishing it, that the large majority of the abdicators, at least 90 per cent, abandoned the priesthood under the pressure of the moment, even if less than half of them eventually came back to it. But because it affected the established Church at its most sensitive point – its human resources – and inflicted on it sometimes irreparable injuries, the campaign of destroying the priesthood is nevertheless one of the most important aspects of this collective adventure, which we cannot allow to be passed over in silence.

We should not approach the dechristianization of Year 2 from the standpoint of the problems of another age, for that is not its interest for us today, nor indeed its challenge. The real question is to try to understand what happened, not in the heads or in the calculations of a few leading figures, whether clandestine or not – Fouché, Chaumette, Hébert, Robespierre or Danton – but what this brutal crisis of conscience represented at the level of important groups, on one side or the other, actors or victims. It was a crisis in which elitist language awakened the most deep-rooted gestures of the popular culture of subversion; in which a language of liberty (or one which claimed to be so) was imposed by violence; in which the butchers of the *auto-da-fé* – that expression which implied a sweeping of the board – joined in with the derisive laughter, with the festivities, with the dream of an ideal city and of a new man. It is on these grounds that the dechristianization of Year 2 has been described as a true 'cultural revolution' before the modern connotation of the expression. Let us, however, beware of chance transpositions and indeed of formal similarities.

But approaching the question in this spirit postulates a procedure which is free both from preconceptions and from prejudices, and which is concerned only with turning to the best account all the information which we have at our disposal. We need to use the reassurance given to us by the sheer weight of numbers, grasping bodily the mass of our 5000 addresses and the throng of our 16,000 or 20,000 abdicators, in order to take a view of the totality of the phenomenon by direct contact with documents which are sometimes tragic, sometimes spicy or droll, and which mingle continually drama, laughter and dreams. A whole discourse unfolds, which it is perfectly legitimate for us to attempt to analyse using a semantic approach, or to appreciate more directly via examples of extraordinary exploits. Nor must we forget that in an adventure which makes us constantly catch our breath, the narrative has to maintain the place to which it is entitled.

2
At the origins of dechristianization

We cannot avoid the question, however naïve it may appear. How did the dechristianizing campaign of 1793 come into being, and how did this thing arise which we call the cult of Reason, something that in any event was purely improvised? It is not our intention to take up the familiar story of its beginnings, and the way events occurred during October 1793. We know that the first significant initiatives did not emanate from Paris but from the provinces, under the auspices of the representatives 'on mission'. It was people like André Dumont, who persecuted the parish priests at Abbeville as well as at Rochefort and in the surrounding districts, or Laignelot and Lequinio, who attacked the old cult, reconciled Catholics and Protestants around the cult of their native land, and also conducted priestly marriage ceremonies. At Bourges, in Cher, Laplanche initiated the movement to which Fouché in Nièvre was to add all his weight, as much by the first dechristianized civic celebrations as by his decrees on the subject of cemeteries. The word spread quickly, and these examples were repeated, in Gers, in Meurthe, and soon in other places.

The Parisian epicentre was therefore not the first, but it asserted itself almost simultaneously. There has been some discussion on the journey made by Chaumette, deputy prosecutor of the Paris Commune in Nevers, and on his conversations with Fouché. Who had the idea first? The question is almost certainly unnecessary, when we remember that it was really not from Paris that the scandal came but from the rural townships in the Paris region – Ris and Mennecy in Seine-et-Oise. And the main manifestation of the scandal was the delegations of villagers in the form of masquerades bearing the remnants of 'fanaticism and superstition', and declaring that they would renounce the cult to follow only that of Reason. It is true that the Parisian response followed immediately afterwards, and sections of the population organized themselves spontaneously, as if at the instigation of the Commune, in order

to file past the bar of the convention. The movement was launched, the high point of which was on 17 Brumaire: Gobel, the constitutional Bishop of Paris, abdicated his function, followed by his Vicars General, and shortly afterwards by more than 400 Parisian priests. And on 20 Brumaire Paris celebrated the festival of Reason in the cathedral of Notre-Dame.

This summary is intentionally brief, but even so it enables us to concentrate on the problem. If there was incitement, or provocation, it was only that of a moment, and could not have taken into account the massive coalescence of the movement which was to follow. It owed nothing to the official initiative of a Convention which was surprised and then completely won over by it, or of Committees who were equally surprised but initially more reticent. Was it not at the instigation of the Committee of General Security that the petitioners of Mennecy, full of pride in their demonstration, were arrested when they returned? Let us discount for a moment what was to follow, and turn our minds to the question of origins, both immediate and distant. Are we really discussing a surprise?

Going back to the sources

It has become almost classical to recall that in *Les cahiers de doléances des États généraux de 1789* – that enormous collective opinion containing thousands of testimonies – there was no trace of irreligion. The institutional Church was indeed handled roughly there, as far as its hierarchy is concerned, its wealth, and what we would call today its malfunctioning, and also that part of it which we would now perceive as parasitical. But religion itself, and particularly Catholicism, was in no way attacked: the fundamental text of the new regime was the Declaration of Rights dated 26 August 1789, and we know how prudently, following a very lively discussion, the Assembly risked injuring the monopolistic hegemony of the Catholic religion by declaring that 'no one may be harassed for holding opinions, *even* religious ones.'

Even the most apparently unpardonable attacks concerned on the one hand the nationalization of clerical wealth and on the other the detail of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. Their objective was not the destruction of the religious superstructure or *a fortiori* of religious belief, nor even that of separating the Church from the State (the first thought of this arose from the dechristianizing crisis) but rather to position the cult, the established cults, in a privileged place within the new state which had been born of the Revolution.

We must remember that, as Aulard indicated, if the Assembly refused on 13 April 1790 to accede to the demand by Dom Gerle that Catholicism should be declared the national religion, it did so on the grounds that 'the devotion of the National Assembly to the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman cult was never in

question,' whatever the hidden thoughts, we should perhaps add, of certain people.

Things changed very rapidly, without challenging even so this basic principle. Aulard again reminds us that Guadet, the Brissotin, who on 26 March 1792 in front of the Jacobin tribunal mocked Robespierre's appeal to Providence, saw himself isolated, if not disowned. Before the very same tribunal on 3 June that year, the proposal of Delacroix, Danton's friend, that Catholicism should be destroyed and that the statues of the saints should be replaced by effigies of Rousseau and of Franklin, was for the moment penalized since the club declared the motion unconstitutional and refused him the honour of having it printed under the club's auspices.

Moving from petitions of principle to actual practice on the ground, it is easy to remember that at the very centre of the tensions and the acute struggles provoked by the constitutional schism and by the confrontation of the two clergies – constitutional and refractory – the cult itself did not come under attack until quite late. Indeed, it would be true to say that in Paris the official displays passed off normally right up to the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1793. In the provinces we have to go even further, because in the winter of 1793–4 the celebration of the victories of the Republic took place in more than one location with the participation of the religious authorities, and this had been a requirement until that time. Following, as indeed we have done elsewhere, the 'metamorphoses of the Festival' under the Revolution, confirms that the Church maintained its place at least in the revolutionary liturgies right up to the summer of 1792, even if a new style of festival was being sought. The big processions of 1792 were experiments: a Feast in honour of Simonneau on the one hand, and in support of the rehabilitation of the Swiss Guards of Chateauvieux on the other. The true turning-point in the history of the Festival – or at least it was the most spectacular, even if somewhat late in the day – was to be the Feast of the Regeneration, which was celebrated on 10 August 1793 for the promulgation of the new text of the constitution. The invocation to Sovereign Nature, proclaimed on the ruins of the Bastille by the President of the Convention, Hérault de Séchelles, facing the gigantic statue of Isis, whose breasts spread forth a regenerating fountain, was a clear reference to another system, and on these grounds it really qualifies as the first in the cycle of the Festivals of Reason ... before Reason revealed itself in all its ambition.

A dynamic of crisis

But even if the progress of Reason continued unnoticed, until the explosion of the autumn of 1793, it would be idle to ignore the profound rifts that almost

from the beginning created between Religion and Revolution a dynamic of crisis, which became progressively more serious. One has only to cite the major trauma of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, linked in one sense (but in one sense only) to the nationalization of the assets of the Church which had been decided in the early months of the Assembly. Without underestimating the importance of this crucial event, the fall-out of which could be felt from the beginning of 1791 when the constitutional Church began to organize itself and to show up the religious schism, it is perhaps worth recalling the first tremors of this, which demonstrated just how deep were the roots of this conflict, if not its inevitability. It was following the events of June 1790 at Nimes, and shortly afterwards at Montauban, that the confrontation of the religious clash took place – simple Catholic folk versus the Protestant (and patriotic) middle classes. At the same time the collusion between religion and the Counter-Revolution began to evolve, something which was not self-evident at first. Over the whole of a widely drawn area of the south-east one could say that the echoes of the bloody *bagarre de Nîmes*, spreading outwards, contributed to building up a nascent opinion which was either for or against the new regime.

The application of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy shifted a generalized confrontation onto a national scale. On this subject, which only seems hackneyed, the most recent work, particularly the remarkable synthesis of T. Tackett, leads us to accept the truth of this examination. It reveals the existence of a France split into two mutually antagonistic camps. The basis of these stated regional attitudes was a test not only of the views of the clergy when faced with a dramatic choice, but even more of the people, whose choices regarding not only the Church but also the Revolution were suddenly halted. As a formative event the constitutional oath revealed a latent condition and initiated simultaneously a dynamic, in the course of an evolution of which the revolutionary march precipitated different stages.

It was a rapid movement, and it must suffice to summarize the stages. Already in 1791 the conflicts were acute in the two French nations – that of conformism and that of refusal – between the Constitutional party and those who had refused to accept it, the Refractories. From the spring of 1792 the approach of war, followed by the start of the conflict which itself precipitated the fall of the monarchy, added to the drama. An initial outburst of popular anticlericalism accompanied the political crisis of the summer and the autumn of 1792, marked by the decision in a number of departments to deport refractory priests, and by isolated massacres, from Normandy through to Provence. The bloody episode of the massacres of September 1792, whose victims were mostly priests, was simply the most dramatic moment in a state of exacerbated tension.

If part of the clergy – and perhaps also of religion itself – had by now

moved into the realm of reprobation, even of anathema, and was seen as part of the old world of the aristocracy and of the Counter-Revolution by the extreme patriots, the Jacobins and the sans-culottes, or 'have-nots', then the federalist crisis of the summer of 1793 demonstrated that there was no such thing as a good, patriotic priest, and that all compromise was illusory. The revolt in the provinces, from Marseilles to Toulon, witnessed a succession of expiatory processions for revolutionary ignominies. Above all it compromised, to some degree everywhere, the constitutional clergy, who in terms of their feelings were often close to the heart of the Girondins. To sum up, there was no such thing as a good priest, no such thing as a trusted negotiator.

Finally, the war in the Vendée, which was an uprising on behalf of the king and religion (although historians know that the causes were more complex), presented a picture not of the clergy but of large sections of the population who were described as 'fanaticized'. We had already caught a alimpse of fanaticism in the distant and perhaps slightly exotic Midi: in Arles, Avignon and Montauban, in the Ardèche or the Lozère. But it assumed henceforth a formidable dimension, that of a civil war which threatened the very existence of the Republic.

At that moment, towards the end of the summer of 1793, when the offensive in the war of the Vendée was directed to the north, when the fires of the federalist rebellion were struggling to be damped down, we cannot perhaps say that all the conditions were in place for Reason, the ultimate resource, to establish its empire. But we must recognize that a moment of maximal tension existed, that a dynamic which had been at work in the hearts and minds of people since the very beginnings of the Revolution finally came to a head.

Should we trace the way this evolved, at the actual level of popular perception, that is to say, the formation of images, whether real or imagined? This would be an enormous task, which we cannot tackle in the necessary detail. We would need to follow up not only press reports, pamphlets and lampoons, but also everyday activities as they reflected the conflicts and the tensions from one day to the next. Because this task seemed to us to be particularly sensitive and (let it be said) because we had already had the opportunity of doing some work in this sector, we elected to follow the stages of this adventure through the eyes of revolutionary iconography, from the beginning of the Revolution through to 1793.

The progress of anticlericalism in pictures

To analyse the gradual movement and, it must be said, the actual changes in the image of the priest or of religion on a broader basis, and to do this through

the medium of the iconography of the first years of the Revolution, is not really taking a side-track. Imagery is both a highly sensitive reflection of changing public opinion and also a very effective weapon, in all its various forms, from engravings of actual events or genre scenes through to caricatures or allegories.

The explosion in production, aimed at a wider public which was popular as well as elitist, assures us of a rich harvest, highly diversified in its means of expressing itself, particularly as the theme of religion occupied right from the beginning a position which is by no means insignificant in the totality of what was produced.

A first sequence, in 1789, during the very first months of the Revolution, demonstrates an ambiguous attitude, which on the whole is still favourable, through all the variations which it presents on the symbolic theme covering the three orders of society. The cleric has his place, as indeed he must, but he is initially depicted as a prelate, richly clad, a privileged member of the social order. Where the peasant is shown supporting the whole burden of production – a heavily filled basket – or even of the entire country, as indicated by the globe whose weight he holds up like a modern Atlas, the bishop looks at him in the same way as does the gentleman, that is, showing condescension mingled with a touch of disdain, even if occasionally he is making a gesture which is half-way between a blessing and a symbolic support. However, in the most popular series on the theme of 'Past Times' the peasant is carrying on his back the double weight of a highly adorned nobleman and an opulent priest who is by no means slim, both of whom are sitting astride him, while his wife, in the female version of this series, has to cope with a richly dressed lady of the nobility and an abbess.

Even so, in the aftermath of 4 August, the rapid evolution of this theme replaces this first vision by the expression of the unifying dream of the 'Union of the Three Orders': the crook, the sword and the spade, joined together in one cluster. On decorated plates from Nevers, representatives of the clergy, of the nobility, and of the Third Estate pose as a group in family portraits under the sign of rediscovered Unity, or join themselves with allegorical compositions on the theme of 'each pays his share' or 'three heads beneath the same cap.'.

In this stylized ballet where each order is represented by a symbolic personality (in the Third Estate the merchant is hidden or is shown only discreetly, giving pride of place to the peasant), it is significant that the bishops stay in the background so as to highlight the parish priests. It is the good old priest who appears most frequently as the architect of this national reconciliation: 'Put it there, Father – I knowed as 'ow you was one of us.' Mingling both the dream and the expression of perceived realities, the imagery reflects the involvement of the clergy, side by side with the burgeoning Revolution. This

unanimistic iconography was to continue, in a differently recorded medium of graphic expression – in the series of pictures, designs and watercolours which during 1790 illustrated the celebration of federation both in the provinces and in Paris. It was indeed the clergy who, in the framework of a religious ceremony, celebrated on the altar of patriotism this rediscovered unity.

But then some readjustment began to take place. First, the well regulated dance of the three orders lost one of its participants. 'Farewell, Father abbé, I am leaving ...' says the nobleman in one of the engravings, as he tiptoes away, somewhat put out, perhaps, at not having met with the solidarity he had anticipated ... Several prints illustrate this community now reduced to its plebeian members the priest and the peasant forming, in this symbolic imagery, a counterpoint to the increasingly pronounced features of the aristocrat.

This is still only one stage, and from the point of view of our own particular interest it is fascinating to see how each successive shift in the image reflects the dissolution of a greatly desired harmony. It all began with anecdotes. A parish priest from Saint-Séverin, in Paris, refused a poor man the honours of a decent burial. The patriots (the description sans-culottes was not yet in use) invaded the church, hung up the funeral tapestries and set up a modest catafalque. A scene of this type is nothing, one might say, nothing but a group of the laity taking over a cult building in order to affirm the new values of dignity and equality in the face of death. Then we start to notice that there is such a thing as an 'aristocratic' parish priest: a particular priest from Civray (I was unable to identify which was the Civray in question!) used unfortunate words and indeed gestures about what he would like to see happen to his dog. Lo and behold, we see him next mounted on a donkey, in company with the animal, and it was certainly not the dog's head facing him. This was the *asinado*, to quote the expression used in the Midi for describing popular justice. One might well say that it is easy for us who know what is to come – the closure of churches and the masquerades of Year 2 – to pick out these preliminary but isolated signs. But the episodes started to come thick and fast, and the whole tone became much harder. The suppression of tithes began to be discussed, and some of those who ranked among the oracles of the patriotic party revealed that they were by no means disinterested. The abbé Sieyès became an object of caricature, and his thin, black silhouette placed him in the camp of those in whom the Revolution could no longer be recognized.

Hopes of unanimity and realities of conflict

The last series of allegories on the theme of the Three Orders (possibly 1790–1; it is hard to date exactly) no longer fits the pattern. The dream of fraternal reunion was succeeded by hunting scenes. The patriotic hunter takes aim and

fires jubilantly at a new type of winged animal: aristocrats, certainly, but also ecclesiastics from the court, fluttering clumsily about. In the same spirit beaters dislodge a bunch of monks in a tree, and they are riddled pitilessly with grapeshot.

Such jeering brutality did not prevail at first, in a game which was far from being over. The suppression of perpetual vows and lifting the closure of monasteries awakened rather a Rabelaisian spirit which was basically good-natured. It was easy to expand on this theme: from a convent and a monastery emerged in ranks the lines of nuns and monks whom a peasant was joining in marriage, one couple at a time, unable to hide his jubilation ... 'this is the way I'll guarantee horns.' The recycling of Capuchins is well under way and some of them adjust to it without difficulty: 'My contribution is not very big,' says the patriotic Capuchin, apologetically, presenting as a civic offering the beard he has just cut off. Others throw off their cowls and, dressing in the uniform of the National Guard, start doing exercises, while some, more frivolously, dance with young nuns.

The nationalization of clerical wealth brought with it a new touch, harder and more grating, by putting the accent on their riches. One engraving which enjoyed some popularity, if we are to judge by all the variations it inspired as well as by the versions produced by more traditional 'image-makers' keen to update their own theme, played on the theme of a 'national wine-press'. Prelates or fat canons were pressed between two planks and forced to yield up their riches into a patriotic vat. They emerged from the press as thin as threads, awkward and embarrassed. In this increased number of attacks on the body that the graphic arts generated at that time, it seemed that physical normality remained the privilege of the popular hero and that his opponents, whether aristocrats or priests, could only emerge mutilated or grotesque from this patriotic surgery, whether they had been subjected to the wine-press or crushed beneath the weight of the nation.

Here again it is only one version among many of anticlerical language working itself out: 'Goodbye carriages, goodbye mistresses,' sighs one ecclesiastic from the court. One elaborate engraving – which in fact was a portrait of an old woman of the people, with the title *The Old Patriot* – is an isolated but significant illustration of a propaganda tendency whose pedagogic intentions were more carefully thought out, although it was perhaps less 'popular' in spite of its stated intention. There was no recourse here to the weapons of derision or caricature. As the spokeswoman of popular wisdom, the old woman is muttering between her teeth: but the long caption demonstrates that she has all her wits about her and that she can even quote Voltaire as well as the Good Lord in asking herself why it is necessary for the representatives of religion to be so rich and powerful. All this was the priming of a civic sermon of the sort we shall soon be hearing.

Clearly, the crisis opened up by the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and by the schism created in the wake of taking the constitutional oath, plays an important part in the evolution of the story we are following, hardening positions and enriching the thematics, of which we have already seen the first elements fall into place. Were there any good priests left? Some people still believed so, and a few officially inspired engravings show the oath of the constitutional priest being taken. These are the small change, if you will, to be found on some of the plates from Nevers, showing a priest in the pulpit who is stating explicitly: 'I swear to defend the Constitution.' But they are relatively minor, compared to the overwhelming weight of hostile productions.

In order to characterize the refractory priest, the image of the lascivious priest or religious now starts to come to the fore, and the good-natured style of the first allusions has gone. There are prints in this style to cater for all tastes. For people of letters who might have read *Les Liaisons dangereuses* there is a licentious engraving showing an ecclesiastic from the court caressing the buttocks of a languishing beauty: 'It is on this altar that I take my oath.' In another style we see a peasant with a net – the sort used for trapping wood-pigeons or small birds – ensnaring the surprised couple, consisting of a monk and a nun, who are in the corner of his field. In the urban version of this, a scene consisting of several pictures shows us a Parisian church where the refractory priest is preaching from the choir against the new decrees, while in the presbytery on the other side all the preparations are under way around the ovens for a great feast which these same priests share with various loose and disorderly women.

Marking out the adversary

The gallery of grotesque silhouettes becomes richer and also more systematized. Sometimes it is the portrait of a thin refractory priest being expelled from the country, sometimes gratuitous variations that are just part of the game, associating a comedy of words and of expressions on straightforward themes inspired by the gallery of grotesque personalities, Abbot Quille, Abbot Casse, or Père Hocquet, the famous Capuchin preacher. Invariably one of them is given a thrashing by Père Duchesne, the other character in this fairground theatre. But there is more to it than marionettes and belly laughter. The priest – the bad priest – becomes increasingly identified with the aristocracy, of which he is simply one of the variants. On one of the double-headed silhouettes that the revolutionary pedagogues were so fond of we see illustrated the snares of the aristocracy, under the caption 'Beware of their caresses.' On one side is a fairly alluring marchioness, blowing a kiss, while

on the other the priest, in his cassock, looking wild and dishevelled, is brandishing a dagger.

This whole theme became very personalized, as far as both groups and individuals were concerned. Among the serious exponents of this school we should perhaps highlight the *Historical Scenes from the French Revolution*, engraved by Prieur and illustrating striking episodes day by day. These venture, albeit rarely, into provincial scenes, where we find the Counter-Revolution stirred up by the priests, especially in the Midi. Two engravings in particular illustrate this. One of them retraces the events leading up to the massacre by a fanatical crowd of the patriot Lescuyer in the Carmelite church at Avignon. The other, more importantly, recalls the troubles at Montauban. The attack on the patriotic, and Protestant, National Guards takes place in the shadow of a crucifix brandished by a monk, whose dark silhouette showing up against the light gives us the key to the picture.

These were not only groups of actors but also of adversaries, precisely designated by a public opinion which was becoming politicized and which spontaneously personalized events. In the gallery of the enemies of the people, therefore, Abbot Maury became the symbol of privilege, marked out as a priest who was both 'aristocratic' and also unfaithful to his origins. It was perhaps more unpardonable for the son of a simple cobbler from Valréas than for others to have moved into the opposite camp. His return to his native village was imagined, his old father seizing a slipper to administer correction to the villainous rascal. In another print, a surrealist ahead of his time imagined two devils in the clouds betting as to who could produce the most stinking shit. From this colonic evacuation were born d'Epremesnil, the representative of the parliamentary caste, and Maury, the symbol of the priestly caste.

The bitterness of the conflict arising from the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was condemned by Pope Pius VI, thus concentrating patriotic hostility onto the Holy Father. It showed itself in specific actions: the engraving reproduces the burning of an effigy of the Pope in the gardens of the Palais Royal – the first spectacular clerical *auto-da-fé*. But we can also see in a patriotic journal such as the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant* the effect of propaganda which was seeking a means of expressive and simple instruction. 'Sign there, Holy Father,' says a devil, complete with horns and a fork, to the successor of Saint Peter, presenting him with the text of a pastoral letter of condemnation, the well-chosen details of which remind the initiate of the nonsenses of the court of Rome. The rockets that the choirboys are holding recall the fireworks which – according to Abbot Thiers, the learned author of a treatise on superstition in 1706 – were let off in Rome behind the altars to make the people believe in the liberation of souls in purgatory.

When the Holy Father welcomed to the court of Rome the King's aunts,

who had left France, this very clear collusion with the world of *émigrés* was highlighted, as indeed it deserved to be, by a vivid cartoon which almost reaches the heights of satire attained by the English masters of this art form. The old dowagers make their obeisance before a pot-bellied sovereign pontiff, the author giving it the cruel caption: 'Presentation of the mares to the Holy Father.'

The final touch, if one can call it that, is added by a picture which is comparatively unknown as it has scarcely ever been reproduced, perhaps because of the modesty of the print specialists. I do not claim that it is in good taste, but in its Rabelaisian vulgarity it is an outstanding success of its type. On waste ground scattered with piles of dung and human excrement (although flowers are actually growing there) an urchin, or a young man, has dropped his trousers and shows us, hilariously, the use that can be made of a pastoral letter by wiping his bottom with it.

From the benevolent attitude at the outset, when the good patriotic priest replaced the prelate of the *ancien régime* in the allegories of the Three Orders, through to this final tally-ho, we can assess the increasing depth of the crisis, the reflection of unfulfilled hopes. The positions had become set, I believe, by the end of 1791. When Collot d'Herbois produced his tribute, the *Almanach de Père Gérard*, at the end of the Assembly of 1789, it is interesting to note in the illustrative sketches that this figure in the style of Jean-Jacques – presented as the peace-maker, the official of morality and of civic rights in village life – is no longer a priest but a member of the laity. The curate from Savoy has been transformed into a good peasant, well padded and getting on in years. There is no longer any need for a priest: and this is perhaps as serious as, although less spectacular than, the crudest of the anticlerical broadsides.

A weak reply

In any event, the imagery we have (of which only a part is known, so its impact is therefore proportionately greater) shows up in contrast the weakness of the response from the other camp. Counter-revolutionary iconography was not completely inactive, however, and it too did not demonstrate any great finesse. It had a measure of support in one section of the press, for example in the *Actes des Apôtres*. but quantitively as well as qualitatively it could not fight the attacks with equal strength. We find there the theme of religion stabbed to death by the conspirators – Talleyrand, Target or Camus, the Fathers of the Constitution of 1791, or Rabaut Saint Etienne. The latter, as a pastor of the Reformed Church, must be considered a separate case. In the illustration of the *coup de Rabaut* we see the coils of his devil's tail concealed beneath his preacher's robe. This was the period when Boyer of Nimes, who put together

and published a collection of caricatures from both sides, launched the theme of a Calvinist plot against the monarchy and against religion.

Not only stabbed but sometimes also crucified, the fate of holy religion in these engravings is intimately linked with that of the monarchy: the Passion of the King is also its own. One rather strange but very explicit composition shows Louis XVI crucified between his two brothers, the Count of Artois and the Count of Provence (which one was the good thief?). A predicant monk – undoubtedly a Jacobin, but we know specifically that it is Robespierre – is thrusting his lance into the King's side. The moral is a little over-subtle, and certainly less direct and less popular than what we have seen from the other camp.

In conclusion, there is one question remaining. This linkage of themes – from the unifying dream to anathematization – of which we have been following the various stages, is both premature and also quickly interrupted, which in fact poses a two-fold question. Firstly, it is remarkable to note that a whole rationale of the violent dechristianization of Year 2 was put together from 1791 to 1792, at a time when the image of the priest was associated totally with a world that was no longer acceptable, the world of retrograde values but also that of the aristocracy and of the Counter-Revolution. The initial image of the good priest, whose mantle was passed on to the constitutional parish priest, never really came across. The arguments are to the point, and, curiously enough, the actions too. By that I mean the whole battery of them – the *auto-da-fé*, the *asinado*, the symbolic attack on the body by derision and caricature – which now and heneceforward are in place. Extending this analogy, one might well say that the dechristianizing outburst of Year 2 had already been dreamed about, fantasized over and symbolically lived through, before it even happened. The aspect of brutal and unexpected surprise is brought into question in favour of an evolution, not of any real length in time, but which progressed in the two or three years during which the revolutionary concept was crystallized.

An arsenal already put together

How are we to interpret this? A traditional reading of the subject would stick to denouncing the operation of spiteful propaganda which was very confident of its objectives. Such indeed is not the impression left on us by the progressive linking of the themes. The only successful propaganda is that which is well received. Was the elaboration of these linked themes elitist or popular? Both, certainly: elitist in the people responsible for creating it, who were professional artists from the Rue Saint-Jacques or from the Palais Royal, but also skilful at integrating the themes of popular traditional culture and careful in selecting

direct language which brooked no argument. All the ambiguity of a social interpretation of revolutionary dechristianization, both now and for the future, was to be found during this preparatory phase.

Finally, we can only be surprised to find that this shoot of growing anticlericalism suddenly died, at the very moment of, or just prior to, moving from theory into practice. There is an iconography of dechristianization. With only a few exceptions (such as an abdication from the priesthood) it had no further recourse to denunciatory engravings or to caricatures. We might well say that in 1794, when the Committee of Public Safety gave David the commission for official caricatures on specific themes, the art of spontaneous and independent caricature, which provided us with all of this information, ceased to exist. Béricourt, that acute and unprejudiced observer of revolutionary scenes, from massacre to feast day, drew a remarkable series of anti-religious Parisian masquerades, as of a Feast of Reason. But they were simply watercolours whose objective was to recreate the stage and the events. They had no pedagogic objective: it was simply the cool appraisal of the observer, at least outwardly, even if one can perhaps detect in them a note of jubilation. Then, in illustrations of the Revolutions in Paris, as in some provincial engravings, we find once again the echo of the festivals of Reason, of which the Germans and the Dutch present the accusatory portrait from their own point of view. Has derision changed camps?

From the moment when the real push of dechristianization burst forth, when its acts were manifest and its imprecatory language swelled out, creative activity and the whole flow of phantasmal creations underlying it suddenly ceased, or perhaps simply had no further reason for existence. The show was in the street or in the church. For this dechristianization, which had been dreamed about before being enacted, the time had come to move from thoughts to deeds.

3
The dechristianizing wave

In order to set out the picture, and to present a further stage of the different aspects of the phenomenon, an overall vision in terms of waves is justifiable. It permits a concerted assessment of the weight of dechristianization in French space and time.

Spontaneous panic: the Great Fear

We have already vindicated this term by reference to a comparison with the Great Fear. It can similarly be justified in relation to the cult of the Supreme Being between Floréal and Messidor in Year 2. In this comparative morphology of the great shock waves which affected revolutionary France, the Great Fear, as we have indicated, represents the panic level, the most basic step to awareness, hence this combination which exploded around some half-dozen apparently uncoordinated epicentres (who believes today in some form of plot?). They were nevertheless coincident in time, and their effects radiated over three-quarters of the entire country. The panic wave moved swiftly, taking a mere fortnight to run through the whole of France, passed on by word of mouth. What more is there to be said? The Federation movement, in its first beginnings, was born shortly afterwards, from the following winter; I defined it somewhere as 'the anti-Great Fear'. It was indeed that, by virtue of its objective. Where the Great Fear demonstrated the fear of others, reflecting the atomization of this 'unformed aggregate of disunited peoples' that was France, a dynamic encounter was now at work, a dynamic of rediscovered or reconquered unity. Once again it started in the provinces: an epicentre appeared, in the Rhône valley between the Drôme and the Ardèche. The Federation of Étoile, near Valence, is well known: and this was just the starting-point for a movement which spread gradually. It was not a continuous

dispersion, for other poles appeared between the end of winter and the spring of 1790, revealing receptive areas ... Breton Federations (Pontivy ...), Federations in Lille, Dijon, Besançon and Nancy ... A map now started to emerge, showing the part played by those regions of France on the periphery, and the frontier sites which were the most naturally sensitive to this sudden movement of unitary consciousness. But in the months which followed it spread over the whole of France, and the great celebration in Paris of 14 July 1790 was echoed in all of the provinces. It was these same provinces which conquered or rather converted Paris, if we recall the first nervous reactions of the Assembly members to initiatives which they feared would act centrifugally. This particular initiative appears to us as a spontaneous movement, controlled and then taken in hand and redirected through Paris. It was an initiative prompted by nascent political opinion in a France which was still devoid of the dense network of popular societies and clubs which it had at its disposal in 1793, but where the press undoubtedly played its part in spreading the watchwords.

Organized dissemination: the Supreme Being

I hope we may be permitted, for the purposes of instructive demonstration, to step over for a moment the dechristianization of Year 2 in order to make a comparison between the movements of 1789–90 and the example of the campaign for the Supreme Being which took place in the summer of 1794, between Floréal and Thermidor. From this time on we have at our disposal the source we have already mentioned and on which we shall draw extensively, that is, volumes 91–5 of the Parliamentary Archives, an impressive mass of 1235 addresses, mostly brief and concise but in some cases developed in detail. It was one of the most powerfully concerted orchestrations of the revolutionary period, particularly if we take into account the fact that the movement was interrupted by what happened in Thermidor and that the later addresses, in the second half of the month, either were not sent or did not arrive. And let us not forget that this flood of statements generated in Paris was organized primarily around two dates: 18 Floréal, the major statement by Robespierre on 'political and moral ideas' which opened out into the proclamation of the recognition of the Supreme Being and the immortality of the soul, and 20 Prairial, when the ceremony was celebrated not only in Paris but throughout the whole of France. The flow was therefore highly concentrated, primarily in two months, since there were 92 addresses in Floréal, 498 in Prairial, 528 in Messidor and 117 in Thermidor. Allowing the time taken for it to develop, and delays in correspondence, the reaction to this initiative from the centre

was both swift and massive. Could we say that it was general? Far from it, as the map of its origins shows up significant contrasts between an area of the Paris Basin which was densely covered, from Normandy to the Loire region and extending down as far as Lyons in an axis which will become familiar to us; and two other poles, one in the south-east, from Drôme and Ardèche to Hérault in Languedoc, and to Var in the Provençal part of the Midi. Finally, a dense concentration is visible in Aquitaine, from Charente Maritime to Toulouse or to Pau. The opposite poles are equally clear: a large expanse to the west, Brittany and the Armorican borders, the east of France from the Ardennes to the Jura, the heart of the Massif Central, plus some mountain retreats in the northern Alps and in the Pyrenees.

For the moment let us refrain from any commentary on this map. For our purposes its most directly useful aspect is the intermediate visualization of the movement half way through its diffusion, i.e. at the end of Prairial. The areas which demonstrated the earliest spread and which had already sent the majority of their addresses were those which for the most part lay in northern France – the Paris Basin, but also the north-east and the north of France, as outposts of France in the west. An intermediate area of less advanced diffusion is visible in the central west and especially in the Midi, from Provence to Languedoc and the eastern Pyrenees. It is not anticipating too much the interpretations which follow when we say that we can see here the importance of this route on the one hand, and of rapid communications on the other, like military bases set up on the fronts active at that time in the Midi.

So there was a rapid diffusion, from the north to the south emanating from Paris, and a massive response, even if the map as the ultimate arbiter shows up significant regional contrasts in the responses. The spread of the cult of the Supreme Being is the reference point of one of those movements harnessing national opinion, which were specific to the central phase of the Revolution. The most spectacular of these mobilizations – organized demonstrations of national unity – was, paradoxically, the reaction on 9 Thermidor, when enormous numbers of addresses succeeded each other without interruption, continuous public acts to the Supreme Being. But over and above this episode revealed by the cult of the Supreme Being, we can also follow several waves which preceded it – for the fall of and then the death of the King, above all perhaps for the adoption of the Constitution, in mid-August 1793. But there were also more modest or more direct waves: for the recapture of Toulon; for the suppression of slavery and freedom for the blacks; for the defeat of factions; congratulating Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois on having escaped assassination. This latter wave was partially confused with the addresses to the Supreme Being, if it was true that it was He who had deflected the murderers' hands, as indeed many people thought.

And it is by reference to this new ritual now being worked out, as indeed to the early manifestations of 1789–90, that the originality of the dechristianizing campaign will become apparent to us as it starts to evolve.

Dechristianization: a series of superimposed waves

We have at our disposal a whole range of maps and of graphics demonstrating the impact of these different manifestations in both their physical extent and their mutual linkage in time. We shall not abuse this quantity of documentation, utilizing it nevertheless for its power of suggestion and the analytical possibilities it offers of a phenomenon more complex than those we have hitherto discussed. We can draw up balance sheets which reflect in certain aspects an inventory, as far as possible exhaustive, of the manifestations we have highlighted. Examples of this would be abdications from the priesthood or the marriage of priests, and also the changes made in place-names. For other aspects we cannot congratulate ourselves on having made any impression on the rich abundance of events which were evolving on the ground; only the juxtaposition of departmental monographs would warrant that. The addresses assembled by the office of the Convention supplement this to some extent, offering a reflection, or an echo – incomplete, of course – but which we can legitimately accept as representative of original realities. (See figures 1–4.) These balance sheets, although less precise, have at least the merit of enabling us to distinguish different aspects which we shall subsequently be able to analyse in a more detailed way when we come to later chapters – the manifestations of the cult of Reason, the removal of plate and other plunder from churches, civic festivals in brief, the different strata of a phenomenon much more complex than those which have been discussed thus far. The actual reasons for this complexity have already been explained. There is no watchword here, nor indeed what might truly be called an overall plan. A certain number of official measures were taken and invoked, for example, the removal of plate from churches, the removal of church bells too (with the exception of one in each municipality), and the treatment of abdicated and married priests (regularizing after the event a situation that was simply a fact).

However, most of the legislation passed by the Convention after Frimaire had as its main objective the restoration of the freedom of the cults, and they were measures of containment, almost measures of denial, rather than of encouragement. Considering their very limited effectiveness up to a particular point in time, we have to ask ourselves to what extent they were known and applied. A particular address from the Pyrenean communities complaining that the decree on the freedom of the cults had been concealed from them, gives us pause for thought here. All the more so, as a further level of statutory

dispositions, in terms of departmental resolutions, was interposed between the legislation of the Convention and the people; resolutions of local powers, but essentially of the representatives 'on mission' – Fouché was the example of this in Nièvre. Albitte in turn was to impose in the area which he controlled (Ain, Isère, Mont Blanc) the formula for his famous oath aimed at making abdications from the priesthood more uniform and subterfuges more difficult. These types of local arrangements were known and copied in other parts of the country, as those of Fouché were in the south-west (Gers, Haute-Garonne), and similarly we can list local examples utilizing Albitte's oath in all parts of France. These different policies of representatives on mission, counter to the line defined at the summit by the Committee of Public Safety and the Convention, contributed to perpetuating a hard line of dechristianizing activism which extended over a long period, sometimes right up to Thermidor and in certain cases even beyond.

This was not the only reason for the progressive gradation in time and space of the dechristianizing campaign, but by taking into account these considerations we can understand better the length of time the tide took to advance. The first signs showed themselves in Vendémiaire and the last ones in Fructidor, that is to say almost a year later.

A moment of calm

The tide of the addresses flowing into Paris, if we synthesize all the 3728 texts which apply in some way to the dechristianizing campaign, gives us a first measure of the movement. After some early manifestations in Vendémiaire there was a massive explosion in Brumaire and even more so in Frimaire, which accounted for 13 per cent and 16 per cent respectively of the addresses. A slight decrease was registered in the depths of winter during Nivôse, but the momentum increased again at the end of winter, from Pluviôse to Ventôse, which represented a second push almost equivalent to that of Frimaire, and often extended into Germinal. It was only after Floréal, when Robespierre presented his famous report to the Convention, that there was a noticeable reduction in their level. Nevertheless, the months of Prairial and Messidor still account for 4 per cent of the total in each case, and Thermidor a little over 1 per cent. (Of course we are not including in these totals the texts relative to the cult of the Supreme Being.) There were at least six months, therefore, of high tension, from Brumaire to Germinal, with two peaks in Frimaire and Ventôse: but this is still just the indication of a tendency and, as it were, a moment of calm.

We touch concrete reality when we try to distinguish, inside this overall flow, the underlying elements which correspond with one type of

dechristianizing manifestation (remembering of course that one address may carry a number of different messages). Thus we become aware that dechristianization was both an encounter with and a superimposition of actions which might have been differently experienced in terms of municipal conformism (silver plate, removal of bells) and much more traumatic breaks (abdications from the priesthood, closure of churches, *autos-da-fé*). Different chronologies correspond with these various aspects, contrasting brutal outbursts with longer-term tendencies.

Over the whole of France (and without going into the detail of regional variations) the removal of plate from churches and the taking down of church bells are among the measures attested with the greatest persistence from one end of the period to the other, and certainly in the case of plate with the most frequency. More than 2000 addresses (2027 out of 3728) make at least a reference to this, and sometimes give an exact account of the weights in marks, ounces, and grains of gold, silver or gold lace. (See figure 9.) There is less discussion of church bells, although one might well say that the reason for this is because it is self-explanatory (the optimism in the texts might have concealed some obstinate resistance). In both of these cases there was no sudden and brutal flare-up: it seems that there were two important periods in the removal of plate, in Frimaire and in Ventôse, but the movement continued from Brumaire to Floréal. In the same way, the number of references to bells being taken down shows a rising curve from Brumaire to Pluviôse, which is sustained into Germinal, before declining subsequently through to Thermidor. From this pattern we can detect the fact that these measures were officially inspired, and we can see this from the greater or lesser diligence of the different authorities, even if the delivery of the spoils takes on a completely different character when it opens out into masquerades or *autos-da-fé*.

But paroxysmic manifestations like these had a much more concentrated timetable. Paintings, statues and confessionals were heaped together outside the church and joyfully set alight, after the organization beforehand of the burlesque procession of the masquerade where the people dressed up in priests' robes, and almost half of the iconoclastic demonstrations indicated to the Convention took place in Brumaire and in Frimaire, even if a secondary wave was still happening in Ventôse. It was exactly the same with the *autos-da-fé*, the big fires of the winter, for over 60 per cent occurred between Brumaire and Nivôse. In both cases the numbers fell back brutally after Germinal. Henceforth these were spectacles which no one wanted to see, other than in hidden corners of the country, even if other forms of dechristianization continued.

Reason continued its steady progress. (See figure 11. Included under this heading are not only the Festivals of Reason but also announcements of the

opening of Temples of Reason, and more generally announcements that 'Reason triumphed over fanaticism and superstition.') If we follow the slightly deceptive synthesis of the total curve we begin to imagine a victorious and progressive spread, from a fairly modest beginning in Brumaire to a clear affirmation of it in Frimaire, and it then continued its progress through to Germinal. It is true that a drop was noticeable in Floréal, when the Supreme Being took over the lead, but no less than 10 per cent of the addresses dated from this month, and Reason was still being evoked in Prairial and in Messidor. This success was partially deceptive, as the geographical study will prove. Its first fires were extinguished as the concentric waves of its propagation spread further out. But nevertheless, far from being a sudden flare-up with no tomorrow, like the folly of 20 Brumaire under the arches of Notre-Dame in Paris, this winter invention enjoyed a degree of success which was comparatively prolonged.

Among other types of dechristianizing manifestations, changing the names of places seemed to occur at an early stage. This was defeudalization, but more often still it was a form of laïcization and a choice of civic references. More than 60 per cent of the announcements occurred between Vendémiaire and Nivôse. But here too a more modest wave continued into Thermidor, even though the impetus of Ventôse was non-existent.

The test of abdications from the priesthood was more ambiguous. (See figures 5 and 6.) If we imagine ourselves to be an average member of the Convention, kept informed by the statements presented to the Assembly (771 in all, either individual or collective), we might begin to feel that everything is clear and in order after the winter. Almost two-thirds of the addresses (27 per cent in Brumaire, 31 per cent in Frimaire) had been given by then, and by the start of spring they were scarcely noticeable (10 per cent in Ventôse). However, in retrospect we are better informed than the average member of the Convention, as our procedure of direct enquiry based on recapitulating descriptions sent to Paris, as well as on research undertaken locally, reveals a much more marked level of continuity, and the opening of new fronts in the provinces, from the west to the Midi, where abdications took place right through until spring. The priests of Nice did not hand in their letters of priestly authority until Fructidor, just before the fall of Robespierre!

A consideration such as this might lead us to rectify, without being too deeply suspicious, what is given in the Parliamentary Archives. The document is not entirely innocent. Starting at a particular date – in Frimaire, but especially in Ventôse and Germinal – there began to operate a certain filtering of announcements that it was felt appropriate not to emphasize, and on the subject of which a silence was progressively established. A consideration such as this requires us not only to be on our guard but more importantly to move

from an overall view to a more local one, which will reveal significantly contrasting avenues of progress.

Some kinetic games with maps recording the movement would clarify the spread throughout France of a wave which was far from being monolithic. Without going back over the detail of the different manifestations we have previously described, we can apply the same procedure to dechristianizing addresses as the one already applied to those which affected more specifically the cult of Reason. To do this, we first drew graphs by months, showing the totality of all the indications we had gathered. Then, in order to avoid breaking down the samples too finely, we re-grouped them according to the sequences which seemed to impose themselves naturally: Vendémiaire-Nivôse-Pluviôse, the winter blaze; Nivôse-Pluviôse, a comparative slowdown; Ventôse-Germinal, the second push in the spring; finally from Floréal to Thermidor, extensions of and the decline of the movement.

If we look at the most representative indexes – the overall surge of the addresses, or those which referred to the cult of Reason – and then the movement of abdications, we can see a genuine homogeneity behind the limited but nevertheless interesting discrepancies. It is now possible to recreate Reason's journey through France, a trip which is not without interest.

From time to space: France under attack

The first explosion was polynuclear. (See figures 1–3.) We need not concern ourselves about minimizing the importance of the influence of Paris, as we are no longer in July 1789. Paris, and in particular the Parisian press, acted as a sounding-board, as a diffusion centre for the news. But in Brumaire, when the first manifestations started to be evident, Paris and also Seine-et-Oise and part of Seine-et-Marne was just one of the areas where the phenomenon made its appearance. There were unconnected but clearly defined centres of it: Cher, Nièvre and Allier, then the Côte d'Or and Saône-et-Loire in the centre of France. It was there that Laplanche was operating at Bourges, or Fouché at Nevers and at Moulins, in the same way that Saône-et-Loire or the Côte d'Or were the background for the movements and operations of the revolutionary Parisian army. In the north and the north-east the first manifestations were more immediate: we can detect in Meurthe the evidence of the representative Faure, at Nancy, and from Ain to the department of Nord the effects of the work of Dumont, who apparently brought in his colleague and neighbour Lebon. In the central west Laignelot made his presence felt, as did Lequinio in Charente-Maritime; and the resounding declarations of the latter in the temple of Reason at Rochefort would long be remembered, as would his

expedition to Marennes. In the same way we can link the presence of Couthon in Cantal, of Dartigoeyte and of Cavaignac in Gers and in Lot-et-Garonne, with the existence of early sources of activity. As these first manifestations were generally spectacular and provoked surprise, they were of course not misinterpreted: Aulard quotes them and analyses them. The movement was finding its way, and did not yet give any indication of the features which were to become commonplace later on. Lequinio in Charente, or Laplanche and Fouché in the centre of France, counted more on the spectacular quality of priestly marriage in order to impress the people rather than on systematic abdications. Similarly, in the processions and festivities, Reason alone was not centre stage: the causes of Liberty and Country were also invoked. Undoubtedly what was happening in Paris and the surrounding districts contributed to working out a reference model. The abdication of Bishop Gobel on 17 Brumaire, followed by that of his vicars-general, unleashed the first massive wave of abdications. The cycle of masquerades – the repository of the plunder of plate which accompanied the renunciation of the religious cult and the opening of the temple of Reason – spread out into the country districts around Paris, encouraged by certain representatives (Couturier in Seine-et-Oise), and relayed on a huge scale in the capital by delegations of the Parisian Sections of the Council of State.

From Brumaire to Frimaire, and then from Nivôse to Pluviôse, with a distinct slowdown during these winter months: if we go back to the maps referred to earlier we see a wave beginning to form which spread simply by contact around the first epicentres. In northern France, it was those departments which lay to the north of Paris – from Oise to Nord and the Ardennes, but also from the north-east reaching as far as Alsace, leaving unaffected however the southern part of Haute-Saône and of Doubs. In the west, Normandy, surprisingly, was still cautious, although aware of these new Parisian happenings, and it was through the south, from Eure-et-Loir to Loiret and Loir-et-Cher, that the area of Parisian dechristianization tended to join up with the centre of France. But the west proper, from the Armorican borders to Brittany, remained untouched. A further axis of the diffusion became evident, towards the south-east, stretching through Yonne to join up the Côte d'Or and Saône-et-Loire.

Three other areas were henceforth affected: from Morbihan to the Landes, an Atlantic border which, through Charente-Inférieure and Vienne, came into contact with the flow of dechristianization from central France; and then, centred on the Cantalian homeland, the heart of the Massif Central, from Corrèze to Puy de Dôme, to the Loire and Haute Loire up into the Ardèche. Finally, in Aquitaine, around Gers and Lot-et-Garonne, the Landes, the Gironde but also the eastern Haute-Garonne, Tarn and Aveyron were affected.

Spring explosion: the crisis of Ventôse

In Pluviôse, after the comparative respite during Nivôse, the map of the abdications reveals a newly conquered front, from Ain to Isère and to Mont Blanc. Here we can pick up the tracks of a journey by the representative Albitte, the great expert in pulling down bell-towers and defrocking priests.

If we now draw up a balance sheet, or, as it were, pause on the eve of this crisis of Ventôse, which was to be the last mobilization for Hébertism, we can assess that almost two-thirds of the entire country had experienced the passage of the dechristianizing storm, which does not necessarily mean that it had passed over. This was certainly the case in Paris where, under the control of the authorities, there was no longer any mention of Reason, or virtually none; and a similar situation, although in this case resulting mainly from the lack of combatants, prevailed for example in the north-east. But in certain sites, as in Nièvre and its adjacent departments, there had been no real respite: the greatest number of addresses were still to be made in the coming months.

However, it was in the regions which until that time had been relatively untouched, or in others where the impact had as yet been only slight, that the crisis of Ventôse and of Germinal was experienced at its most acute. After the Alps and the Rhône valley, already well worked during Ventôse, the Alpine and Mediterranean Midi entered the scene. From Drôme to Vaucluse, to Gard and to the coast of Provence, the Mediterranean area provides us, often brutally, with the greatest number of abdications from the priesthood and also manifestations of the cult of Reason. The other part of the Midi was not inactive. Radiating, as it were, from around Toulouse, dechristianization showed itself in Lot, and in Lot-et-Garonne, affecting even the Pyrenean departments from the Basses-Pyrénées to Ariège. In both these parts of the Midi, awakened so late in the day, the movement came to an end from Floréal to Messidor (even to Fructidor!) in the maritime Alps as in Aude and the western Pyrenees.

This delay may be explained, perhaps too obviously, by the remoteness of the areas. The belated awakening can also be explained by the active presence of a new batch of representatives in these regions: Maignet in Vaucluse and Bouches-du-Rhône, Borie in Gard, the two Monestiers in the Pyrenean region. These men were certainly Robespierrists, but they were also unrepentant dechristianizers, so at the very moment when Albitte was returning to Paris to present to the Jacobins his recantation and also his acknowledgement of the Supreme Being, there was a final quartet of convinced dechristianizers still working away obstinately in the Midi.

But they were not the only ones. It is astonishing that in one whole area of northern France the high point of the movement occurred in Ventôse and

Germinal, sometimes even in Floréal, whether it was a second wave or new regions being affected.

The first example was to the south of Paris – Loiret, Loir-et-Cher, Yonne, even Nièvre, all places which had been already visited once, often prematurely. Similarly Normandy, from the region of Caux to the Channel, and also the Armorican borders, experienced at that time a period of intense activity – so much so that it spread by contact over the whole of the west and the central west, from Brittany to Vienne, and areas which thus far had been untouched fell back into a belated dechristianization. The name of Reason was invoked in Finistère and in Calvados right into Floréal, though over most of the country no one had risked doing this for a very long time.

There is something quite fascinating about the way in which the dechristianizing squall travelled over the whole of France. It was both disconcerting and yet at the same time seemed to respond to an inner logic which could only be partially accounted for by the presence of a representative 'on mission' in a particular place at a particular time. Before taking the inquiry further we need in any event not simply to draw up a balance sheet of events but to assess the depth of penetration of this dechristianizing wave, by considering the maps which take into account the totality of the phenomenon, at least in its really major aspects.

France conquered or France resisting?

If we take a deliberately simple starting-point – arranging the eighty-six departments of France into four roughly equal groups according to the number of addresses which they sent in to the Convention – a clearly legible map is immediately apparent. The part of France most strongly shaken was, first, a whole area around Paris, not the Paris Basin of the geographers but one which is centred further to the west to include Normandy, the Channel woodlands or Sarthe, reaching up into the north and following the frontier as far as the Ardennes, but not really taking in any of the departments of the east, from Champagne to Alsace (Aube even contrasts by virtue of its silence with Seine-et-Marne). To the south, the area of strong dechristianization encompassed a good part of central France, a patch which involved Cher, Nièvre, Yonne and the Cote d'Or, Allier, Puy de Dôme, Saône-et-Loire, influenced by the course of the Rhône, while to the south-west of Paris the push was perhaps somewhat less vigorous, from Loir-et-Cher to Indre-et-Loire, reaching Vienne and Deux-Sèvres. One feels instinctively that it would be too simple to interpret this as a spread by diffusion, giving pride of place to the flow generated from Paris. The value of these evolutionary maps is that they orientate us towards the hypothesis of a polynuclear explosion, where the

heartland of Paris and that of central France met as the movement progressed. But certainly an axis of propagation of the movement begins to show when we reach the staging post of the region around Lyons (Rhône-et-Loire, Ain and Isère) stretching down to the Midi via Ardèche and Drôme, missing out the mountainous regions of the Massif, and encompassing Vaucluse, Bouches-du-Rhône, Var on the left bank, and Gard and Hérault on the right bank of the Rhône. In overall terms the south-west was partially withdrawn from the main stream, even if a distinct pole was evident around Toulouse and more broadly in the middle valley, from Haute-Garonne to Lot-et-Garonne, and in some ways Lot and Aveyron.

Contrasting with this, the regions unaffected – silent or stubborn depending on one's interpretation – are equally clear and have a real homogeneity. A wide sweep of the north-east, from the Meuse to the Jura, the west as it was clearly marked out on the map of the 'adventures of Reason', including the Armorican section of the Massif, reaching the corridor of Vendée and Poitou to part of the south-west and of the central plateau which, between Corrèze and Lozère, breaks the continuity of this centrifugal diffusion. And the chain of the Pyrenees was not only late in being affected, but was scarcely affected at all. Was this due to conservatism or was it just a mountain retreat? If the argument is valid, it would apply equally to the internal Alpine area, between Mont Blanc and the Basses-Alpes, even to the maritime Alps. Poor accessibility and a peripheral location strengthen the conclusion here as in the case of the Pyrénées Orientales.

This map can be utilized as a reference matrix and, in brief, as a guide for the investigation we are about to undertake. Nevertheless, and without anticipating some of the questions we shall need to look at in depth, we can already start to formulate a number of queries.

For some of the manifestations we have at our disposal other maps which would certainly appear to be more viable, as they are based on direct factual inventories. This is so in the case of abdicating priests or revolutionary toponymy. Do these analyses in themselves confirm the tendency we have indicated, or do they in fact make the results more relative?

A further test: abdications from the priesthood

The map we are proposing for the purpose of demonstrating the pattern of the abdicating priests of Year 2 is to some extent an approximation. (See figure 5.) It is based on descriptions sent in to the National Convention by districts or by departments, complemented by fleeting mentions from spontaneous addresses (Parliamentary Archives) and information from both old and recent monographs for a whole series of departments, and finally by recourse to local

archives (notably in the south-east of France). On the basis of a precise calculation of almost 14,000 abdications (13,436) arrived at by these different means, we feel able to put forward the total of 18,000 to 22,000 as a legitimate extrapolation. The proposed map, therefore, picks up certain things by default: but that does not make it any the less evocative. It was established on simple criteria (four classes: less than 50 known abdicators, 50 to 100, 100 to 200, more than 200), and the scenario it describes is essentially no different from the preceding references. Here, too, we find the Paris Basin and – very clearly delineated – that of central France, from the northern side of the Massif Central to the area around Lyons where it connects with the axis of the Rhône and the Alps, which extend it to the Midi. In the same way the focal point of central Garonne is surrounded by stubborn areas. On the other side were the expected centres of opposition: the west, the north-east (and even the north), a large area of the south-west covering a major part of the south from the Massif Central.

Against a background of overall convergence, this geographical split is also interesting through the discrepancies it reveals with the map of the dechristianising addresses. Without beating about the bush I would say that it offers a compromise between the latter – i.e. the reflection of the dechristianizing influx – and the successes or reverses of the Constitutional Oath of 1791, which is not far removed from it. To sum up, certain regions which had not been violently dechristianized contained a large number of abdicators by virtue of the fact that they had a large number of constitutional priests, making them fair game. This was the case, for example, in the Alpine departments. Others, strongly dechristianized, had very few abdicators (Nord). The comparison indicated here shows the precautions which have to be taken in assessing the play of initial conditions with the intensity of the dechristianizing campaign.

Without multiplying the number of examples, we can make a similar observation with regard to the map of significant modifications in revolutionary toponymy taken from the lists of the meticulous Figùeres, according to returns which we shall need to look at again: the visual impact of it will have to suffice for the moment. (See figure 23.) Correlations do exist, and important ones (identical areas of resistance in the west and the north-east, as in part of the south-west and the Massif Central). The importance of the area of Parisian influence is surpassed by the position of the epicentre in the centre of France, and by not only the Mediterranean but also the Aquitanian part of the Midi, which showed that it was more active in this sphere than had previously been thought.

The great advantage of this method of global positioning (and for the moment we could not ask for more) is to be able to present the overall framework, both space and movement, in general terms. A more exact approach

than that of using just a departmental network would be preferable. It is not impossible, and for certain aspects we shall be able to illustrate this in the framework of the south-east of France when the wave of propagation, from Saône-et-Loire to Ain and Isère, thence to Ardèche, Drôme, Mont Blanc and Isère, ended in the Provençal part of the Midi, during the course of the months between Brumaire and Floréal.

These are refinements of the procedure, which need to be backed up with confirmatory tests and other correlations, comparing the absolute numbers by department – with which we are satisfied – to the totals of population, of clergy, even of communes. We have indeed done this, and we shall be commenting on it in the course of future chapters.

Let us dwell for a moment, however, on the wealth of questions with which we are now confronted. There was indeed a wave of propagation, but what were its determining factors? The representatives on mission were one, as has become apparent, but perhaps somewhat too quickly? The map suggests both repetitive waves and also very clear determinants. Communications, in particular the road network, played their part, as we suspect when we look at the heavily defined structure of the axis Paris-Lyons-Marseilles, in which the heartland around Lyons acted as a staging post, where the operations of the Revolutionary Army were concentrated.

But it is clear, too, that there is nothing inert about this receptive centre. The movement spread to the north-east early, during the winter, but the results there were mediocre, just as they were in the Armorican west which was affected only at the end. A movement which had been spreading for almost a year can scarcely be called spontaneous, but as we come to the end of this first exploratory perusal it seems even so to sum up the true state of a France in which the level of receptiveness was so very unequal.

4
A clean sweep

Let's erase even the trace
Of superstitious slavery;
Reason takes its place,
Reason's ours, and heavenly.

So runs the rhythmical refrain to the verses sung by a member of the political club in La Châtre, the day of the last decade in Brumaire, on the occasion of the Festival of Reason. When the Convention received the symbolic homage of Reason, a month later, its influence was already spreading, from the centre of France, or from the Parisian area, to the whole country. At Montagne sur Aisne, Citizen Farcy sang in turn:

On the wreck of despotism
Rises up our liberty;
On the ruin of Jesuitism
Shines out our society ...

while at Béziers the representative Milhau proclaimed: 'All revealed religion is a purely human convention, an imposture in principle, a tissue of superstition in its effects. The Supreme Being has no other temple than the Universe. Honest hearts are His altars. Virtuous actions are the only practice and the only sacrifices which please Him.'

Following the example given by the communes of Seine-et-Oise, at the beginning of the movement, the petitioners filed past the bar of the Convention, surrendering the 'remnants of fanaticism', like for example, the sans-culottes from Bry sur Marne, a department of Paris in the district of Eqalité, whose official spokesman announced:

> We have given back to the shops of the nation all the items we have seized from the den of superstition, and all the instruments which were used to turn us into fanatics, from the holy-water stoup to the aspergillum; plus the small amount of plate in use such as the chalice, the monstrances and various candlesticks made of copper, two bells, two confessional grilles, a number of ornaments, all the linen, and three leaden burial caskets, which we tore up from the earth, and which held the remains of three vampires.

The tone was set: in its triumphant progress Reason appeared first of all as the destroyer, making a clean sweep of fanaticism and superstition, or what was left of it. Its aim was to obliterate the memory of the past. This could be seen in the restructuring of the toponymy, and also in the campaign to close churches and other places of worship, as well as in their partial destruction (pulling down bell-towers). In the midst of all this activity, removing plate from churches and taking down bells rapidly assumed exceptional importance, stimulated by the contribution they could make to the Republican war effort. Iconoclasm proper, which frequently manifested itself as the *auto-da-fé*, appeared rather more gratuitous, although the transition to it crossed a finely drawn line. But with the *auto-da-fé*, as with the carnival masquerade which often accompanied it, another type of activity started to become apparent, and it announced a different system, which would replace the world that had been destroyed.

Laïcising space: the revolutionary toponymy

Changing the names of places on a basis similar to the reform of the calendar – i.e. the restructuring of time – this venture appears retrospectively to be not only a great leveller but also one of the most audacious events of the revolutionary episode with which we are dealing. The elimination from the toponymy of everything which might recall the *ancien régime* (kings, castles ...) or previous superstitions (the names of the saints) was undoubtedly an official measure, and as such it cannot properly be considered as a part of basic dechristianization. But the application of a general political line was significantly modified in practice so this experiment, far from being simply a manifestation of passive conformism, is nevertheless valuable by virtue of what it reveals.

As far as it can be followed from departmental correspondence, the modification of place-names was perhaps not the most massively attested form of active dechristianization: 228 cases, that is to say 6 per cent of the addresses. Their pattern, however, enables us to establish a chronology, because all of these addresses were made at a very early stage. Almost 60 per

cent were concentrated in the three months of Brumaire, Frimaire and Nivôse, and mainly in the first two. (See figure 4.)

Although the sample, in spite of its modest size, gives us an indication of the chronology of the movement, we cannot expect a significant cartography from it. Some half-dozen departments around Paris accounted for more than a third of the notifications. On this evidence proximity played a major part in the changes.

The relative speed of the occurrences, by comparison with other manifestations, is easily explained: it is much simpler to change a name than to collect plate from churches or take down church bells. However, we must take the analysis further, beyond the facts which we have had at our disposal thus far. As it happens, we can do this. Because it was an important administrative matter, the authorities (departments, districts) generally kept a strict record of these changes in place-names, and the technique of a direct inventory by department, which was applied in the case of the abdicating priests, can be utilized here too. A detailed general analysis may be drawn up, based on the dictionary of the revolutionary names of the communes of France, published by the learned De Figuères around the turn of this century. This was a source which had not previously been tapped, other than at the level of localized studies, and which we were tempted to utilize in its totality. We are of course aware that De Figuères's catalogue is incomplete, for classic studies, such as that of M. Dommanget on dechristianization in Oise, have brought to light a number of revolutionary toponymies which had been omitted from the dictionary. Our own researches *in situ* in the departments of the Midi have led us to the same conclusion. However, even allowing for the fact that the level of loss is comparable from one department to another, Figuères still provides us with a basic view which fortunately we can apply to the whole of France. (See figure 23.)

What can we deduce from this ageing catalogue, pressed into the service of a history which is based on analysis and fact? The author lists 3092 modifications of names, which when applied to the 37,600 communes of France represents a little over 8 per cent. The first temptation – that of analysing by department the communes whose names were changed – quickly stops us short. It is not that the resultant map of France lacks coherence, but we soon notice that its legibility results more from its structure prior to the modifications in its toponymy than from the impact of revolutionary pressure. In short, we get the impression that it is nearer to a map of abbeys or of medieval deforestation, which in some areas resulted in a proliferation of saints' names not evident elsewhere, than to a map of dechristianization. The same result occurs, for the same reasons, if we draw up a map based not on absolute numbers but on the percentage of modified names of communes estimated relative to the national average of 8 per cent, although the resulting

structure yields a pattern which is different. There were some areas of resistance which experienced virtually no change (the north-east, Brittany, Aquitaine), while others on the contrary were completely overwhelmed (the Paris Basin, the south-east). In order to refine this approach, we decided to confine ourselves to changes which could be classed as significant, meaning that there was a whole series of acts of municipal conformism which were laïcizations pure and simple, and this was the largest group: Saint Antonin became Antonin, Chateaudun became simply Dun sur Loir. At this level it is undoubtedly extremely difficult to eliminate the weight of pre-existing toponymy. But other modifications reveal more clearly a genuinely revolutionary choice; and by undertaking this exhaustive analysis we see that the results fall naturally under a number of main headings. First we come across what might be termed civic names: Liberty, 181 cases; Equality, 40 cases; Fraternity, the poor relation with 17 cases; then the description civic or republican, 21 cases; or the word mountain – which was not always without a hint of ambiguity* – 263 cases. Reason was found to be added on to only ten or so country spots which had traditional place-names, even if they were associated with particular villages which had been 'defanaticized' or 'cleared of prejudices'. In the same category there was an assorted section where epithets predominate – people, nation, even union, unity, sans-culotte, or *bonnet rouge*. The 'Maximum' won over only one municipality, or so it would appear. A second group of important changes concerned those communes that had placed themselves under a new tutelary authority, by which we mean one of the martyrs of Liberty.

In the honours list authorized by Figuères's dictionary, Marat wins the day by far with fifty-three mentions, ahead of Lepeletier (twenty-five) and Chalier (eleven). The other heroes of the Revolution (Bara, Viala, William Tell) or of philosophy come next (Franklin and Voltaire with six each, Rousseau with seven mentions). Moving on to another theme within this group, we find a section of it which takes its examples and models from antiquity: Brutus is the undisputed winner of the day here with twelve mentions against Scaevola who appears only three times. The geography of antiquity also made a contribution. We find several mentions of Sparta, Thermopylae and Marathon, as against one lone Tarpeian Rock.† Finally, mythology also provided a number of heroic protectors, notably Hercules. Other small market towns, especially in the Midi, found in their ancient past a title which had a better ring than the one they abandoned (Athenoples, Heracleum, Glanum).

* *Montagne* meaning either the higher-level seats in the National Assembly where the left-wing members of the Convention sat, led by Robespierre and Danton; or its literal meaning.

† A rock-face on the Capitoline Hill in Rome over which persons convicted of treason to the state were thrown headlong.

An astonishingly modern map

The overall percentage of these significant modifications in relation to the total number of communes ranges in virtually all cases between none and 7.5 per cent with exception of the Rhône where it rises to 14 per cent. The national average, taking in all the departments, is almost 2 per cent. It is in relation to this average that we established the different levels on the synthesized map we have drawn up. On the basis of one line of research, which in any event is fairly risky, the result is unexpectedly clear. It is very obvious that several parts of France present a marked contrast to each other. The areas of resistance can be grouped into a number of blocks – the north-east quarter, the Armorican area, from the Seine estuary to Poitou, reaching down into western Aquitaine. Then, more restricted and less certain, are regions like the north, or one section of the heart of the Massif Central, and the lower part of Languedoc as far as Roussillon. By contrast, the France of confirmed revolutionary options is the area around Paris and the Paris Basin, going down as far as the middle reaches of the Loire. The most spectacular was undoubtedly the horseshoe of the most prominent departments, which we can trace on the northern side as if we were following the hands of a watch – from Corrèze to Haute Vienne, to Creuse, to Indre, to Cher, to Nièvre and Allier, thence to Saône-et-Loire and to the Rhône. This crescent of Jacobinism encircling the Massif Central reaches down to the south towards the two sides of the Midi, that of Aquitaine and that of Provence and the Alpine region. In Aquitaine, it was in the plains and hills of the centre, around the hub of Toulouse and Gers, that the most strongly motivated zone became organized. The south-east still showed significant contrasts, Dauphiné demonstrating generally its will to change, as did the corridor of the Rhône and lower Provence, from Gard to Var. There is little doubt that if we took this analysis further the map would give us some surprises, with certain departments, which might have been considered as real sanctuaries, demonstrating that they were significantly affected – as, for example, the Vendée, or Aveyron, the Loire and Haute Loire. But in these places pressure was exerted which might almost be described as military. There is a very real ambiguity in the conclusions which can be drawn from our map. Suffice it, perhaps, to dwell on the surprise that an unlikely experiment resulted in a map which, in 1794, prefigured the large splits in French electoral sociology of the twentieth century, which are still valid today.

We can extend this analysis further beyond an all-embracing vision – which in itself simplifies it – and put it into a departmental framework. This has been attempted, at least for half the country, in the present case, the eastern

half (the north-east and south-east quarters). Items taken from departmental documents were used to complete the information provided in Figuères's catalogue. In this way three possible cases began to appear, as punctually as a bed of seeds in the spring: first, a locality whose name had been theoretically modified (from a saint's name, or some other vestige of 'feudalism' or 'superstition') but where there was no local link with the new name; second, a toponymy which had been simply laïcized; or third, as opposed to this, a significant change of name, demonstrating a real will towards revolutionary action.

We see in all of this a meaningful pattern beginning to emerge, indicating the way in which the territory of France was in some cases worked over in depth, and in others left in peace. The differences in strategy were evident from one department to another, sometimes even from one district to another. This resulted in a typology: areas where no locality, or almost none, escaped modification and where revolutionary toponymies abound – this was the case in the Rhône, the Haute Loire, and to a lesser degree Vaucluse – and areas of more general conformism but where no great inventiveness was apparent (Gard, Marne, the Hautes- and Basses-Alpes, part of Ardèche, Mont Blanc, or the Côte d'Or). But we can also detect areas of confrontation, where revolutionary names ring out provocatively in the midst of a pattern of more obstinate areas. This was the case in the Ardennes, in Meurthe, the south of Aisne or the Pas de Calais in the north and the north-east, where this pattern seemed to dominate; but parts of the Midi were also comparable (Loire, Isère ...). Finally we have the areas of resistance or those which were possibly just uninvolved: Lozère (with the significant exception of the Cevenol district of Florac), and the 'refuges' around Nice and part of the Alpine Massif to the south, but also around Meurthe from the Haute-Marne and Haute-Saône or Bas Rhin, an important part of the north-east of France.

It is a temptation – although one we have to resist – to analyse even more minutely the small units which have a very distinctive behaviour pattern and which look very inviting, for example, those around Arles, where the names of the martyrs of Liberty, Marat and Chalier, were given to a number of hamlets. Similarly, but more spectacularly, in Var and above all in Maurs, or the Gulf of Saint Tropez, antiquity reigned supreme. Saint Maximin became Marathon, which could be spelt with or without the h, since St Raphaël changed to Baraston which itself could be spelt with one r or two depending on whether it was linked to the cult of a dead or of a living personality. St Tropez, newly called Héraclée, offered its hand to Sainte Maxime, now become Cassius, above the Gulf of Simbracit, and Grimaud, which did not wish to be left out of these college-style exercises, added the spontaneous designation of Athénople.

In spite of the trace of exoticism which it showed, which is not to be found

elsewhere, does the Mediterranean Midi represent a fair sample which enables us to appreciate a nuance that is important in the study of the new revolutionary toponymy – i.e. the properly revolutionary character of the names selected? The order of magnitude in the Midi (20 per cent of the significant changes out of all the modifications) corresponds roughly with the listings in Figuères's dictionary for the twenty departments of this region. But behind this average profile Figuères allows us to evaluate some striking contrasts. The most explosive use of language is to be found in Nièvre (55 per cent of the revolutionary transformations), in Rhône and Loire (46 and 40 per cent), to a lesser degree in Isère and Ain (27 and 25 per cent), before surfacing again in some departments of the Midi (Bouches-du-Rhône, Var, Vaucluse). Conversely the inventiveness is more restricted in the Alps (Hautes-Alpes 19 per cent, Basses-Alpes 6 per cent, Savoie 6 per cent) or in the central plateau (Ardèche 9 per cent). Further slight variations in the information we have can be seen by following up particular characteristic themes, for example, the toponymy of the martyrs of liberty, plotted out in the form of a map, shows up a remarkable concentration in the department of Rhône and its surroundings, and we shall come back to this theme in due course. (See figure 22.)

Changing the names of places may be a joke in poor taste, indeed, of little consequence, and above all ephemeral, if we are to believe historical tradition. And yet, during the course of this investigation it has begun to seem that there is more to this experiment than we originally anticipated.

Do we need to spell out that the business of eradicating the cult was not restricted simply to this verbal exorcism? The clean sweep covered equally the closure of churches, sometimes their partial destruction, and at the very least taking down the bells and removing the plate, an iconoclastic element which manifested itself in its absolute state (without any justification in material gain) when it culminated in the *auto-da-fé*. This iconoclasm which some authors, even recent ones like Richard Cobb, have made central to an egalitarian dechristianization that both destroys and burns, is indeed an important phenomenon. It is doubtless appropriate to see a number of levels within it according to its various manifestations, by the very reason of the differing approaches to which one is led. There is a type of iconoclasm which attracts public attention, and which might be described as quasi-official: it was this which harnessed the slumbering treasures of superstition in support of the war effort of the Revolution. And the echo of this resounded loudly at the bar of the Convention. Then there was the other sort of iconoclasm, which also attracted public notice because of its explosive manifestations of ostentatious destruction. But it was immediate, on the spot, and ran the risk of being extended by the fact that any report of it was more like a cry of victory, which may or may not have been presented to the Convention. At the bar of the Convention it was accountable activity which was noted down, from

municipalities, districts and departments anxious to acquit themselves well in tasks such as requisitions or enrolling men. According to local tradition, reported with horror by erudite parish priests of the nineteenth century, or by English Jacobins today, it was the devastating raids of the army commandos which carried the day, the butchers of the *auto-da-fé* who lit the fires. Both sides of this coin represent part of the truth, and behind the comparative neutrality of the scenes addressed by administrators can be heard the echo of what actually happened. In Loire, for example, the large quantities of plate collected were those specified by the representative Javogues during the course of his famous expeditions in Forez.

Closing the churches

'Our churches have been closed, the former Catholic cult is no longer practised, we have dismissed our priests.' Addresses such as these, whether coming from a municipality (as was most often the case) or from a district or even a department, extrapolating incautiously, are certainly to be found, but in comparatively small numbers. A total of 5 per cent of the dechristianizing addresses is indeed very little, and quite insufficient to account for the general closure of churches, at least from Pluviôse to Floréal or Prairial, as is confirmed by local monographs. (See figure 4.) However, it is nevertheless instructive to look closely at this small handful of indications. In the south-east, for example, five departments out of sixteen account for eight-tenths of the addresses; those of the area around Lyons (Rhône, Loire, Ain, the northern tip of Ardèche, ten addresses), then Drôme (six examples) and Gard (nine examples). There are occasional mentions in Mont Blanc, Lozère, Vaucluse and Bouches-du-Rhône, and there are none in the Alpine region stretching from Isère to the maritime Alps and to Var. Around Lyons the greater part of these announcements were made during Frimaire, and there was none after Pluviôse. Further south, however, such announcements were rare before Pluviôse: they reached their peak at this time (half of the addresses occurring during this one month) but continued into Germinal and even Floréal. Once again we find here the imbalance with which we have become familiar and which local sources confirm. An official of the Committee of Public Safety, visiting Marseilles during Pluviôse, and probably having just come from Lyons, expressed astonishment at the contrast then existing between the two areas, for in Marseilles the churches were still open and the cult still celebrated. From these few indications we can therefore form the impression of a timetable applicable to this quarter of France: the ending of the cult (following the example of Paris) in the northern part of the area, which found

a new impetus around Lyons, and the application of this ruling in the regions of the Midi particularly during Pluviôse.

In the comparative chronology of the different manifestations of dechristianization thus established, closing the churches was to follow the changing of place-names – something which was brought in swiftly but which preceded by only a very short time the major wave of abdications from the priesthood. If the chronology of the addresses received by the Convention has some appearance of probability, we must beware of concluding from such a small number of addresses, that there was a significant survival of Catholic worship until spring 1794. Indeed, in many cases the closure of the Church was not announced as such, but rather under the form of the opening of a temple of Reason, or via the announcement that 'Reason reigns henceforth in our commune,' showing concern that there should be a positive validation of the phenomenon. Linked therefore with this other series of announcements (four times the number actually furnished) the balance takes on a broader basis. But the fact of the matter is that the addresses of renunciation of the Catholic cult and of conversion to that of Reason give only a pale reflection of the real extent of the movement.

Fortunately we have, at least for one area, the possibility of making a precise comparison between the phenomenon as it actually happened and what had occurred in Paris. In Gard (nine addresses of renunciation of the cult, and thirty or so which included references to openings of the temple of Reason) a precise figure was kept of the extent to which municipalities, whipped along in the spring of Year 2 by the representative Borie, expressly renounced the cult, or to be more exact the different cults, and formally let it be known. The number of these renunciations, which were increased by announcements of the opening of a temple of Reason, rose to 233 communes: eight times greater than the number of addresses received or, putting it another way, almost exactly two-thirds of the communes of the entire department. The chronology of the phenomenon here positions it late in the time scale: 117 cases in Ventôse, say a half of them; 71 still during Germinal, say 30 per cent. In other words, 80 per cent of the church closures in Gard happened at a time when, in the centre and the north of France, the dechristianizing wave had ended more than three months before. The sheer weight of the phenomenon shows quite clearly the pressure which was applied. Should we therefore make some extrapolations based on Gard? This might be dangerous, to say the least, for the impetus provided by Borie and, equally, the multi-denominational nature of the region (with the pressures of one community, or rivalry between the main two) make it without any doubt a unique case.

If we were to hazard a guess we would say that, after a date which varied somewhat (Frimaire in the north, Pluviôse or Ventôse in the Midi), most of

the churches not already converted into temples of Reason must have been closed, if only because of abdications from the priesthood which deprived them of ministers. Although it was general in the towns, the phenomenon must have experienced major variations in country districts, by virtue of the fact that there was such an enormous number of possible scenarios: areas of total closure versus sanctuaries which were still untouched (like the district of Castellane in the Basses-Alpes, which was 'a real cesspool of priests,' according to one national official in Year 2). Here constitutional priests and – according to the area – refractory priests were able to maintain a free hand in celebrating the cult. At a pinch, it was the same situation with the abdicators! We came across a particular village in these same Basses-Alpes which, after having received the abdication of their parish priest and taken due note of it, asked him, as he was still there, to celebrate Mass the following Sunday. This story, which is actually more amusing than it is incongruous, suggests that there were many compromises reached in country districts.

Once the Church was 'purified' of its former usage, it was capable of being re-utilized almost immediately, as a temple of Reason, or sometimes, in the case of presbyteries, as a school or even a police station. The capital value in stone which it represented was rarely contested. We may doubtless recall the destruction of those churches in the Marseilles area which had served as a den for federalist groups, and we may recall also the legal acquisition of many a convent chapel or religious house on the grounds that it was a national asset. But the first example seems to be almost the one urban exception which proves the rule; and the second, properly speaking, does not enter into the true framework of the dechristianizing campaign.

The bell-towers of Albitte

Putting on one side for a moment the iconoclastic mutilation which we shall discuss later, it is interesting to note that the Church, or rather its actual buildings, came under attack only in particular places. An obvious example is the famous bell-towers of Albitte, when this representative on mission attempted systematically to raze to the ground these proud monuments of superstition, so that they would be reduced to the same physical level as that of ordinary citizens. Did this venture have any imitators? We come across it in the course of accounts dealing with the area covered by Albitte: in Mont Blanc (four mentions) during Ventôse, and in Ain, from Ventôse to Germinal and Floréal. Although it occurred somewhat late in the day – a function, perhaps, of climatic considerations – this measure demonstrates the obstinacy of one dechristianizing representative. It is interesting to stress that evidence of the practice, unknown almost everywhere else, can also be found to the south-east

of the Massif Central, in the hostile region of Lozère, where we have confirmation that it also occurred during Ventôse. Did the representative who operated there, Chateauneuf-Randon, simply copy Albitte, whom he resembled in more ways than one? Without detracting from the initiative of these personalities, whom we shall be showing carrying out their responsibilities, we believe that we do not need to look too far to find a complementary explanation: Lozère and Mont Blanc. There were two areas which were virtually devoid of priests, for they were well hidden in Lozère, they had left Savoie, and abdicators were rare. As there was no one to be stripped of his priesthood, the dechristianizing fury was vented on church buildings. This hypothesis can be confirmed by what happened in Puy de Dôme and in Cantal, where according to the sources, and influenced also by Chateauneuf-Randon, iconoclasm expressed itself in the same ways. Thus, for example, at Saint Flour where (using the excuse of an exercise) a church called the Calvary was attacked with heavy artillery, the commentator adding: 'We should have been very satisfied had the chapel been filled with priests.' This was harsh humour (or maybe it was not humour?) – a comment on the vengeance taken against stones, in the absence of men.

Removing plate from the churches

If the destruction of churches and pulling down bell-towers were events which were comparatively rare and which were limited to particular places, taking down church bells and removing the sacred plate were much more general, and ranked certainly among the forms of dechristianization most directly experienced at village level. Almost half of the correspondence with which we are concerned deals, either in part or as a whole, with silver belonging to the communes. (See figure 9.)

In order to understand what the operation represented, it is perhaps appropriate to refer to the article which Albert Mathiez, with strikingly modern insights, devoted to the question as early as 1925. The author placed the removal of plate from the churches among measures which, if not official, were at least semi-official, or regularized after the event. In the context of the growing need of money for the purposes of the revolutionary struggle, he recalled the first instructions of November 1790 and then of March 1791 which put at the disposal of the nation precious objects that were not strictly necessary for the cult, and which drew to the attention of the district authorities the need to send these items to the mint. This first confiscation, which was legal and only partial, generated experimental procedures which were subsequently taken up spontaneously. It was effectively after 10 August 1792, initially in a Parisian framework, that the incidence of these civic offerings of valuable items began

to increase, and their progress started to be regulated. In March 1793 Cambon established a statement and even a retrospective inventory of deliveries made to date of 'vessels in gold, silver-gilt and silver sent in by departments and received at the mint in Paris'. This detailed statement, which we have examined at the Archives Nationales, validates a sort of prehistory of the movement with which we are going to deal. It lists 56 marks in gold, 14,424 in silver gilt, and 23,269 in silver, not including gold and silver lace 'for burning' in order to extract and collect the metal from it.

At this stage – really before the birth of the violently dechristianizing movement – it is surprising to note the almost total absence of the south-east quarter of France: 156 marks of silver out of 23,269, less than 1 per cent, 1470 marks of silver-gilt out of 14,424, still only a tenth. The inventories sent in subsequently which we can still consult today – i.e. numbers 6 and 7, dating from Brumaire and 29 Nivôse – are for their part still strictly limited to Paris and to departments on the frontier. Is there a technical reason for this? Were the items which had been deposited at the mint in Paris the only things included in these accounts? It would certainly seem so, and we may well share the perplexity of Cambon when on 11 Frimaire he tried to systematize this movement: 'There has been a sudden rush to bring to the Treasury all the objects of gold and silver which were used in religious ceremonies. The only impetus for this has been public opinion.' In spite of the rules laid down by the Committee of Public Safety on 5 Nivôse, and 5 and 12 Germinal, for taking in these deliveries, the authorities in Paris kept very quiet on the subject of this unwanted manna, and Cambon, in Germinal, was to denounce once again the embezzlement for which he held the Hébertists responsible.

Meanwhile, what was happening to it in the provinces? The direct inventory in the depths of the Archives Nationales which centralized the accounts (F 19612 A) does not give us the key to the problem. Indeed, it gives only piecemeal information on just four departments (Hérault, Basses-Alpes, Ain, Ardèche). We have therefore no alternative but to resort to the Parliamentary Archives, which recorded day by day the contributions from the provinces, or at least those of which they were advised. The accounts were certainly submitted, but they were confusing. The municipalities listed their deliveries, often more than once, leaving us with no possibility of sorting out the repetitions. Districts and departments announced theirs too, and it becomes impossible to segregate these with any degree of certainty from the lists of the municipalities. It is therefore very probable that more than one silver-gilt cross and silver ciborium were duplicated on several occasions when being entered in the accounts, by those anxious to enhance the victories of Reason. We should not therefore expect from our calculations an accuracy which they do not claim to have: at best they determine an order of magnitude, a geographical spread and an approximate flow of events.

Plundering the churches did not happen overnight: of all the movements we have analysed, this was the one which took place over the longest period. On a national scale, it started modestly enough in Brumaire, continued more decisively in Frimaire, the curve declining somewhat after the winter only to start up again in Ventôse in a second push which linked the easier way of living in the spring with the new outburst of dechristianization. The movement continued in Germinal, but started to drop from Floréal, and the decline was accentuated during the following months. This bimodular graph reflects in fact significant regional variations in the flow of the movement. Using a broad brush, we might say that it was most evident in the north-west quarter, where the push of Frimaire was very strong and that of Ventôse noticeably less, while in the north-east quarter the main part of it occurred in winter, between Brumaire and Pluviôse, and just continued on from there. The Midi reacted more slowly. In the south-west, the first push in Frimaire and Nivôse was less marked than that in Ventôse or Germinal; in the south-east, in started even more slowly and increased step by step until spring – Ventôse, Germinal and including Floréal. This occupation of France, therefore, happened by degrees, in the course of its work, crudely, over a distance, and within the framework of the regional areas thus defined we can follow its evolution and its growth, month by month, for example from the area around Lyons to Provence.

Rich spoils or meagre booty

If we look at the map which evaluates, throughout the whole of France, the announcements of deliveries of plate classified according to sources (and there are many of them, more than 2000, or to be exact 2027), it shows us nothing new, only a massive corroboration. (See figure 9.) It is the identical map which we found for the cult of Reason, and also for the dechristianizing campaign, with a huge epicentre, from the Paris Basin to the centre of France and, by way of Lyons, extending down the Rhône to the Mediterranean Midi. The west, the north-east, a large area of the south-west taking in the whole of the central plateau, and the inter-Alpine region, make up essentially the areas of opposition. But looking beyond this first measure of the activity, drawn up on the basis of the number of relevant addresses, could we not perhaps attempt an overall estimate, emulating Cambon, by using the tables and the figures which were forwarded in such large numbers?

To make a comparison of the generosity (if one can use such a word) of the different areas concerned, smacks somewhat of a gamble, for it is obvious that the sources of available wealth to be tapped were unevenly distributed. In exactly the same way that we shall have to ask ourselves how the numbers of abdicating priests related to the total clerical population, so here we need to

know the respective contents of the churches and sacristies. The map as we have drawn it up, showing the deliveries by department expressed in absolute values, certainly shows up significant contrasts: it remains to be seen what exactly these consist of. The value of the goods was based on the deliveries of silver, which from all areas was the one essential component of what was sent in, ahead of gold, which was much rarer, or silver-gilt or gold lace.

It will come as no surprise to discover that the contrasts between one department and another are most revealing. Just to take two clearly defined regional samples from both ends of France: the north-west quarter (twenty-four departments) shows a departmental average of just over 10,000 silver marks, while the seventeen departments of the south-east barely exceed 4000 (4100 on average). In spite of the apparent glitter of the gold items from the baroque period of the Midi, the real treasures were to be found in the large Gothic edifices of northern France, as we can see by looking at some of the details: eleven out of seventeen departments in the Midi yielded less than 4000 marks, which was the case for only four of the twenty-four departments of the north-west. The regions around Paris (Seine-et-Oise 34,000 marks, Oise 11,000) to Picardy and to the north (Pas de Calais 45,000 marks, Somme 22,000), via Normandy, both upper and lower (Calvados 19,000, Orne 13,000, Lower Seine 15,000) yielded real riches, for which the Midi had no real equivalent, except possibly at Lyons or Marseilles (Rhône 11,000, Bouches-du-Rhône 8000), although Savoie established itself as exceptionally productive (16,000 marks).

There is a temptation to ascribe to this balance sheet a simple explanation, perhaps too simple. The relationship between the wealth of the areas and what they yielded is obvious. In the Midi there is a marked contrast between the mediocrity of the departments behind the Massif Central or the Alpine area, and the relative wealth of Comtat and Basse Provence. But other parameters should perhaps be brought in: the relative distance from or closeness to Paris, and also whether the dechristianizing offensive, the experience of which was variable, had occurred at an early or a late stage. It is perhaps as a function of this factor too that the north-south divide can be explained. The analysis of the total number of addresses relating to plate, both in absolute terms and also relative to the number of communes, brings us back to a familiar geographical scenario: it was of course those departments which were the most actively involved who responded best.

'Our Saints go off to the "font",' or to the national melting-pot: our bells too. Mentioning the dispatch of the bells is generally associated, in local correspondence, with that of church plate, although the incidence is much less frequent (350 cases, or one tenth of the addresses). Its timetable is therefore also comparable, although slightly later (the main push occurred here in Pluviôse) and less affected by the force of events, in Frimaire or Ventôse. This

subject brings to a close the list of operations which we might suppose to have been attempted cold in the framework of a systematic destruction of a time which had gone. But in fact the clean sweep with which we are dealing was brought about on more than one occasion by what was to remain in the collective memory as the high point of dechristianization: the iconoclastic bonfire, the *auto-da-fé* of the remnants of superstition.

Iconoclasm: the bonfire of the *auto-da-fé*

Iconoclasm, like its spectacular extension which was the *auto-da-fé*, consists of those manifestations of sacrilege which were retained most often in the collective memory, and thrown into relief as the dechristianizers themselves made them the climax of their demonstrations. And yet, picking out such acts mentioned in the course of the addresses to the Convention, the weight of them is hardly overwhelming: 263 iconoclastic texts and 139 mentions of *autos-da-fé* (6 and 4 per cent of the total addresses) probably reflect only a small part of what actually happened. No doubt there was an element of conscious or subconscious dissimulation which played its part in apparently contradicting the exhibitionism with which the collective actions were surrounded. And no doubt, when they arrived, the recipients of these addresses came very quickly to the view that such demonstrations were misplaced, and therefore scarcely worthy of much attention. There is a flagrant conflict here between a provincial dechristianization following its own dynamic, and a political line in the centre which refused to recognize it. Demonstrations of this type, in so far as they could be drawn up from the documents in question, and the extent of their geographical spread assessed, were even duly noted in the calendar. (See figure 4.)

It seems to me that it was not only because they were subsequently concealed that the acts of iconoclasm or the *autos-da-fé* seemed to occur at such an early stage, but also because they illustrated the first and the most explosive phase of the dechristianization of the winter of 1793–4. Half of the iconoclastic accounts appeared in the three months of Brumaire, Frimaire and Nivôse, even though the general curve shows a second and more modest push through to Pluviôse. But the subsequent drop, in spring, was dramatic; a sudden lull which was even more accentuated when the *autos-da-fé* were lit, for it was in the depths of winter when the fires of the 'playthings of superstition' burned. Even so we need to modify our view depending on the region, as there were significant contrasts. The most frequent mentions come from the Paris Basin and the north of France, encompassing Normandy, Picardy, Champagne, and pushing as far south as the gates of the rebellious Vendée. Then a second pole becomes visible from Burgundy to the Lyonnais,

stretching right down the Rhône valley to the Provençal Midi. Against this, Brittany, the north-east, the main part of the central plateau and the south-west were scarcely affected, with the exception of certain areas (Charente-Maritime, Gers, Puy de Dôme); nor were the Alps, where Savoie was the only area to be seriously concerned. This contrasting map reflects in part the chronology of the movement. Vandalism and bonfires reached a climax at the beginning of winter (Brumaire and Frimaire) in northern and central France, as in some of the early areas of the south-west. But in the west, on the one hand (Normandy and the Armorican borders), and, on the other, particularly in the Lyonnais, in the Alps, the Massif Central, Languedoc and Provence, it was in spring that the movement really spread, from Ventôse to Germinal, in a final diminutive burst which conflicted with the general calendar of events. From Floréal onwards, in the west as in the south-east, it was only the peripheral areas of France which had recourse to such displays. Elsewhere they had become incongruous and unacceptable.

What did this iconoclasm consist of? The accounts of it are both extremely varied and yet at the same time very stereotyped by the use made of a number of key words. In all cases it was a matter of surrendering – or possibly of destroying if they were not capable of being re-utilized – everything which came under the heading, in the most harmless cases, of 'signs of religion' (the outward signs of the cult), particularly its 'instruments' or what were referred to more scornfully as its 'utensils'. But this type of objectivity was usually displaced by harsher descriptions: 'idols', and more particularly 'relics' or 'playthings'. The playthings of superstition and the relics of fanaticism were denounced for the perverted use that was made of them. 'The playthings of fanaticism have been used for far too long to retard the reign of Reason, of Liberty and of Equality' (Chauny, Aisne), but they were also described more precisely, sometimes as sumptuous and magnificent, sometimes as ridiculous, signs of error and of stupidity. The 'sacred vessels' which the most respectful ones talk about became elsewhere 'so-called sacred', and then the description turns into an unrestricted flood of epithets, the 'magic goblets' of the 'goblet performers', their 'battery of kitchen utensils', even the 'coppers from the kitchen of fanaticism'.

'Burn the idol'

While sometimes regretting (as in Aubusson) 'that their priests were not made of metal' so that they too could be dispatched for melting down, what did local activists propose? It was above all to 'burn the idol', as was proclaimed on 24 Pluviôse by an official report from Pont-sur-Rhône (formerly Pont-Saint-

Esprit) while in a general and somewhat more abstract way Lodève was destroying 'all the signs which could recall the memory of it'.

The idol or the idols? It was above all the saints of the churches who bore the brunt of this operation. There were madonnas from street corners in Aix-en-Provence (Germinal, Year 2), but more generally saints from the churches: 'statues of the aforementioned male and female saints' at Yssingeaux (20 Frimaire), 'saints, male and female, and all their knick-knacks' at Sommières (Gard, 5 Germinal). Sometimes, good-humouredly, the pitiful procession was evoked of those who could no longer work miracles. At Boulogne (11 Nivôse) 'the Virgin Mary without miracles' was burned, at Auch (17 Brumaire) 'Our Lady of Miracles of St Mary', at Piolenc in Vaucluse (13 Pluviôse) it was confirmed that 'all the saints of gold and silver returned to the mint with good will ... the others, three kings, were dispatched heavenwards through the mouths of three small cannon', at Seyssel 'the saints of wood and plaster learnt that the hands of the sans-culottes destroy every level of aristocracy at the same time.' This good humour was not always general, however, as was admitted at Noyon (5 Frimaire), where some difficulty was experienced in getting rid of the 'saints who, in spite of the prayers of a few bigots, were no longer prepared to work miracles.' Sometimes the jeering sans-culottes came across a saint if not of flesh and blood at least of bone. In Var, from Sainte Baume to Saint Maximin, the representative Barras and the local Jacobins tracked down the relics of the 'excessively celebrated and so-called Madeleine', the details of which we find in an address sent from Épernon on 4 Frimaire: 'You will see amongst these relics of stupidity the hair of that well-known prostitute called Magdalene, whom the priests sanctified because it was important for them to have saints from all the professions, and you will also not be surprised to see a rib from the famous Geneviève, the remains of whom Paris believed it possessed in their entirety.'

Idols, saints or demons? The sans-culottes from Valréas in Vaucluse sent on to Paris (where one can only wonder what became of them) 'the disgusting bones of a so-called saint whom the hypocritical monks worshipped like the god of rain'; and those from Gamarde in the Landes got rid there and then of 'a hideous figure taken from a former convent and to which the fanatics attributed a ridiculous resemblance to the Devil'. Eventually, these playthings became pointless, even ridiculous, regarded simply as derisory odds and ends. In Aix, on Ventôse, the people put together the accessories of Bishop Roux who was about to be guillotined – two rings, a mitre, a gold cross, and a crosier. This latter item at least could be made into a broom handle 'which would be more useful than when it served to foster illusion and as a decoration for superstition'. In this area the inhabitants of Comtat and Savoie harvested rich spoils, and the administrators in Mont Blanc did not fail to acknowledge

'the sabre and the cap given by the bishop to Prince Eugène, of horrible memory', and also 'a Papal hat in purple velvet embroidered in gold, trimmed with ermine and a decorated band, and with a fringed tail to the mitre'.

Crosses, confessionals, so why not books?

Saints were not to be the only victims prepared for the fire: in churches, as in cemeteries and in the country generally, crosses were destroyed. The sans-culottes from Yssingeaux recalled this happening on 9 Frimaire, those from Ferney Voltaire burned theirs on 27 Frimaire – very meagre booty, they said, from a church which Voltaire had not wished to see embellished. And then we come across one particular unfrocked priest in the Hautes-Alpes who travelled the mountain roads pulling down crosses and rural calvaries. Tollet, the former curate from Trévoux, was also an apostate, and he was known in Ain as one of the destroyers of country crosses during his wandering expeditions.

Among the traces of 'fanaticism' and 'superstition' there were some which, in more ways than one, attracted the concentrated hostility of the sans-culottes, at first sight surprisingly. An example of these was the confessionals. This can be explained by the admissions of some people, who confided what this instrument, now covered in disgrace, meant to them. Thus, for example, the sans-culottes from Beaurepaire in Isère 'burnt their confessional as an expiation for the bloody *autos-da-fé* in which so many thousands of the victims of fanaticism were sacrificed by barbarous inquisitors'. At Gap in the Hautes-Alpes, on 16 Frimaire, the confessionals were placed on the street corners, rather like sentry boxes, which was not done without some reservations. Similarly in the Midi, in Brignoles as in Monaco, displays of this sort generated protests, even skirmishes.

Objects were indeed burned: but as far as we know, based on the evidence we have, there was comparatively little burning of books. It was of course referred to in the accounts of certain *autos-da-fé*. At Compiègne, 'a bonfire did justice to all those ridiculous books which had formerly poisoned young hearts and left in their minds only stupidities and prejudices' (14 Frimaire). At Mans a few days earlier 'the flames devoured part of a vestment, various religious statues, missals and other instruments of magic', and at Rochefort on 30 Brumaire 'five or six pious books' were added to the effigies and the likenesses in the *auto-da-fé*.

In Rhône, on 30 Brumaire, a proclamation was issued requesting that 'all the books of absurd theology should be deposited at the administrative offices of the District'. But it should be noted that this measure might appear conservative as much as iconoclastic, and we have to go to Gard to see 'the con-

tents of an old den full of stupidity and trickery consigned to the flames', and to Sommières to see books burned in the name of Reason. Comparatively few books were burned, therefore, but no doubt a large number of papers. At the time of spontaneous abdications from the priesthood in Year 2, burning letters of priestly authority, with great pomp and ceremony, was a regular occurrence, and it was only later that the thought was conceived that they should be preserved as proofs of guilt. Sometimes this type of *auto-da-fé* was associated with the destruction of title deeds and papers, the remnants of feudalism, and we can detect here a concern to interest the peasants in the dechristianizing venture, as can be seen in Gard (Saint Jean on 3 Pluviôse, Aulas on 23 Pluviôse), and also in Ain and in Isère.

The *auto-da-fé* was a totality: having considered its main aspects we now need to re-create its quality as a spectacle, which is why the accounts which deal with it as an integral whole, rather than a summary statement of component parts, are so precious. So often we have to be content with a laconic description, briefly summarized: 'The canvas (depicting Saint Louis) was cut into shreds and the frame was burnt under the tree of Liberty ... We danced the Carmagnole around the *auto-da-fé*' (Saint Valéry sur Somme), ... 'All the statues in gold and silver, the playthings of superstition and fanaticism, were consigned to the flames amid general applause and public dancing' (Tarascon sur Ariège, 18 Germinal). But just occasionally the need to describe it in full wins the day, and enables us to join the spectators; so here we are at Seyssel in Ain, on the border of Mont Blanc, where a festival of Reason was being celebrated on 3 Nivôse. The national official who gives us the account of it recalls by way of preliminary that the sans-culottes knew how to destroy the hideous monster of fanaticism, for 'it is in the hearts of the afore-mentioned people that true feelings of nature and patriotism hold sway,' and that 'leaving pomp and magnificence to the despots' they are content with 'a simple festival, where they can breathe that pure air which is fitting for men who are free.' The procession, led by a young woman of the people clad as the goddess of Reason, followed by the authorities and by the people, ended with an *auto-da-fé* in the form of a mime: one ludicrously dressed individual, whose ecclesiastical costume included a skull cap and a clerical band, represented fanaticism, and as he came out from behind the altar he looked in astonishment at the goddess Reason. She showed him the Rights of Man: terrified, he tried to escape, but the watching Jacobins secured him in chains. They then left the church, complete with the playthings of superstition. Four Jacobins carried away the confessional box which they placed next to the temple of Reason: a municipal officer armed with an axe split the double box into two ... a miracle! Thus divided, the confessional became a sentry box into which marched a member of the National Guard singing 'Let's preserve the Safety of the Empire.' Then the playthings of superstition were piled onto the fire

and burned. 'The personification of fanaticism was about to be thrown onto the fire too when he suddenly divested himself of his burlesque costume which he gave up to the flames and appeared dressed in the uniform of the National Guard. He abjured the errors and the lies which he had taught thus far and swore to profess only Republican principles founded on sound Reason.' We have described this illustration in some detail, as it expresses in all its fullness and finality the vocation of the iconoclastic ceremony – an educational demonstration in popular use.

But beyond the simple descriptions these texts enable us to see the ultimate objectives to which iconoclasm responded, or at the very least its own self-justification. Why burn an idol? Or why burn idols?

A regenerative liturgy

The answer to this question was: for the simple reason that these vestiges of superstition were both superfluous and ridiculous. To the theme of 'playthings' was added that of knick-knacks. 'The knick-knacks of superstition are no longer necessary,' wrote the commune of Pradelles in Haute-Loire. One might have though that these were ridiculous adversaries, but the sans-culottes would have none of that, for these knick-knacks were an insult to equality. Some went so far as to say they were an insult to divinity, as for example the municipality of Saint Affrique (Lozère, 5 Pluviôse) denouncing the 'luxury in the churches which insulted the divinity, who should have no other temple than the universe'; or even the soldiers of the Municipal Guard in Marseilles, who recalled that 'the founder of their religion did not deck himself out in gold and silver.' The sans-culottes from Rheims thought exactly the same, and wrote:

> We also believed that these playthings in gold, silver and copper were not more precious in the eyes of the divinity than a vessel made of wood or of clay ... It is indeed laughable to see Jesus the sans-culotte served with foppishness. In their fanatical hands he had been decked out as a great gentleman for the benefit of the Tartuffes,* who secretly laughed about it and grew piously fat from it.

In the case of these latter examples the anti-religious objective is therefore missing, even if they did not spell it out as did the councillors of Chilly in the district of Rocroy (Ardennes) on 4 Frimaire (something which took rare courage): 'The representatives of the Sovereign People will see by this decree that through this offering our commune wishes to contribute by all possible

* The central character of a play by Molière (1664) whose name became synonymous with hypocrisy and false devotion.

means to the safety of our country and not to renounce the Catholic cult.' But more often a Spartan lecture denounced the threat of luxury and pride, 'those odious attributes of fanaticism,' as was said at Annecy, 'of which some, by their sheer enormity, insult and seem to threaten our liberty.'

Should these objects, ridiculous and harmful though they might have been, simply disappear without a word? Some people certainly thought so, consigning them to oblivion as did the club members of Fresnay sur Sarthe (7 Ventôse) in a rather prolix style which is nonetheless expressive: 'The confusingly precipitate fall of all these plaster saints, gods and devils has become merely an impure amalgam used hastily by society in order to purge its meeting places, and now the limbs of so many dismembered or shattered fantastical creations have become children's toys, dragged mercilessly around the streets, and thrown here and there on dunghills.'

Others developed the theme of the expiatory sacrifice. It was to appease the shades of the martyrs of Liberty – Marat, Peletier, Beauvais and Gasparin – that the inhabitants of Arles lit their bonfire (10 Frimaire); it was in expiation of 'the bloody *autos-da-fé* ... of fanaticism' that the sans-culottes of Beaurepaire (Isère) lit theirs, quite oblivious of the paradox. This somewhat wordy justification is not the one most commonly used: it gives way to the theme of purification and regeneration. The concept is indeed very simple, and is frequently developed along the lines of 'our plate has been dispatched to regenerate itself in the national crucible' (Modane); 'all our bells have been transformed into cannon' (Chambéry). 'In the city of Rheims fanaticism is dying. The bells which have been respected until now ... have been brought down from their watch-towers, are making their way to Metz, and are about to be changed into mouths of fire.' On many occasions the imagery is extended to make it support a real liturgy of symbolism, for example, the relays imagined by the Jacobins of Saint Chinian (Hérault): 'extinguish the torches of fanaticism and light the flame of reason.' There was a striving for something beyond words, for allegorical symbols. At Abbeville, on 24 Frimaire, an *auto-da-fé* of saints produced tricoloured flames. At Caen, on 20 Ventôse, the children released a flight of captive doves, a dragon was set on fire, and this in turn set fire to a grotto from which emerged a hermit who laid aside his rosary beads and his crosses, and then took the oath of fidelity to the Constitution.

This regenerative liturgy was applied most frequently to chalices purified by civic libations, as publicly demonstrated on several occasions. At Rambouillet 'we drank the health of the Republic using the ciboriums and the sacred chalices.' At Mégève – a commune which, according to its town council, was 'the back end of the world' – 'a chalice which had escaped our Druids at the time of their flight with the people of Piedmont' was purified by the sans-culottes who, by drinking from it, cleansed it of superstition and fanaticism. At Thonon, 'the vessels which superstition had called sacred'

were purified by civic and Republican libations before being sent off to be melted down. However, on some occasions it was a whole area which was subjected to this ceremony, for example, at Pont-sur-Rhône (formerly Pont-Saint-Esprit):

> Today we held an *auto-da-fé* in front of the portals of this august temple (which naturally is that of Reason), in the adjoining cemetery, and on the ruins of one of the typical symbols of our former cult. We burned all the effigies and all the grotesque figures from our churches. We chose this place deliberately in order to purify in some way the shades of our ancestors. Fanaticism, like them, will now be plunged into eternal sleep.

At the close of this purification, materials from the churches, now regenerated, could be re-used in the service of the Revolution, or sometimes simply of the community. However, it was rare to come across villagers such as those of Santeny (Seine-et-Oise), who explained what they intended to do with the material' from all the pews and altars, and with all the woodwork and other remains of the former sacristy': it was to be used in undertaking the clearing of 200 acres of common land.

Usually the objectives quoted were less directly self-interested: in the district of Villefort (Lozère, 5 Ventôse) the bells 'have been transformed into large casks, the vessels are being sent to the crucible, and the old ecclesiastical linen used for bandages.' The Jacobins of Beaucaire, in rather more lyrical vein, imagined a world undergoing radical transformation: 'our forests become sailing ships, the stone of our houses is transformed into saltpetre and our bronze into cannon.' However, without any doubt the palm was carried away by Carpentras. Here, as recounted on 22 Ventôse, 'these precious metals, so grotesquely, so vainly heaped up in our temples will in the future be destined for a use which is more natural and more in the public interest ... These clamorous bells, which deafened us with their lugubrious and discordant sounds, will in future disturb the rest only of the enemies of our country.'

At the end of this process – which was recuperative in the strict sense of the word – the sans-culottes felt that they had won an essential gamble which had vindicated them, a gamble on miracles. They had drunk from the sacred chalices and had not died, they had burnt effigies of the saints without incurring their vengeance. So where were these miracle-workers? 'Saints in silver, fatherly, little, loved ones, have all disappeared: they have gone off to work miracles' was the jubilant cry. And this power to work miracles is in future ascribed to the Revolution. 'The lightning fell on the towers and on the belfries,' to quote a writer from Moutiers (Mont Blanc) on 22 Ventôse. Others (Vienne, 27 Brumaire) linked a fountain of wine with the *auto-da-fé* and did

not conceal their joy. By changing water into wine they showed that they too could work miracles: 'liberty works just as well as fanaticism.'

So at the very moment when the clean sweep reached its paroxysm in the *auto-da-fé*, it is clear that it was opening out into another system, and that what had been destroyed had only been done in the hope of rebuilding something better.

5
The abdication of the priests

The historians of sacrilege have retained two principal images: that of Reason, with the features of an actress, lording it in the choir of Notre-Dame in Paris; and that of Bishop Gobel, influenced by Chaumette and by Cloots, coming to renounce his priesthood at the bar of the Convention. These encapsulated the totality of the attack on the mystical body of the Church, symbolized by the desecration of the place and by the attack on the living body of the Church militant in the person of its priests.

In memoirs, as indeed in historical memory, the abdicating priests of Year 2 occupy an ambiguous position. There is no doubt that the truth about them has been hidden. The work of concealment started as early as the consular period when Pope Pius VII made his Legate Caprara responsible for doctoring the records of the scandal, by reconciling with the Church those among its flock of lost children whom it was possible to reconcile. The century which followed did not ignore them. More than one of the monographs which are so precious to us, and which came from the pens of ecclesiastics in the years 1860 to 1900, are filled with first-hand recollections of the preceding generation, of those people whose lives were followed to their death-bed reconciliation or to their final impenitence. But although they were not ignored, they were discussed as little as possible, and the strict silence was broken only in a few literary instances (although they were important ones). Balzac put the apostate turned moneylender Rigou at the centre of the village conspiracy of *Les Paysans*.* Jules Janin and Barbey d'Aurevilly were the only ones who dared tackle head-on the character of the unfrocked priest. In the society of a monarchy whose members paid their dues, and where half-pay for the retired soldiery held a recognized place, these retired activists of the revolutionary war of religion could not claim the right to any leniency.

* *Les Paysans* in *La Comédie Humaine* (Pléiade edition, vol. IX).

Unpardonable for having given in, and sometimes for having given in without too much resistance – as people were only too well aware – were they therefore condemned in history to silence? In spite of precedent, and the moral caution of the enquiry launched by Marcel Reinhard in 1964, I sensed as little as ten years ago, when reading some of the commentaries on my work *Religion et Révolution*, the imprudence even today of lifting a corner of this veil.

Yet there is no scandal in opening up these records, which are so rich in information. Among others, but nevertheless important, they contribute to our knowledge of the dechristianizing movement, its objectives, its evolution, its violent incidents. They enable us to probe even deeper into the feelings and the mentalities of those people who were, often involuntarily, the victims and the actors in this drama.

The abdicators: an overall balance sheet

Let us first of all introduce them in the anonymity of the group which they formed. (See figures 4–6.) The balance sheet is fairly detailed: in twenty-one departments from the south-east quarter of France I have picked out a total of 4228 to 4471 cases, doubtless a somewhat lower number than the reality. Complementary studies which have been undertaken since that time covering the rest of France have established 3084 in the north-west quarter, 1674 in the north-east, and 1024 in the south-west. These complementary estimates are incomplete, limited to the statements and notifications assembled in the Archives Nationales (the tables from the Series F 19, and the addresses from the Parliamentary Archives). However, if we look at ten departments or so, and if we compare these three sets of figures with the information obtained from local monographs which really made use of the sources on the ground itself, it seems to me that we need to apply a factor of two in order to reach the true total: so that it is 13,564 (the exactness of this figure is somewhat illusory!) which we should add to the 4471 abdicators from the south-east, to arrive at an overall total of 18,035 (or 18,476 including the 441 known abdicators from Paris): and this number must in any event represent only the very minimum order of magnitude. Nevertheless, however incomplete it may be, the information which we have at our disposal for the western half and the north-east quarter of France is still very precious for all that. From the timetable which it reveals, it shows us the evolution of the movement, month by month, and gives us also an approximate order of magnitude which we can use as the basis of a map.

Without for the moment going any more deeply into the problem of the essential nature of these abdications, which occurred in very different

Table 5.1 Percentages of abdicators by categories of origin

Geographical origin	*South-east*	*South-west*	*North-east*	*North-west*	*Paris*	*Total*
Parish priests	60	72.5	63	61	63	34
Curates	16.5	12.7	8.7	9	13	18
Higher clergy (canons, vicarsgeneral)	6.5	5	3	7	6	25
Unemployed, or without definite assignments	8	5	8	19	11	
Religious	8	5	11	4	36	7

ways, we can now at least attempt an overall appreciation. 18,500 to 20,000 abdicators: is that a large or a small number? If we refer to the estimates of T. Tackett and C. Langlois, the numbers of clergy in the France of 1790 totalled some 114,500. A sample of around one-sixth, which is a big number if we look at the abdicators as simply the black sheep of the flock, is nevertheless limited in its numerical impact. So we cannot really argue in those terms. The dechristianizing offensive, in the form of abdications, did not affect equally the different categories of a clergy which, at the end of 1793, had already seen a significant reduction in its numbers. This had happened in several ways: by emigration (20,000 to 25,000 had emigrated or had been deported, if we try to follow exactly the basis of information given by the historian D. Greer); by executions (3000 to 5000, according to the same author); and by the fact that a whole section of refractory clergy, opposed to the Constitutional Oath, had started to operate clandestinely. In any event, a good proportion of the clerical population of 1789 was now partially out of action (to what degree we shall soon see). These were the religious who had been dispersed and retrained from the beginning of the Revolution (26,500 of them, or 23 per cent of the total in 1790), and priests who were not in the service of a specific parish (28,500, or 25 per cent).

The abdications affected principally the parochial clergy, i.e. above all the constitutional clergy. We can assess this if we look at the collective portrait of a group we know very well, a sample of just over 10,000. Both similarities and differences are apparent from one region to another.

Perhaps we may be forgiven for this table of figures (we shall not abuse it): however, it does enable us to make an initial diagnosis by localizing the

Table 5.2 Ages of abdicating priests

	South-east Quarter	*South-west Quarter*	*North-west Quarter*	*North-east Quarter*
Average age	49.5	45	43.5	45.5
% by age group				
20 to 30	7	17	17	not known
30 to 40	23	22	30	
40 to 50	22	20	30	
50 to 60	22	23	15	
over 60	25	17	18	

victims. We should resist the temptation to extrapolate from this 50 per cent sample (since we estimated the total number of abdicators to be around 20,000) and by applying similar orders of magnitude to those groups of the total clergy in France from 1789 to 1790 to conclude that a third of parish priests (32.6 per cent), an eighth of the curates (12.5 per cent), roughly the same number of the remainder of the secular priests (from canons to ordinary priests who were simply 'in the habit') and up to a twentieth of religious (5.4 per cent), all abdicated from the priesthood. From 1790 to 1793, there was a real bustle and stir in this population! So many curates were promoted to parish priests in the reorganization of the constitutional clergy, not to mention the religious, or the non-parochial priests, who were assigned to the service of a parish, while, as we have indicated, emigration, sometimes death, and – for a section of the refractory priests – clandestineness all had their effect! The parish priests and curates in 1793 were no longer the same as those of 1789.

It only remains to say that in this modified church, which was mutilated and half scattered, the clergy who were the first and most seriously affected were the supply priests, and particularly the constitutional parish priests and the curates (reduced in number since 1790) who assisted them, and together these formed more than three-quarters of the abdicators. The clerics who were not public functionaries (i.e. the secular clergy and religious) were able to escape the storm. Much more easily, except in Paris, no doubt, which was a real trap in Brumaire of Year 2!

This instant diagnosis, for all its apparent naïveté, is immediately confirmed if we attempt to define the group of abdicators by using different parameters. There is nothing anecdotal about analysing them by age; in the register of platitudes there has been far too much insistence on the shameful capitulation of the new constitutional clergy, recently ordained or promoted, in other

words on the betrayal by the younger ones. But our priests are of mature years and correspond in all respects to the profile of the constitutional priests as it was drawn up for 1791 by Tackett: he proposed an average age of 44.9 years (around 50 for the parish priests, from 33 to 35 for the curates). This estimate is confirmed, even to its finest details, within the group of abdicators.

A reflection of the clerical population?

Without going into too much detail, it is worth nothing that average ages in departments or in regions confirm the differences within the list drawn up in 1791: thus there was a young clergy in Alsace and the Vosges (39 years of age), slightly older in Picardy and the north (from 48 to over 50 in Ain, or the Ardennes), and this same convergence can be found also in the south-east of France, where the average age overall is higher than elsewhere.

But these variations by age reflect in part the different composition of the groups by region. The noticeably higher proportion of curates in the Midi, and particularly in the south-east, is very clear, and this corresponds with what we know about the geography of priestly service to parishes following the *ancien régime*, notably in the Provençal Midi. A similar contrast can be found in the north-west quarter, where curates were more numerous in Brittany and the Armorican borders, with the exception of Picardy, Higher Normandy, and the heart of the Paris Basin, where the parish priest was often the only officiating minister, and this pattern applied equally in the north-east, as can be seen from our table. On all these points, the statistical and cartographical elements which we possess show up clearly the relationship between the group of abdicators and the constitutional clergy after the oath of 1791.

From the similarity of these two groups, can we therefore conclude that the militant campaign against the priesthood simply liquidated the constitutional clergy, who were more exposed and no doubt weaker? This argument has been put forward by the determined adversaries of the Constitutional Church, both then and now. It is, to say the least, grossly over-simplified. First of all, if we look again at the balance of 26,542 members of the parochial clergy (parish priests and curates) in summer 1791, as calculated by Tackett (and there were subsequently both retractions and also promotions), the number of abdicating parish priests and curates, which according to our estimate is 13,000 to 15,000,* would represent only 50 to 57 per cent. However severe the dechristianizing campaign might have been, it spared a significant minority, indeed almost half (46 per cent of parish priests, 69 per cent of curates, if one can risk an overall order of magnitude). For those who might be discouraged by this

* Excluding religious and priests who had no pastoral responsibility for abdicators.

necessary but rather forbidding statistic, let us run the risk of irritating those others, who think that our approximations are over-simplified, by proposing the following formula which might resolve this: the constitutional schism after 1791 had cut away slightly less than half (48 per cent) of the clergy's effective personnel, while the abdication movement cut away from the Constitutional Church slightly more than half of its members (50 to 57 per cent).

But how was the division made within the group itself, between the abdicators and those who stood firm? Before we can begin to try to penetrate the secrets of conscience, by allowing the priests to speak for themselves, let us continue along our deliberately simple line: it was a function of a greater or lesser pressure on the one hand, and of unequal resistance on the other.

Unequal resistance depending on the categories and their legal position, or unequal resistance depending on age? Where we are able to go beyond the inhibiting criteria of overall averages, and can assess the composition of the constitutional clergy and that of the abdicators by age group, it appears that the resulting convergence around the age of 45 conceals very different reactions. In the south-east quarter of France, where we were able to work with some precision, the younger ones on the one hand (less than 30 years old, or less than 40) and the older ones on the other (above 60) abdicated proportionately less frequently than parish priests aged between 40 and 60, the very ones who were in the most responsible positions and at the same time the most directly exposed. This was demonstrated by the fact that the level of abdications among parish priests was significantly higher than among curates, and also by the fact that non-parochial priests, or religious, were only marginally more affected, this in spite of the fact that they provided a not insignificant proportion (25 per cent) of the total, and in some places even more, notably in the towns.

Unequal pressure? We are actually quite well equipped to appreciate this, based on the information we have. Let us take a look at the series of maps which illustrate the successes and the failures of the constitutional oath in 1791 (using percentages, as Tackett did); at the specific numbers of abdicators by department; at the relationship between the number of abdicators and the actual numbers of parochial clergy in 1790 (clergy who were subject to the oath); and at the relationship between the abdicators and the actual numbers of constitutional priests in 1791. The commentary it yields is interrelated and highly significant.

The scale of the loss

However crude and approximate it might be, as we have already pointed out, we cannot but be struck by the similarity between the national distribution of

the abdicating priests and that of the priests who took the constitutional oath. The same areas of heavy concentration are apparent: the Paris Basin, the Burgundy–Provence axis running through Lyons and the Alps, the compact zone around the centre of France, from Morvan to Poitou by way of Limousin. Conversely, we have the regions which were unaffected: the west, extended by a coastal stretch along the Atlantic, reaching as far as the south-west where the area of the Pyrenees and the southern side of the Massif Central are clearly delineated; then, at the other end of France, a large part of the north-east and of the border region in the north. It would not of course be difficult to pick out discordant elements in the pattern for some departments, and these are sometimes quite striking (Var, Aude, the Hautes-Pyrénées in the Midi, Loiret or Loir-et-Cher in northern France): some of these might result from gaps in our documentation, but that is not the main reason.

In addition to confirming that abdications from the priesthood occurred in areas in which many priests had taken the oath to the constitution, the following maps also make it possible to be more subtle. The one which compares the total number of abdicators with that of the parochial clergy in 1790 gives us a picture which is both specific and relative at the same time, while confirming the overall geography of the comparison. (See figure 6.) Going beyond the crudeness of absolute numbers which might be deceptive (the clerical population varied as a function of the density of population, the number of parishes, the size of towns and the number of clerical institutions), the map restricts to around twenty departments those in which the loss is higher than 40 per cent of the parochial clergy in 1790, and to sixteen those in which it is between 20 and 40 per cent: overall a total of thirty-eight, less than half. On the other side, we are left with less than 8 per cent of abdicators in twenty-three departments, and between 9 and 20 per cent in eighteen others. The 'unaffected' part of France increased its terrain, in the west, the south-west and the north-east.

The position changes if we compare the number of abdicators by department with those priests who took the oath, these latter representing three-quarters of the available pool, as we have seen. We are now able to assess the level of systematic eradication, whether successful or not, of what was left of the constitutional church in 1793. Against a familiar background the map shows up new realities, particularly where the low number of constitutional priests reduces the number of possible abdicators or of those directly exposed. The places where dechristianization was most intense are again very clear, indicating a typology of these sites. Those where the effective number of abdicators exceeded that of the constitutional priests encroach significantly not only on the fringes (priests without specific functions, regular clergy) but also frequently affect the refractory priests as well. There are a dozen or so departments in this category – the large cities, Paris, Lyons, Marseilles, places

where dechristianization was very active and which were traps for refugee priests – and also a stretch in central France, from Deux Sèvres to Saône-et-Loire, connected in the east by the pole of Lyons, which was particularly active, while in the Midi Gard is very prominent. But a department like Doubs, with a low rate of priests who had taken the oath, also fell into this category.

Furthermore, within the category of departments strongly affected (those with more than two-thirds of abdicating constitutional priests) it is not surprising to come across some in which the oath was widely taken. At the other end of the scale of departments there were others which, although refractory and scarcely affected, contained some priests who had taken the oath (enclaves, or refuges, in the west, the north-east, the south of the Massif Central). In all this two categories attract attention. On the one hand, the regions in which the oath had frequently been taken and which were therefore spared this dechristianization – like Var, Aude, the Hautes-Pyrénées – and on the other those which, although strongly refractory, were extensively affected by abandonment of the priesthood. A number of fronts like these become apparent – in the north and the Pas de Calais – but also a belt from Calvados to Charente which followed the Armorican borders, for example, in the Midi, Gard, Ardèche, Haute Loire and Cantal, forming a frontier of confrontation, or of re-conquest, over the dissident west or the rebellious Midi. Far from being therefore the simple reflection or echo of structural contrasts, as revealed and positioned by the constitutional oath in 1791, this map turns into material reality a situation which is both fluid and pregnant with strife.

Spontaneous abdications or forced abdications?

We must now attempt to go further, from the macroscopic approach covering abdications from the priesthood over the whole of France, to the analysis of what it meant in the real-life experience of those who were its actors or its victims. The component parts of the global analysis that has been used up to this point make it easier to map the terrain and sometimes even to suggest interpretative hypotheses. We know now that the movement affected a good proportion of the constitutional clergy, even though other elements of the clerical group were equally affected; and we know too that it had a huge impact in a number of departments, even if others were scarcely touched by it. The indirect indexes which we have used so far enable us on occasion to go even further, and to analyse in finer detail both the geographical distribution and timing of this campaign of abdication. In geographical terms we have until now limited ourselves to a departmental analysis, but if we extend this to

cover whole districts, then the contrasts stand out much more clearly, as we have already shown in the case of the south-east. As well as this, following a pattern which repeats itself even more precisely by communes, as a function of the axes of propagation which followed the most commonly used routes, real linear trails – like the Alpine route from Grenoble to Manosque and then to central Durance, like the Rhône corridor – provide us in this same framework with a most striking example. Without giving large numbers of additional examples, we can see a comparable pattern in the north-east of France: from Yonne to Meurthe a sort of flow can be seen which ends in the districts of Nancy and of Pont à Mousson, and to some extent of Vézelise. A cluster of some twenty districts, spread through Yonne, Seine-et-Marne, Aube, Haute Marne and Marne, and finally Meurthe indicate the skeleton of a region and show the influence of the major roads which converge towards Nancy and Pont à Mousson, one leading from Sézanne via Vitry-le-François, Saint-Dizier and Commercy, the second from Provins through Arcis-sur-Aube, the third from Auxerre to Saint-Florentin, rejoining the first two via Bar-sur-Seine and Bar-sur-Aube. Around these major axes, which are more or less continuous, can be found more circumscribed centres, spreading out from a district or a city or a large town: Brioude in Haute-Loire; Privas in Ardèche; Florac in Lozère would be a few examples, from the central plateau, taken from among many other possible ones. This more detailed geographical approach enhances the *conjunctural* aspects of an imposed dechristianization, while a panoramic view shows up more clearly its structural aspects. Both of these viewpoints should now be merged into a more detailed account of the timing of the abdications, so that we can understand their mechanics better.

Up to now we have described the broad rhythms of the movement in the six months which it took to go through the whole of France. Examining it on a more local level, i.e. at the level of district or department, and concentrating on a more precise analysis by *décade*,* accentuates the convulsive nature of the phenomenon, whether there was one or several successive outbursts. We are well acquainted with the brutality of the Parisian episode, which has been analysed by Bernard Plongeron. The great majority of the abdications, which we can date precisely, took place between the middle of Brumaire and the end of Frimaire – indeed, we might almost be tempted to say between 20 and 30 Brumaire, immediately following the abdication of Bishop Gobel. This feature is far from being unique to Paris, and we discovered it in Provence when we did our first studies: 85 per cent of the abdicators, here somewhat later, occurred in Ventôse and Germinal, and 35 per cent were in the single *décade* from 20 and 30 Ventôse. To make the point even more strongly there were

* The periods of ten days into which the months of the Republic were divided.

forty-eight abdications on one day of this same *décade* in the district of Marseille, all of which makes the idea of a spontaneous movement highly suspect. Other people have confirmed similar situations elsewhere. In Allier, there was the case of a group of priests from the district of Moulins, all of whom abdicated on the same day. Some departments, at the instigation of a representative on mission (as occurred with Albitte) went to extremes. In Ain, 95 per cent of the abdications from the district of Bourg took place during the second decade of Pluviôse, 100 per cent from Belley and 98 per cent from Montferme (formerly Saint Rambert) during the following *décade*, and the department of Mont Blanc showed the same characteristics and pattern. The south-west is full of examples of this type. In Gers 83 per cent of the abdications happened in Frimaire, while in Haute-Garonne 74 per cent took place in Ventôse, and in Aude 55 per cent during the third *décade* of Floréal.

Additional examples would be superfluous: the evidence is there, even if we contrast with these brutal, single-peak profiles those cases where the curve was bi-polar, in successive pushes (as in Isère, in the district of Tour du Pin, at the end of Frimaire and again at the end of Pluviôse). This model can also be found at the other end of France, in Normandy, where the early thrust of Frimaire was followed by a later and a more vigorous one in Ventôse/Germinal and occasionally Floréal, or in some areas where abandonment of the priesthood was less overt and was spread over six months. In these places, clearly, the operations were not carried out with any great noise or publicity.

Nevertheless, we should not conclude from these external signs, however widespread, that there were no spontaneous – or even enthusiastic – abdications. The personal testimonies of some priests, which we shall shortly be discussing, are themselves the proof of it, but even at this point it is clear from the way that proceedings unfolded that, in every place, before the flood of abdications, there were priests coming forward who wanted to marry, to leave their assignments, or even to renounce their priesthood. There had been no pressure on them: indeed, some of them – like a parish priest from Ardèche – complained that they were being blocked by the lack of understanding shown by 'sullen' administrators. The initial sequence of truly spontaneous abdications varies in its timing according to the place. In the Mediterranean Midi we have worked out that those which occurred prior to Nivôse (i.e. before the main campaign was unleashed in these areas) were of this type: they make up 10 per cent of the total, which is not insignificant. A similar count in the sout-west results in a figure of 7 per cent. But we know instinctively that these results have to be treated with extreme caution. In Nivôse, abandonment of the priesthood was already in full swing in the area around Lyons or the centre of France, and had already been completed two months before in Paris and the surrounding districts!

The modalities of abdication

It is best to begin by examining the statements of the interested parties themselves. However impressionistic it might be, this collective discourse is none the less fascinating, even if the confessions apply to only a minority of the individuals. We must examine initially the formal structure of the abdication process. It is of fundamental importance, and to criticize us for not having discussed it until now would not be unreasonable. Our justification – previously stated – is that this information was not necessary for an overall assessment of the movement which was imposed. It does, however become important for an appreciation of what happened in the life of all the people involved, particularly when we put ourselves in their places and share their experiences.

The descriptions and the addresses which we have utilized reflect the way in which the operation was conducted. A number of addresses were sent to the Convention, whether directly or not, and it is in this collection of over 700 documents that we find traces of the early and spontaneous abdications, although we know that basically this is only a very selective sample.

By the same token, the Convention also gave personal hearings to some priests themselves, especially those from neighbouring departments, Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne or Oise, but sometimes also from a distance, who sought to imitate Gobel and his vicars-general, as did most of the clerics elected as deputies to the Convention. But the main part of the information comes from districts which had established lists and summaries, and centralized the abdications. Usually it was the municipalities, especially in towns of some importance, who received the declarations from the priests, and subsequent notification of it cannot always be found, which certainly does not facilitate research. Using this enormous body of information enables us to get some feeling for all the ambiguities of the term 'abdicator'. The difficulty of giving definitions to its varied forms became apparent towards the end of the period, when Cardinal Caprara undertook the delicate task of reconciling them with the church. A codification was established at the time, to which scholars have referred (sometimes with difficulty) ever since, so diverse were its manifestations.

Making priests abdicate was undoubtedly not the idea at first. The initial plan was to make them get married. In Cher and Nièvre, priestly marriage preceded abdication, and it was sanctioned and practised by constitutional bishops like Torne in Cher. We therefore come across married priests who have not abdicated, and who sometimes continue doggedly with the exercise of their ministry. But even so, particularly from the end of Brumaire, following Gobel's example, it was priestly abdication that was to become the most

popular practice, whether or not it was confirmed by marriage as the extension of it.

Renunciation ... but in what form? Although they did not amount to a cumulatively escalating process, several procedures were instituted. Some priests simply resigned their livings and ceased performing their office, sometimes qualifying the act by specifying 'public office', or even stating 'until it may be necessary' to resume it. Very quickly, however, a veritable abdication formula was established ... but abdication from what? The more prudent ones, or the more reserved, stated precisely: 'abdicates (from) his priestly function' – which, for the purposes of discussion, is almost identical with the previous example. So they were frequently requested to add the words 'without intending ever to take it up again'. To be more specific, the words which came to be used most often were 'abdicates from his function and his state of priesthood' or 'his situation as a priest'. Sometimes it went even further. The practice quickly grew of requiring letters of priestly authority to be given up, as a pledge that an individual's previous state had indeed been repudiated. Attentive authorities took charge of them and, in more cases than one, these documents were used to fuel an iconoclastic *auto-da-fé*. There were, however, quite a number who attempted to evade this obligation imposed on them, by claiming to have misplaced their letters of authority. This test reinforced and aggravated the implications of the declaration of abdication, or at least it was considered to do so at the time of the Consulate. Was it really without recourse? More than one priest considered that handing over the paper, however precious it might have been, would not of itself deprive him of his priesthood. Some even said as much. They 'handed in their letters ... without implying in any way that this deprived them of their priesthood'. How many others thought it? So here is another ambiguous category, that of the 'traitors' who handed in their letters but did not become abdicators by doing so!

The final stage in the growth, or the escalation, of the abdication process was that of the 'blasphemers' – these were the ones who crowned their abdication or their apostasy by an explicit declaration. Here we have to include first of all those who were blasphemers in spite of themselves – the signatories of the famous 'oath' which the representative Albitte imposed on the priests of Ain, Mont Blanc and, to a lesser degree (at the end), Isère:

> I the undersigned ... carrying out the duties of priest since ... under the title of ... convinced of the errors that I have professed for far too long, declare in the presence of the municipality of ... that I renounce it for ever. I declare equally that I renounce, abdicate and repudiate as falsehood, illusion and imposture, all the supposed characteristics and function of priesthood, which I certify by depositing here in the office of the aforementioned party all my warrants, titles, and letters. I swear in consequence, before the Justices of the people, whom I

> recognize as all-powerful and wise, never to pride myself on the abuses of the priestly calling which I renounce; to maintain Liberty and Equality with all my strength; to live and to die for the establishment of the Republic, one, indivisible, and democratic, under pain of being declared a base villain, a perjurer and an enemy of the people, and to be treated as such.

The group of signatories of the oath of Albitte was enormous in at least two departments (Ain, Mont Blanc), but was not unknown elsewhere, as for example in Isère, in the Massif Central, and in a small way in the south-west or in Normandy. But even without this model there existed a group of 'blasphemous' priests who, relying on their own inspiration, drafted statements of their apostasy couched as professions of faith: and in these cases there was no possible doubt.

Finally, we should not underestimate one last category which has not been included under the previous headings but which is nevertheless not insignificant. Like other current researchers we have to consider as 'abdicators in fact' the clergy who abandoned the priesthood, often got married, and made no attempt at subsequent reconciliation. They left no declarations, nor do they figure in any table of classification. The possible loss or the destruction of documents has been one factor here, but the silent abandonment of the priesthood played its part, though without access to the detailed or indiscreet notebooks of local scholars it is difficult to appreciate the full extent of this last group.

The priests' dilemma

In the overall scale of renunciation of the priesthood, using one formula or the other, we begin to understand more clearly the dilemma of the priests, their tricks of avoidance and their attempts to preserve the essentials. From one end of France to the other, their rather pathetic little ruses were very similar: letters of priestly authority have gone astray, or been burned, or entrusted to a friend – convoluted formulas introduced as safeguards. On the other side of the coin, we sometimes come across the willing complicity of sympathetic authorities and sometimes, conversely, a degree of authoritarian vigilance which becomes increasingly meticulous as experience grew. In Ardèche, for example, a whole series of declarations had to be re-done, as they were judged after the event to be inadequate. And, as we know, it was to a former priest, experienced in the twists and turns of casuistry, that the representative Albitte entrusted the drawing-up of his famous 'oath'. One can well understand that under these circumstances a whole geographical pattern evolved, tracing the

intensity of the dechristianizing pressure, and trying to estimate the relative importance of those who resigned and those who were abdicators pure and simple. Thus, for example, it is not difficult to pick out in the south-west the territory covered by the representative Dartigoeyte – the Landes, Haute-Garonne, Lot, all with very high rates of abdication (84, 96 and 100 per cent respectively) – in the same way that the presence of Lequinio and Laignelot in Charente Inférieure brought in their wake a score of 98 per cent. By contrast, some of the Pyrenean departments appeared relatively untouched (Ariège, 13 per cent of abdicators). In the south-east quarter, the contrast was very marked between the departments around Lyons, where the pressure was strong (Saône-et-Loire and Loire with 61 and 66 per cent of abdicators, Ardèche and Drôme where two-thirds or more of the priests abdicated, or at least handed in their letters of priestly authority) and the Alps and the Provençal Midi, where the ones who simply resigned were often in the majority (71 per cent in the district of Aix).

In this dubious struggle, we can well understand the caution with which the authorities presented the list of their successes. In some cases (though not very many) they risked a true status report of the supposed feelings of the abdicators within their jurisdiction. In the district of Lyon-Campagne, those who were considered to be patriotic, or even very patriotic, totalled 60 per cent, leaving 32 per cent for doubtful elements and 7 per cent 'fanatics'. It was better than at Montélimar, where roughly a third of patriots faced almost as many 'hypocrites' and 'fanatics', leaving the balance to a whole morass of elements that were doubtful or at best indifferent. It is true to say that scorn seemed to dominate these assessments, which were often full of irony: 'a philosopher ... a libertine ... likes women' or even 'debauched in every way ... a real peasant, works his own plot ... a good hunter'!

Under these circumstances one is tempted to view with legitimate suspicion the statements made by the parties themselves, who were in such a humiliating position. To be strictly accurate, all that we know about many of them, or even the large majority of them, was simply what they handed in: a name, a signature, their letters of priestly authority, or at best a few embarrassed phrases. Some, however, made an explicit declaration, containing the elements of a carefully constructed statement. These have been classified, perhaps too facilely, with the group of 'blasphemers'. There were not many of them: in the south-east I came across 162 declarations of this type, a little less than 4 per cent of the abdicators. When this line of research is extended across the whole of France it results in a comparable order of magnitude and, basically, more confirmatory elements than new ones.

By virtue of this, then, there is nothing absurd about the totality of these statements, with the relative homogeneity of their variations on a number of

dominant themes. And behind what can be ascribed to constraint, or to the force of circumstances, behind the silences and the dissimulations, can be discerned a totally coherent view.

The statements of the blasphemers

'Blasphemers' really did exist, although they were not in the majority (a fifth of those who spoke out in the south-east). And what did they reject in religion? Fanaticism, through their profession which had been 'vilified by fanaticism' (Asselin, at Cherbourg, 2 Frimaire); superstition, or 'the errors and superstitions contained in the aforementioned Catholic religion' (the parish priest of Sauvetat, 25 Vendémiaire); the puerilities denounced by Pancrace Robert, a priest from Manosque, when he declared that 'the French people, who have been deceived for far too long by religious puerilities, are at last opening their eyes;' charlatanism and lies (Janot, the parish priest from Raissac, wanted 'to pay homage to Reason by the sacrifice of his rights to charlatanism and lies'); and similarly Louis Valentin Chalon, at Saint Brice en Cogles (Ile-et-Vilaine) 'regretted having been the minister of lies'. At the very least, the world they are rejecting is that of stupidity and error, which needs to be exorcized. This wish was expressed by Bouchet, the parish priest of Saint Denis Malgloirès, when he cried 'Death to those who aid and abet prejudice and to all the errors committed in the name of religion.' His colleague Rocourt, the parish priest of Berles-Berlette in the Pas-de-Calais, was rather more moderate in his conclusions: 'Being more of a Republican than a priest, I hastened to return to Berles-Berlette after attending the Feast of Peace at Arras ... I wanted to prepare everyone to accept and to conform to the new calendar ... when an idiotic neighbour, a parish priest, came and spoiled everything ... If we want to banish error, we must examine priests much more closely and exclude the fanatics.' This sentiment is reflected by Jumet, an episcopal curate in Creuse who stated succinctly: 'It is only rascals or idiots who would persist any longer in keeping the people in error.'

Linking together self-criticism and denunciation, it is clear that the majority refrained from making an overt attack on the God of Christianity, and some were anxious to differentiate between fanaticism and impiety. 'As an enemy of fanaticism as of impiety, I shall try to instil into you the love of order,' declared Gautier, the pastor at Cros, who offered his services as an officer of morality. But some went further, denouncing the Christian God of vengeance. Dauthier, from Saint Sauveur, the former canon of Puy, viewed 'with horror, as unworthy and destructive of the existence of a Creator, any opinion which would turn Him into a strange, unjust and wicked being'.

Very few denied Jesus Christ, the results of doing so being very mixed any-

way, if we are to believe the pious account given in the records from Lyons of the interview of Drivon, who was incidentally a refractory priest, with the Revolutionary Commission in that city. He thought he would save his life by abandoning his priesthood and renouncing Jesus. According to some reports, Parrein, the President of the Commission, replied: 'You are a wicked villain. Jesus Christ was the first one to preach Liberty and Equality. As far as we are concerned, we have no intention of renouncing him.' According to other reports, he said: 'Jesus, deceiving men? Jesus, who was the best sans-culotte in the whole of Judea!'

For the majority, the grievances which they held against the religion they were repudiating resulted primarily from the exploitation of the credulity of the masses by stupidity, hypocritical charlatanism and the greed that resulted from it, which made it resemble a 'Golden Calf'. (Béchonnet in Allier enlightened the people on the 'prejudices which cost them so dear and which were of interest only to the priests'). And finally, this religion had joined hands with tyranny. Dauthier, the canon of Puy, learned from history that it had 'inundated both hemispheres with torrents of blood in the name of the God of Peace,' despotism and fanaticism were intimately linked, and people spoke of 'fanatical despots' as of 'priestly despotism.'

In the face of such brutal condemnations, it would be reasonable to ask what account those who admitted having been 'ministers of error' themselves gave. Some pleaded a vocation which had been forced on them, 'the result of the pressure which his late father had exerted on him' (Blanc, curate of the chapel of ease at Salon). Those who admitted having been themselves deceived by 'the result of a superstitious education' (Guillard, parish priest in the Loire) were rather more numerous, expressing sentiments similar to Martin, the parish priest of Cosnac, who wished to recant the 'errors which unprincipled men had inculcated in me'. The most frequent excuse came down to repudiating all complicity with a cult from which they had long since become detached: 'Although I have been a priest for twenty-one years,' said Renoux from Marseille,' I have never exercised my ministry but have simply educated children.' Bonamy at Condom affirmed 'I abandon all duties of this type in accordance with the vows which I made long ago and by virtue of which I have abstained for many years from the exercise of these functions.' More laconically, Mivet, in Corrèze, 'exercised them only rarely'.

Tortured or enthusiastic

For some who played a double game by 'laying aside titles which they had retained only in order to be able to combat fanaticism' (Estournel, Gard), and who therefore themselves ended up in the acrobatic position of having to

denounce these 'hypocritical charlatans to whom perjury is nothing,' there were others who confided, with apparently complete sincerity, the story of a painful adventure. 'I approached the altar only very rarely, with a repugnance which increased from day to day' (Béchonnet, Allier). These are more like victims of torture, who pleaded guilty, sometimes unreservedly: 'Citizens, I deceived you for a long time by telling you things which I did not believe myself, but I did not dare tell you the truth because I was alone ... I solemnly forswear, I ask forgiveness from the very ground, I rend my cassock and I fall on my knees before the people.' These were extreme cases when compared with the majority group of those who alleged justification, or attenuating circumstances. Far from being ministers of error, they preached only virtue. In Gard, a number of Protestant ministers confirmed this: 'I preached to men virtue and universal morality ... drawn from the book of Nature' (Elie Dumas). But the Catholic priest is not far behind, resigning without shame the 'functions which he flatters himself he has never abused to halt the progress of Liberty, of Equality, of Philosophy, and of democratic government' (Guiraud, district of Moulins), or the 'ministry he had exercised with the intention of serving the country and the Revolution, and from which he resigns today with the same objective' (Dubasque, in the Landes).

Faithful defenders of the Revolution? There were many who pleaded convincing acts of service in years gone by, particularly on the most dangerous fronts where patriots were in a minority. A parish priest from Lozère recalls the affronts he had endured at the time of the constitutional oath; one of his neighbours from Hérault confirms that it is far from being over and that 'the aristocracy raised difficulties and created unpleasantness for them in more ways than one.' Patriotic priests did indeed exist: they became presidents of popular societies, they enlisted in the Republican armies, they were persecuted by the federalists. However, they were not necessarily the ones who cried loudest 'I have always been a sans-culotte. Long live the Montagne, long live the Republic, one and indivisible. Long live the Jacobins and the sans-culottes' (Bouchet, Gard), 'Long live the Sainte Montagne. Long live the Convention which has so often saved us. Long live the Constitutional Authorities. Signed: Nalin, sans-culotte' (parish priest from the Basses-Alpes).

The circumstances of abdication

Although the abdicators might recall their past and their progress in terms such as these, it is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that they were rather more niggardly about the details surrounding the precise circumstances of their action. We know very little about those who refused: they were often the obscure combatants of a constitutional church whose heroes have never been

sung by conventional historiography. We know somewhat better the statements made by the constitutional bishops, Roux in Marseille, Laurent in Allier, Torné in Cher, Delcher in Haute Loire, and most of them are not lacking in dignity. But they gave in, where others held firm. In Lyons for examples, Philippe Duval – who even so was a member of a political club at Amplepuis – affirmed that 'he would give his head rather than renounce a title so honourable,' adding that 'he regarded priesthood as a grace from God.' But no doubt he had nothing to lose before the Revolutionary Tribunal, where his fate was sealed. More modestly, others stated the point beyond which they would not go, declaring that 'they would give up their ministry but without intending to abandon their priesthood.'

In the great mass of those who actually took the step, unreserved jubilation is rare, even if we do come across it in the parish priest from Chiroubles who announced 'the happy moment when he forsook his priesthood,' or in the parish priest from Lot and Garonne who 'renounced with great pleasure his profession as a priest'. On the other side of the coin, there were a few who admitted the fear which made them act 'so as not to arouse suspicion' or 'to keep malicious tongues quiet'. They were timid, anxious even, and wanted to 'abdicate in the best possible way'. These were often the ones who pleaded age, weariness, 'failing sight and health' in the case of the parish priest Sarmet from Marseilles, while one of his colleagues from the Hautes-Alpes confessed, with tragic simplicity, 'that he no longer had either the age or the courage.' Perhaps he should have followed the stimulating example of his colleague Latil, the parish priest from Niozelles in the Basses-Alpes, who stated that, if he were successful in a lawsuit currently in progress, he would 'not be afraid of giving new proofs of his civic loyalty by taking a wife'.

The best documented group, significantly, is that of the priests who abdicated 'to obey the law'. When we try to discover which particular piece of legislation they are referring to, we find somewhat surprisingly that the one in question is usually that of 2 Frimaire, generally held to be the one which put an end to the most violent dechristianization by proclaiming the freedom of religion. We can assess from this the gulf which separates history as seen from Paris from that seen in the provinces. In fact, most of the priests do not refer to a specific clause, and content themselves with abdicating 'to demonstrate complete submission to *the law*'. This is an attitude in which some pastors, like Gachon in Nîmes, joined more explicitly, stating that 'passive obedience to the law has always been one of our most fundamental principles.' This was irrespective of the fact that this abstract law contained fairly exact clauses based on an authority which was nearer home, that of popular society, or even simply 'the general wish' or 'public opinion'. One particular parish priest from Gard stated that he was abdicating 'having always had the will of the people as the guide for his actions'. And we quote the letter of a minister from the

Hautes-Alpes only because of its involuntary note of humour: he forgot that he was writing to his bishop, and resigned as his 'most humble and obedient sans-culotte'. In seeking out the 'blasphemers' we discover a clergy which is astonishingly docile.

For all that, we should not underestimate the conscientiousness of those who very clearly made a political and moral choice, and said so. We meet them in the ranks of the constitutional bishops like Laurent in Aillier: 'Today I judge my functions useless and even harmful to the Republic. I therefore abdicate them.' A similar attitude lies behind this statement from a simple parish priest who believed that 'his functions were incompatible with the prosperity of the Republic' (Reynaud, the parish priest of Tarascon), or that 'the advance of the Revolution no longer permitted him to exercise his pastoral functions.' Jean Radier, a parish priest from Lansargues in Hérault, perhaps gives us the key when he cries: 'Now that the state of priesthood contravenes the happiness of the people, and hinders the progress of the Revolution, I abdicate from it and throw myself into the arms of society.'

'I throw myself into the arms of society'

Whether this was the expression of a wish or an act of confidence, these priests were ready to enter into the service of the new world established by the Revolution. In the future which they were planning, some of them claimed the right to an interior religion ('the only one which is pleasing to the Supreme Being,' said the parish priest Béchonnet from Allier), but others had clearly kicked over the traces and rallied unreservedly to the religion of nature. At Vire, as early as 15 Frimaire, citizen Soublet, a priest, declared: 'The only cult which is appropriate for reasonable men should confine itself to the practice of social virtues, and morality ought to be the only basis for universal religion.' How many people echoed him? Jumet, the episcopal curate from Creuse, 'swore to recognize no other gospel than the Act of Constitution'. Jeysine, the parish priest from Solomia in Gers, 'will in future have no God other than that of nature, and will offer Him no worship other than that of Reason'. Lugan Jaume, in Lot, 'recognizes no other religion than that of the practice of Republican virtues'. Baret at Vitrolles (Bouches-du-Rhône) 'abdicates from every religious creed and will in future preach only that of Liberty and of Equality.'

By throwing themselves in this way 'into the arms of society' and recognizing no religion other than that of natural law, these priests were basically giving a massive vote for one ambition only: to become (again) 'simple citizens, ... good citizens' or 'true Republicans' (but rarely, in spite of a few exceptions, 'sans-culottes'). This transformation was regarded by some, whose

thought patterns had not changed, as being in some way miraculous: for example, the writer, from Loire, of the 'Letter to a Patriotic priest aged 23 who became a citizen at 24'. More tangibly, they offered their services, and in a very real way. More than one enlisted in the Republican army, like Guyon the former parish priest of Saint Esprit at Aix, who joined the democratic Dragoons and displayed 'as much zeal (in this post) as he had previously in the exercise of his ministry'. Those who were not of the stuff of which soldiers are made turned very naturally to teaching as a career. Some wished to continue preaching: Niehl, the former canon from Allier, proposed that he should become 'the preacher of Liberty, Equality, Republicanism,' and Baret, whom we have already met at Vitrolles, wanted only 'to preach the creed of Liberty and of Equality'. In addition to these civic vocations, there were also country priests who dreamed of 'dedicating themselves to agriculture,' or even of 'cultivating a small field where, breathing the pure air of Liberty, they might bless the Republic,' and there were some who announced their intention of 'contracting marriage with a virtuous wife,' although, barring a few exceptions, this was usually done without ostentation.

Reconciling religion and revolution?

If finally our abdicators are not very forthcoming (they are frankly even evasive) on the subject of the future they imagined for themselves, they do wax much more eloquent on the collective future they dream about for their country, and with which contrast they exorcize the past and its darkness. In the discovery of this new, shining world that they are pleased to evoke, what part is played by genuine conformism and authentic adherence to the new order? We would do well not to try to determine this too quickly. Indeed, in the case of more than one of the thirty or so individual accounts which we have at our disposal, we can sense without any doubt the feeling of a personal adventure which was an essential experience of his life.

The first ones still dreamed of that compromise, or rather of that encounter, between Religion and Revolution which was the dream of the constitutional Church. 'There can be no true happiness until Religion unites its influence with that of the Revolution,' we read in an address called 'The views of a patriotic parish priest,' written during Vendémiaire and sent from Isère to the Convention on the very eve of the explosion of the violent dechristianizing movement. Two months later it was another priest, this time from Allier, who replied to this unreasonable claim, the failure of which seemed to him to have been established: 'These very priests who wished to christianize the Revolution, these same priests. Oh power of truth! The priests give homage to it and demand civic baptism.'

Civic baptism: that is really what it is about, for a whole group of those who stress the almost mystical discovery of a new system of values which now imposed itself on them with all the power of a new religion. 'The great day when truth comes down from the heavens has finally arrived' (Béchonnet, Allier). 'I opened my eyes to Reason' (Escoffier, Ardèche).

Is it really a question of a new 'cult', as a number of these invocations would lead us to think? If some of them talk of 'the sovereignty of Reason' (Guiradon, parish priest of Monroc, Basses-Alpes, 'The Republic cannot exist without the sovereignty of Reason'), others (Allier, Loire, Hautes-Alpes) have no hesitation in turning it into a genuine cult, while others again see in precisely this triumph of Reason the destruction of all religion ('Reason and justice have no need for religion,' Vaisset, parish priest of the district of Donjon) or stress in Rousseauistic terms the uselessness of all creeds because 'the whole Universe is the temple of the Eternal.'

From such fine but nevertheless important distinctions, as expressed by these former ministers of the Catholic faith, we can appreciate just how truly permeable the constitutional priests were – and this could not have been totally hypocritical – to the system of values which inspired the dechristianizers, even in its own internal divergences. While they might have been constrained and forced, these constitutional priests were nevertheless intimately penetrated by and, as it were, impregnated with a language and a philosophy which they applied with familiarity: and they certainly appeared at the beginning to be in a state of minimal resistance to a system which they disputed without conviction.

6
The married priests

We have no wish to revive the memory of the scandal by making a separate issue of married priests. There is a clear distinction between their story and that of the priests who abdicated, even if the two do have some common ground. The marriage of priests began before dechristianization, in some cases as early as 1790, and at that time it was the spontaneous choice of a few individuals; the real fire burst forth from 1793 to 1794, with a rush of frequently forced unions, which represented the peak of the movement. But during Thermidor, and to some extent just after the Concordat, the number of recorded cases was by no means negligible, as can be seen from the pattern which emerged in the different regions of France.

It was not the same types of priest who married, before, during, and after the surge of Year 2, and we shall be discussing this. But the importance of the dechristianizing crisis can be explained partly by the deliberate policy of certain representatives – in the centre, in the north (Dumont), in Charente-Maritime (Lequinio), or in the area of Lyons – who made it a point of honour to conduct priestly marriage ceremonies, as this was the most spectacular and for them the most demonstrative manifestation of the break with the past. Thus it was that the campaign for marriage, even in the two consecutive periods of winter 1793 and spring 1794, often anticipated the campaign for laïcization, which replaced it in part as a lesser (?) form of attack on the body of the priesthood.

The records of Cardinal Caprara

We know these priests fairly well and, over half of them, almost too well. Cardinal Caprara was the Papal Legate who, at the time of the Concordat, had the delicate task of reconciling those who wished to come back into the bosom

Table 6.1 The number of married priests

Quarter	*before 1794*	*1794 (Year 2)*	*after Thermidor*	*after the Concordat*
South-west	21%	40	33	5
South-east	22%	51	20	7
North-west	3%	74	20	3
North-east	13%	58	21	1

of the Church. He left in his records, as well as in the accompanying correspondence, the opportunity of being able to follow the details of more than 3000 of these lambs who had gone astray – married priests in the large majority of cases (over 80 per cent). Not all had made themselves known, and, on the basis of accurate samples of areas which have been studied in detail, we can estimate that the real number of married priests was around 6000. This order of magnitude represents a form of compromise between the number suggested at the time by Abbot Gregory – approximately 2000 – and the pessimistic estimate of Caprara who increased it to 12,000. But we should also appreciate that if one of them tended to minimize the wrong, the other was inclined to exaggerate it. Let us not get into a debate which is both academic and at the same time frequently led by religious historians who have underlying but very obvious motives. All that remains to be said is that the treatment of the records (of which all the details have been published) and the notes of Caprara have left us with a body of almost 3000 usable cases (2959), which are typical of the whole.

These numbers are by no means split evenly around the ideal average of thirty-five cases per department. Indeed, the divergences are very significant. Almost ten departments had less than five marriages, but we can reckon 132 in Paris, 110 in Oise, 107 in the Pas de Calais, 103 in Saône-et-Loire, and a further 101 in Aisne. The general map shows marked contrasts in absolute numbers, and is significantly different by comparison with other tests of dechristianization. (See figures 7, 8 and 10.) We can see there, of course, the major poles of the movement: the Paris Basin, but more in its northern part than to the east; then the axis Paris-Lyons-Grenoble, and the epicentre of Saône-et-Loire at Vienne, the departments of the centre, the south of France offering rather more discontinuous poles – from Rochefort to Bordeaux, around Toulouse, Montpellier or Marseilles – against the background of a territory which was much less affected by the practice. If we extend the analysis further by relating these figures to the numbers of clergy by department (that

is to say those clergy who were subject to the solemn declaration of 1790), or to the number of clergy who were effectively constitutional in 1791 (those who had agreed to be bound by the declaration), the geographical distribution of the impact of marriage becomes more precise. We recognize, of course, just how approximate this comparison is: between a fifth and a quarter of the married clergy, as we shall see in a moment, were religious who did not fit into the above framework. Even so, we should not lose sight of the overall weighting of the numbers for what they do actually tell us. Based on a sample of 4 to 5 per cent of the clergy affected by the declaration (3.5 per cent if we adjust it for the weighting of the other religious), the part of France most seriously affected still appears to be heavily concentrated around the region of Paris on the one hand, and the central belt reaching from Deux Sèvres to the Ain or to the Isère on the other, with a secondary axis running north-south from Lyons to Marseilles.

But other factors come into play which enhance the comparison of the number of married priests with the number of constitutional priests on the one hand and with abdicated priests on the other.

The politics of priestly married – the brutal expression of a provocative dechristianization – also had a significant impact on zones where the clergy were constitutionally weak and areas where the numbers of abdications were comparatively low. Examples of this can be found in the west – in the Armorican borders – and also in the whole northern frontier area, stretching from the departments of Nord and the Pas-de-Calais to Moselle. We might be tempted to conclude that the marriage of priests in overall terms had affected northern France much more than the Midi (more than 1000 marriages in the north-east quarter as against 300 in the south-west), were it not for the fact that we also have to take into account those other frontier areas where dechristianization was more marginal but nevertheless highly provocative, and which are exemplified by departments that were sometimes rebellious but where there were more marriages than abdications: Côtes du Nord and Finistère in the west; the Ardennes, Moselle or the Vosges in the east; Lot, Aveyron or Lozère to the south of the Massif Central.

The map here shows up the individual actions of missionary representatives or of activist groups, as well as the specific involvement of priests who were breaking bounds in these regions. We shall need to reconsider this when we come to attempt an overall interpretation of the event of dechristianization. Just as significant as the areas where an unexpectedly high proportion of marriages resulted from spontaneous action were other sectors where the solemn declaration was made by large numbers and which in contrast were scarcely affected by the marriage of priests. This was the case particularly in the Rhône and Alpine south-east, as also in part of the south-west.

Table 6.2 The types of married priests

In %	*parish priests*	*supply priests*	*curates*	*higher clergy*	*deacons*	*religious*	*total*
North-west	24		4	5		13	54
North-east	35	10	4	2		21	27
South-west	45		2	4	6	15	28
South-east	41		11	8		16	23

Sociology of the group

Married priests, therefore, are not a simple variant of abdicating priests, who broke completely with their former status. The sociology of the group, as a function of the status of its members, is quite different from that of the abdicators.

The important percentage of cases of indeterminate status (those who in their correspondence with Cardinal Caprara omitted to specify precisely their previous position) alters to some extent the value of the appraisal. It explains in part our divergence from the orders of magnitude of other researchers (Langlois and Le Goff: 26 to 28 per cent of religious). But the points of agreement are more important than those which are at variance. What is most striking is the lower percentage of parish priests and curates by comparison with the group of abdicators, and the significantly greater proportion (by a factor of two or even three in percentage terms) of religious, who as non-parochial priests must have formed a large proportion of the indeterminate cases (assuming that a number of them were to be reinstated as parochial clergy). In other words, religious or regular priests who were not tied to the service of a parish were more strongly attracted by marriage as the way to a new life. It is easy to understand the part played by religious in the premature and spontaneous marriages which occured before the autumn of 1793. Thus they represent, in the south-west for example, half the cases taken up during this sequence of events.

The age of these married priests depends directly on what has just been discussed above. These strays were young, at least significantly younger than those priests who abdicated. As reported in 1794, their average age was 37 in the north-west and south-west quarters (five to seven years less than the abdicators), 38 in the north-east (abdicators: 45), and 42 in the south-east, which reflects both the structure of an older clergy and the same division as elsewhere. In all locations, the age groups most often quoted are from 20 to 30

and from 30 to 40. On this point, our analysis agrees with that of Langlois and Le Goff. This verification is hardly unexpected: classical historiography has often stressed the massive defection of young priests ordained in haste by constitutional bishops at the beginning of the Revolution, and this is confirmed by some of the notes in the records of Caprara. But it is only one limited factor, and it does not take into account all aspects of the defection of clergy who on average were quite young.

These outlines need to be made more precise, for they provide an indispensable reference system, containing both the actions as well as the words, which enables us to appreciate more directly the adventure of priestly marriage. To do this, we have at our disposal the wonderful collective confession of the records of correspondence received by Cardinal Caprara after 1801. Albert Mathiez, who had the distinction of being the first person to draw attention to this previously unrecognized (or concealed) source, wrote of it: 'I know of few human documents of such gripping interest.' The commentaries on which he made this statement are tainted with anticlericalism and unquestionably dated, but, even so, they opened up a line of approach which is still fruitful. Only one part of the records, it is true, gave rise to real letters, and the usable balance is thereby reduced. However, hundreds of genuine confessions still exist, from all over France. These form a counterpoint to the discussion on abdicated priests as it has thus far been entered into, and indeed they are the extension of it ... eight years later.

The tears of Saint Peter: return to the past

From these letters we can retrace the path of the married priests, from the time they took holy orders through to the trauma which the Revolution represented, with the abandonment of their priesthood, and then marriage. There follows also the description of the way they lived, their professions and above all their family life, as a couple. In other words, there are many real-life stories here.

Reading what the married priests tell us of the way they came into the priesthood, we discover the first paradox, which if truth be told is easy to explain. Anyone who is interested in drawing an exaggerated picture of the clergy in 1789 – the sort of thing that was popular half a century ago – will find far more material in the dialogue between the married priests and Cardinal Caprara than in the statements of the 'blasphemers' of Year 2. There is no mystery here. A number of the abdicators claimed that their vocation was forced on them, and so any feeling of shame was superfluous when it came to getting permission to go back into the world, when a full and frank confession led to unquestioned nullification.

The group of those who pleaded an absence of vocation was by no means negligible; there were roughly forty in the southern half of France. 'At that time,' wrote J.A. Capelle, of Haute-Garonne, 'I did not have enough enlightenment nor enough hope to see the difference between truth and error.' Pleading inadequate time for reflection, Croze Montbrizet, a young Genevan who was admitted to holy orders at the age of 21, at Puy in 1787, 'wanted to find an easy and pleasant existence'. G. Dardène (in Lot) admitted to becoming a priest 'more from a spirit of self-interest than of religion'. Others, however, laid the blame on an error of youth, 'the allurements of the age' (Bellon, a canon at Puy at 16). For someone else it was 'an enthusiastic friendship for a college classmate' though for the most part it was simply a laconic admission that 'they had no vocation'. Almost as great a number claimed family pressure (thirty-five in the Midi), for example, J. Gautier (Lot), who had become a priest 'out of respect or rather out of reverential fear'. Or Jacques Didier, from Mont Blanc: 'When he was very young his parents persuaded him with great insistence to take up the ecclesiastical life, with the intention of achieving a happy future for him. They had a large family, and their means were very slender.' Another example was Aimé Latailliède (Lot) recalling the memory of an old uncle, a canon at Moissac, who wished to pass on his living. Still others cited dark family conspiracies to reduce their excessive numbers. B. Burc (Haute-Garonne) entered the priesthood 'against his will, his brother having received all the favours from his father'. And Claude Counen in Ain had no hesitation in admitting that he embraced the ecclesiastical state 'in order to avoid the vengeance of his parents'. It is a long litany of individual adventures, where one was sent to work in the fields with the servants, until he came round to seeing the attractions of the ecclesiastical state, and another gave way to family blackmail following a youthful prank or an affair of the heart.

Can we legitimately link this roll-call of non-existent or stumbling vocations with the important group of priests ordained around 1789, fresh from the seminary, and, perhaps more important, those who were ordained by the constitutional bishops? Old historiography has emphasized this point, anxious to demonstrate that nothing good came out of the constitutional Church. We have to admit that these young priests seem to have shown little resistance to either pressure or temptation. Many had the tastelessness to claim the irregular circumstances of their excessively easy admission to holy orders as the reason for their right to secularization. Several had not reached the requisite age: for example, J. Leyssier (Dordogne), ordained 'at the age of 20, without age dispensation and without seminary training'; or Lalobre, in Drôme, who recalled that the authorities 'admitted him to each of the grades in rapid succession, so urgent was their need to replace the refractory priests'. And what can we say about those who pleaded historical accident, like J.F. Floyrac,

in Hérault, who took his vows 'only 15 days before the decree suppressing all religious orders'!

The memory of Year 2

Troubled and uncertain from the very beginning of the Revolution, these priests had to cope with the fearful trial of both dechristianization and the Terror. How heavily did this memory weigh on them? Out of a total of 543 explicit confessions from the southern half of France, there were 121 priests who made specific reference to it, i.e. a little less than a quarter. Is this a large or a small number? Against these, a much smaller group, a few dozen, recalled the Revolution without embarrassment and without regret, sometimes even with insolence. P. Genien, for example, in Charente Inférieure, evoked 'this triumphant torrent which happily wrenched him from his duties'; or Croze Montbrizet, in Haute-Loire, who invited the prelate to consider that 'the Revolution caused great changes.' Others were simply without complexes, like Silvio Cagnoti from Nice, still dazzled by the adventure he had lived through: 'Scarcely had the cries of Liberty echoed through Italy when, keen to break his chains and clasping his weapons, he went into battle under the colours of the Republic.'

These were extreme cases, as the majority of the priests who were satisfied with the outcome justified themselves in rather more embarrassed terms. P. Vacques (Lot-et-Garonne) confessed that 'it was his intention to please the authorities.' Barruel Labeaume, from Ardèche, who 'supported the Civil Constitution with his head rather than his heart,' added that he 'was opposed to all the impious proposals of the incendiaries'. And several pleaded a misunderstanding in good faith: 'I accepted this obedience in good faith without intending to separate myself from the Catholic Church.'

For most of them, however, the Terror remained the worst time of a Revolution perceived as cruel. A number of them, using stereotyped phrase, had already rewritten the Revolution in its immediate aftermath. 'The altars dedicated to the true God were overthrown, His temples completely devastated and turned into places of prostitution,' wrote one priest from the Var, while F. Morand, in Charente, recalled the time when 'all too unhappily in this country the altars were overturned and everything held most sacred was profaned.' 'A wretched time,' wrote Seren, the county official, 'when churches were pillaged and ministers forced to abandon their function.' And indeed for many of them the Terror was no idle word: it was their own, and they used it ... 'seized by terror and devoured by sorrow' (H. Labernade, Basses-Pyrenées), 'too weak and afraid' (J. Cassaing, Aveyron), 'sick with terror'

(Barral, Isère), 'drawn into the whirlpool of the Revolution and led by panic' (Mathieu, Hérault). Like a repetitive theme of lamentation these words of fear punctuate the chronicle of these difficult times, making it hard to justify the description of 'a momentary aberration'.

Still referring to the southern half of France, forty-five married priests out of 240 in this group – 18 per cent – made explicit declarations of persecution, or of pressure being applied to them. We should almost certainly have expected a higher number to plead a case such as theirs, particularly as the argument was not the sort to be concealed. Ten or so were imprisoned, and as many subjected to the blackmail of prison itself or of marriage, 'urged by the lawful authorities to commit themselves to the bonds of marriage, and in the case of refusal threatened with all the horrors of persecution' (Chanouillac, Charente Inférieure). This is the sort of case which we continue to find frequently in the Alps, where the oath of Albitte was rigorously applied, as it was in the area around Lyons. J.B. Monat, a priest from Lyons, 'had only been able to escape death by undertaking to the official representative that he would get married'. J.B. Romieu, from Gers, concluded piteously: 'after twenty-two months in prison, I was forced to take a wife,' while Fernex, from Savoy, confessed that he had agreed to be married for 500 francs offered to him by the representative on mission.

In all these statements of retrospective denunciation, the representatives were constantly cited as the people most responsible: the best known, and some who are slightly less well known, were Wacquier in the Pas-de-Calais, Lebon and Buisson in Seine-et-Oise, Couturier and Musset in Oise, Dumont in Aine. In the south-west, the names quoted were Mallarmé in Haute-Garonne, Dartigoeyte and Paganal in Dordogne or in Gers, and Lequinio in Charente-Maritime. In the south-east it was the name of Albitte which recurred most frequently throughout this correspondence: in the Alpine districts he appeared as the pre-eminent persecutor of the terrorized priests. But other priests also (in Charente, in Ain, or in Calvados, as just part of a review which in no way claims to be exhaustive) denounced the commando expeditions of the revolutionary armies and the village Terror – and denounced them in equal terms, sometimes even more strongly than the representatives themselves. 'In the midst of such a terrible storm the calm of my little parish only ten kilometres from Trévoux – a centre which reflected every sort of crime – was such that it soon scandalized the revolutionaries of that town. By order of the Revolutionary Committee of Trévoux I was arrested and put into prison.' Elsewhere 'the so-called revolutionary army not only overturned the altars but also imprisoned the priests' (J.J. Giraud, Isère).

From these impressionistic testimonies we can draw up a map of the village Terror. Turning this into spatial reality, from the Lyonnais to Nièvre or to Charente-Maritime, owes nothing to chance, even if the limited number of

Table 6.3 Occupations of married priests

	North-west	*North-east*	*South-west*	*South-east*	*Total*
Teaching	58 (29%)	36 (31%)	24 (35%)	51 (36%)	169 (32%)
Law	31 (15%)	14 (12%)	10 (15%)	20 (14%)	75 (14%)
Administration	66 (33%)	30 (25%)	12 (17%)	20 (14%)	128 (24%)
Liberal professions	7 (3.5%)	6 (5%)	2 (3%)	15 (10%)	30 (5.6%)
Army	5 (2.5%)	3 (3%)	1 (1.5%)	5 (2.5%)	13 (2.5%)
Commercial or manual	22 (11.5%)	8 (7%)	9 (13%)	20 (14%)	59 (11%)
Landowning	8 (4%)	6 (5%)	4 (6%)	6 (4%)	24 (4.5%)
Agriculture	6 (3%)	8 (7%)	4 (6%)	7 (7%)	25 (4.5%)
Total (actual numbers)	203	117	68	141	529

these demonstrations which were based on memory prevents us from making imprudent extrapolations.

The married priests recalled these memories for the needs of the cause and their own justification, but did they really wish to banish those memories? We shall see them reappear, in terms of guilt and repentance, when they recall their relationship with the Church. We have to face the fact, however, that in the course of all their pain and suffering a new life began for them, the preoccupations of which centred on their profession and on family life.

A new life: professional retraining

Professional retraining, if we may permit ourselves to use a phrase which sounds so anachronistic, was at the heart of their anxieties in the past as it is, albeit in different terms, today. In the confusion of having abandoned their previous state many of them, as we shall see in a moment, found in marriage a means of subsistence, and Mathiez was not wrong in emphasizing this fact. Having become fathers of families, it was imperative for them to find a means of supporting wives and children. How did they respond to this? We know the profession taken up by a sufficiently large number of them (529 cases) for us to be able legitimately to extrapolate.

The overall convergence of the results from one region to another, in spite of the comparatively modest samples, supports the viability of the whole. In any event, the orders of magnitude obtained coincide quite specifically with

the proportions suggested by Langlois and Le Goff in their article on married priests, and this was based on a much more modest sample.

The facts are there: our priests switched substantially to the activities for which they were best prepared. They went primarily into teaching, which took roughly a third of them, with a remarkable degree of consistency from one region to another, although there were slightly more in areas of the Midi. The category includes a number of variants: in the Midi 45 to 46 per cent became primary school teachers, as against 64 per cent in the north-east, the balance being split equally between teachers in higher education and those in charge of private boarding schools.

Even more remarkable is the position held by administration, particularly when taken together with the legal professions (38 per cent of the total). There is also a marked contrast here between northern France, where the proportion was larger (48 per cent in the north-west quarter, 37 per cent in the north-east), and the lower share in southern France (south-west 32 per cent, south-east 28 per cent), even if the relative importance of the liberal professions in the south-east – doctors, veterinarians, health officials, notaries – corrects this imbalance to some extent. In summary, we have here a cluster of activities which with the army – sometimes just a transitory reception area and rarely a definite career – acounted for 45 per cent of the married priests. They felt very much at ease as civic officers, town clerks, or notaries. Franc, who became a notary in the Basses-Alpes, explains: 'This position is very similar to my original one, in that these functionaries are true mediators in family affairs.' But many simply vegetated in lowly jobs, clerks or petty officials in town halls or district offices. Even in these careers, however, breakthroughs were possible, which means that occasionally we come across a judge on a local circuit, a chief of police, sometimes a district sub-prefect. A few of those who stuck to a miltary career rose to an enviable position like a war commissioner or an officer of the Republican Guard.

Should we be surprised at the paucity of productive activities? A little over a tenth were in trade, commerce or manual work. Going into these activities presupposes a little luck, of which marriage was sometimes the instrument or the opportunity. The results were extremely variable. In this group we come up against the ostentatious opulence of merchants who married well (Tournachon in Lyons, Tuffet in Mâcon), and at the other extreme the very real poverty of some of those who were manual workers. These were generally lay brothers, disorientated by leaving their monasteries: 'I was the gardener at my monastery,' wrote one, 'and I can no longer bring myself now to work for others.' Chappelle, a convert from Lyons, who was another example, described himself as 'a poor and simple artisan;' and what are we to make of Claude Tur, a lay Capuchin brother, who became a carpenter and was virtually illiterate?

People like these found little favour in the eyes of Caprara, who was hard on the small men. It is perhaps also surprising to see the comparatively low number in agricultural occupations, again a slightly ambiguous group as we find there both landed gentry and true peasants. What became then of the abdicators who wanted to return to the land? Was that just a dream? In fact, it seems likely that those who returned to the obscurity of a peasant family or the anonymity of some other mechanical job, may well not have written to the Cardinal Legate, or if they did it was proportionately much less frequent.

Having made this overall review, we should not lose sight of those who remained in obscurity, and without doubt there were quite a number. When all is said and done, it was virtually inevitable that those priests who had broken their vows should declare their new activities. It was quite natural for them to indicate their civil status, as this was the major problem to be resolved. What is perhaps more unexpected is the touching – or perhaps vital – dedication they brought to the question of family. Of those who wrote to Caprara 80 per cent were married, and out of this total a whole group were fathers of families. All of them were faced with the problems of a new life.

The bonds of marriage

A whole thesis has been put forward, both at the time, in the correspondence with the Legate, and also taken up again and modified during the nineteenth century, in order to try to understand, to explain, and sometimes to excuse what has remained the ultimate scandal. Having recourse also to oral tradition, which we should not neglect, great stress has been placed on the number of marriages of convenience or of charity which took place – with an old servant, or with a relative, or innocent marriages with an old housekeeper, where the disproportion of age was such that no harm could be found in it. These cases certainly existed: we have come across them, and taken them into account. However, the general run of case histories, as revealed in the notes and correspondence of Cardinal Caprara, were very different. Out of a total of almost 3000 priests whom we followed up, some 2200 left sufficiently explicit traces for us to know their family situation. Of these a little more than 750, or 35 per cent, were fathers of families. This proportion varied noticeably from one region to another.

One could discuss at length this table of figures, for all its barren appearance, but we shall resist the temptation to do so. These couples joined together for less than ten years – indeed, for less than eight – did not stay infertile in more than a third of the cases. This depended on their ages: with the notable exception of the south-east, the average age of the wives – around 30 in the north-west and the south-west – made for a group which by and

Table 6.4 Priests' families

		North-west	*North-east*	*South-west*	*South-east*	*Total*
Average age of married priests		37	38	37	42	
Average age of spouses		30	(?)	31	45	
% of fertile unions		36%	31%	49%	28%	35%
Number of children						
in %	1	28	32	32	36	31
	2	24	30	30	24	27
	3	21	16	25	25	21
	4	10	10	8	13	11
More than	4	4	6	4	14	10
	?	11				

large was potentially fertile. The regional variations in the numbers of children reflect the differences in age of the couples between one area and another. However one looks at it, these are real families which evolved in less than ten years. Against the third with an only child, there are 42 per cent of households with three children or more.

These demographic considerations, whcih are incongruous only in outward appearance, lead us into the concrete realities of priestly marriage. Who were these women, of average age, who agreed, without any concern for social disapproval, to share these unusual lives? The statistical approach, even on modest samples, brings the clichés and the conventional stereotypes back into proportion. Some simulated marriages did indeed take place, but they were very few in number – three in the south-east, two in the north-west – although they did provide an important vindication. Thus we come across a priest from Isère, Joseph Percier, married 'by his parents' to an old lady of 73 with whom he lived 'like mother and son'. It is true that many of these simulated unions were arranged amicably, and this explains their rarity. Nevertheless, in the large majority of cases we are dealing with genuine marriages. Where were the wives found? Comparatively few, when all is said and done, came from the ranks of servants or housekeepers: three examples in the south-east, the same number in the south-west, eight in the north-west

quarter, and a dozen in the north-east. Marking out the points on the board in this way cannot claim to be in the least comprehensive, but it does bring back a sense of proportion to the question. Exactly the same sort of situation applies in the case of nuns who had left their convents. This did indeed happen, but there were not exactly crowds of them – we came across some sixty cases (63) covering three-quarters of northern France. In fact, it seems that help came most frequently from the families of the priests who were in difficulty. This was the case most often testified to (more than seventy examples) in the small sample which we have at our disposal and in which the wives are identified with some precision: a 'relative', sometimes without a more exact description, sometimes a sister-in-law, a cousin, or most frequently a niece.

The importance of this family support can be explained by the difficulty which many of these priests had in actually finding someone to marry. J.J. Person, for example, the former parish priest from Gard, confided that he married a Protestant, 'being unable to find a Catholic who would accept him'. He succeeded in converting her after they were married, and they lived together in chastity. But this was not the general rule. In a considerable number of cases it was an honest match that was made, sometimes even one to be envied: an 'honest woman', a 'young girl', of 'good family', and in some cases the family origin was stated specifically – the daughter of a surgeon, a teacher, or a merchant. For some of them, this union was the point of departure for a new life. H. Ménétrier, a priest in the Rhône district for 24 years, had been led 'by his destitution and by a momentary error (to become) the husband of a well brought-up young girl who had a considerable fortune', and from whom he concealed his status. Jacques Didier, from Mont Blanc, waited until 1801 to marry a young Parisian woman, by whom he had a child, and from whom similarly he concealed his circumstances, so he became a Parisian and 'carried on his business'. In contrast to these social successes we should recognize that the records also echoed failure, detailing stories which often struck a discordant note and were sometimes strangely comical: 'Marie-Anne Henry, by whom I have a child aged nine, has left me for a libertine who seduced her six months ago: consequently I no longer wish to marry her.' It was in fiascos like these that many later commentators saw the just punishment of Heaven, and yet it would be wrong to include among them the regularizing of free unions which had often been carried on over many years. There are many examples of these straying priests, whose unusual way of living had caused them to be 'exposed to all sorts of dangers' and because of that 'to have transgressed against chastity' (J.B. Floyrac, Hérault). But marriage henceforth was a reality that they had taken upon themselves, and for many of them it was irreversible. What did marriage really mean for these priests when they appeared as penitents before the judgement seat?

Repentance or impenitence

A momentary aberration, a source of poignant repentance? Many said this, including those – they were not in the majority but they certainly existed – who had succeeded for over ten years in concealing their circumstances from their wives. Sometimes the course of nature resolved the problem by making them widowers and they requested their re-integration. Some wrote in secretly, and others put the problem or problems back onto their families, the ill health of the wife, or of their three children. In cases like these, Caprara proposed conjugal chastity. The ones involved had sometimes reached this conclusion before him, promising to live 'like brother and sister', or like 'mother and son,' to use the expression of a priest from Dauphiné, to whom this must have been no great sacrifice with his old wife aged 75.

Conjugal chastity, whether it was a real or a symbolic sacrifice, was not accepted by all of them, for there was a whole group which was sufficiently well set up to take on the reality of marriage without regrets or repentance. 'Be good enough to leave me to the time in which I am living, and to which I am bound so strongly by ties that are both honourable and indissoluble,' wrote Tournachon, a wealthy merchant from Lyons. This question of principle is put forward frequently, on many different grounds. The impossibility of continence features strongly in these very direct confessions. Some priests recognized that 'the strict rules of chastity had become almost impracticable for them' (Jarnavier, a priest from Hérault, aged 63). Others, even more indiscreetly, tried hard to share with the Legate (or at least to make him understand) their 'irresistible passion' or their 'terrible inclination for members of the opposite sex'.

Others did not put forward the demands of the flesh, but in even larger numbers cited the material necessities of living. They had married in order to survive: 'reduced by the Revolution to the most extreme poverty ... without money and without the means of providing for my own subsistence' (Jacquinod, Ain). But henceforth, and going beyond all other selfish considerations, it was the family which had to be supported, and children whom they could not 'bring (themselves) to abandon' (Ravau, Vaucluse).

In the course of these disclosures, which are sometimes very moving, a broader theme begins to emerge. Although often married through compulsion, or sometimes through self-interest, these priests had discovered a conjugal attachment which for them now outweighed every other consideration.' Affection ... prevents our separating,' wrote Basset (Hérault), 'the harmony which reigns in our home is an invincible obstacle to our separation,' added Lenormand, from the same department.

Caught up in this network of contradictions, many of them let their repentance burst out and they wept for their fault 'as Saint Peter had done'.

> I declare before God that in everything which I have done, said and written on the affairs of our time, my sole intention was the good of religion and peace within the Church, but now recognizing my error I retract sincerely and with all my heart everything which has been condemned ... protesting that I submit both in spirit and in my heart to everything which the Catholic religion teaches ... in the body of which I wish to live and to die, and I ask pardon from God and from men for the offences which I may have caused.

(Barruel Labeaume, formerly canon in Ardèche). These were the ones who, as soon as their situation permitted it, requested 'to be workers once more in the vineyard of the Lord,' even if they were a minority compared to those who asked simply and humbly to be rehabilitated after their marriage, that is, they wanted secularization but also reconciliation at the same time.

Some went further. While still trying to regularize their situation they did not attempt to hide the fact that for them real life was elsewhere, and that the flame of both the ministry and perhaps even religion itself no longer burned for them. 'Since I was ordained I have never worked in what one might properly call the ministry, for more than 14 years, and I have never fulfilled a truly ecclesiastical function,' declared Bellon (Haute-Loire). Under these conditions we have to ask ourselves what such correspondents could possibly expect from Caprara. A grace due to him, declared one (Jean Renoux, from Var)

> because whether by force or not he has nevertheless left, publicly abandoned, his ecclesiastical calling ... The petitioner states again to Your Eminence that there is no further hope that he will return to the ecclesiastical calling, that he has indeed now moved so far away from it that he would prefer to die rather than return to it, that he will not give up his worldly dress or wearing his hair in a pigtail, and that there is no way in which he would give up being married ... even if he was threatened with excommunication.

The writer, who was perhaps a little irascible, did not really strike the right note, with an approach which ought to have been even marginally more humble. But was he not simply expressing one aspect of what many people were thinking? Speaking therefore in the name of the silent ones, who had not put pen to paper, he confirmed the importance of the real experience of indifference, of the break which was now a fact.

7

From Reason to the Supreme Being

Contrasting with but also complementing the destructive energy which unfolded, the dechristianizing movement wanted to build something permanent: and we have seen how very difficult it sometimes is to differentiate one aspect from the other at the centre of the same event, the *auto-da-fé* being the most extreme case.

This creative activity showed itself in a number of different ways, which were often contradictory. We know very well, via the solid contributions of classical historiography, the essential features of the cult of Reason as it was viewed from Paris and reconstructed by Aulard. We also recall the echoes of the famous and very crucial controversy between Aulard and Mathiez on the extent of the overlap between the cult of Reason and the cult of the Supreme Being. Was it a sudden and radical contradiction or an almost imperceptible transition? There is still much to be said on this subject, and we need now to reconsider the elements of a problem which may appear so complex only because of the multiplicity and sometimes the ambiguity of its intersecting strands.

To the system which was being set up, from winter 1793 to spring and summer 1794, might be added the elements of a system linked with festivals. The people involved seemed unaware of this intermixture of styles. Sometimes the initiative came from the government (the festivals to celebrate the recapture of Toulon, the celebration of each Tenth Day), sometimes they were the result of local initiatives, or they simply overflowed as extensions of the forces which had been released (the festivals for the martyrs of Liberty, which led into the cult of revolutionary heroes). In the context of these things which were created while the iron was hot, Reason quickly assumed an essential place, whether it was a question of the formal opening or the consecration of a Temple, or the practice of the cult of Reason, of which the spectacular

festivals were often the high points. During the last century a whole historiography recalled, often in horror, the images of the goddesses of Reason, living personifications of the new deity. A revolutionary cult or, to be more specific, a number of revolutionary cults therefore came into being, organizing themselves into a whole which was more or less structured, and which linked together Reason, the martyrs of Liberty, and the civic cult. It is the uneven growth of this movement, which on the whole flowered early but also more or less completely, that seems to us to be important. It may be followed on the ground itself, based on the sources we have.

This story is of a movement which was both imposed and created at the same time, a mixture of spontaneity and constraint, of conformism and lack of respect for the directives of the State, and becuase of this it developed slowly over total of ten months. The cult of the Supreme Being, however, was superimposed very differently: handed down from above, the truth imposed itself here brutally, in a very short sequence of events, three months in all, of which the month of Prairial was the pivot. Presupposing that the dictates of an academic presentation are unnecessarily analytical, and in that sense therefore a contradiction of real-life experience, we shall attempt to set out successively what we know of the cult of Reason, and the different aspects of this complex new system of beliefs and rites, from the concept of the masquerade to the cult of the martyrs of Liberty or to civic festivals, summarizing finally the successes and failures of the cult of the Supreme Being.

The proclamation of Reason

It is not easy – indeed it would be arbitrary – to split up exactly the three aspects of the cult of Reason, the evidence of which is contained in the documents that we are dealing with. These aspects are the opening of the temples, the celebration of the cult, and the festival. Quite often the three elements interact equally with each other, and come together in the official reports of the inaugural feasts. (See figure 11.)

It is perhaps best to look at the actual basis of the public proclamation of Reason. Thus, in winter 1794, representatives from the various sections of Paris or from communes near the capital came without further ado to announce at the bar of the Convention the new movement which reigned in their lives. Let's listen to them:

The error which had been handed down from age to age has just vanished, the prejudices of fanaticism have disappeared, we have no other cult than that of Reason and of Liberty (Villemomble, 4 Frimaire).

We place ourselves on a level with Reason, and we consolidate her Empire. May she alone reign henceforth over us, and may we be her untiring ministers (Commune of Issy, 4 Frimaire).

A deputation from the Section of Brutus ... renounces the religion of error ... They recognize no other God then Nature, no other religion than that of Truth (5 Frimaire).

Fanaticism has ceased long ago to exist in Gonesse, and the inhabitants of Gonesse worship only Reason; Equality and Liberty are their only Gods; the Unity and Indivisibility of the Republic are the only objectives of their struggle ... Enlightened by the flame of Philosophy and deeply filled with horror at both tyranny and superstition, they burn their incense only on the altar of their own Native Land, and all their affection is centred on the sovereignty of the people.

What some proclaimed, others sang, at the risk of provoking a hostile reaction from the Assembly even at this early stage, when towards the end of Nivôse the youth deputation from the Pike Section sang:

Henceforth Holy Reason
Will be our Religion.
Ah! no more superstition!
No more slothful, idle priests,
With only us to give them feasts.

But a surge now started to come from the whole of the provinces, even distant places and the most modest communes. How could it be stopped?

Our two communes were the first to proclaim the cult of eternal reason; the only one worthy of a free and enlightened nation. May this example be followed by all our brothers in the Republic! May centuries of enlightenment and philosophy succeed centuries of ignorance and error! and may fanaticism finally be banished for ever to Cayenne along with the imposters who fomented it at the expense of pious and credulous people whom they have deceived for so long (Verdun sur Doubs, 22 Pluviôse Year 2).

We now have no more superstitions, no more prejudices, no more churches, no more priests. Our temples are used today for the celebration of civic festivals, the Tenth Day has replaced the Sunday Feast ... (The metal of the bells) will be purified in the crucible of philosophy and of Reason (Revolutionary Committee of Saint Flour, 4 Frimaire Year 2).

We must leave documents such as these and come to rather more mundane statistics. Let us take, for example, the average case of Pont-Cèze, a market

town in Gard from the district of Alais, formerly Saint Ambroix, which has left us an account of the operations undertaken in the commune on the preceding 13 Pluviôse. By the time the official report reached the Convention, on 19 Ventôse, accounts such as these were being badly received, and the minutes of the Convention reported drily: 'The Commune of Pont-Cèze offers to the Republic the plate from its church, which has been converted into a temple of Reason, and advises that the Protestants similarly have made an offering of three silver chalices which formerly were used in their services.' A cutting statement, when we compare it to the official reports sent in on 16 Pluviôse. The event had been prepared for by stages with which we are now familiar: the obliteration of the external signs of Catholicism, leading to 'the destruction of fanaticism, the only internal enemy,' and the substitution for the Cross of a tree of Liberty. Then awareness dawned that 'in order to root out all traces of superstition, they had to co-operate with the mass of the people in finally destroying this ancient superstition which had caused torrents of blood to flow, and of which the genius of Reason had taken the place by disarming it with a sacrilegious dagger.'

It had therefore been decided to consecrate to the cult of Reason 'the buildings abandoned by the corruptors'.

> The building where the Catholic religion was practised, and which is now stripped of any objects which might be useful to the Republic, is to become the temple of Reason, the centre of equal civic rights and duties: and from this place will spring forth teaching for the people which will inculcate in them true Republican principles and bring them to a level of Republican fervour which is generally lacking in our canton, of which this commune is the chief town.

Having become the temple of Reason, the church was to be dedicated on the last Tenth Day of the month, and it was planned to hold on each Tenth Day's simple lecture and explanation of the laws,' and to each of these the communes of the canton would be invited to send a deputation.

We chose this average and deliberately neutral example (and there was no shortage of illustrations which were more colourful) because it typified the experience of the operation in a small, southern, market town.

The diffusion of the new cult

From description such as these it is much easier to interpret more precisely than we have done hitherto both the flow and the distribution of those thousand or so addresses (984) which we have seen arriving on the desk of the Convention. (See figures 4 and 11.) In relation to the general movement of

dechristianizing addresses, and also to other events which we have been able to analyse (iconoclasm, abdications ...), the cult of Reason demonstrated its importance (27 per cent of the addresses) even if it was less than that of the followers of the Supreme Being (33 per cent). Above all, the movement continued for some time, not confined solely to the brutal outburst of winter, as were the majority of destructive events. There was of course a first push in Frimaire, with a second and more marked one between Pluviôse and Germinal, which rose to a climax in Ventôse, and in which a fifth of the addresses venerating Reason were concentrated. Finally it was not until the beginning of Prairial that there was a noticeable decline. Even then Reason was not completely displaced by the Supreme Being, since in spite of all attempts to filter them out there were still a good sixty addresses which take us right into Thermidor. From this persistence we can assess the hidden explanation which we can follow on the maps showing the diffusion of this wave. Barring a few exceptions it was confined to the region around Paris, a number of areas in the centre of France and in the north during Brumaire. It exploded in central France during Frimaire and spread into the 'peripheral' areas of the Midi and the west during the spring, while still showing signs of a distinct awakening in the departments around Paris, from Normandy to Yonne. The overall balance sheet brings out the contrast between the regions strongly affected – the Paris Basin, the centre of France, the area around Lyons and the Rhône corridor, part of the Mediterranean Midi and a few places in the south-west. Then there were the areas of resistance: a large area of the west along the Atlantic coast, the north-east, the heart of the Massif Central, the inter-Alpine region and the Pyrenees.

There were roughly a thousand announcements of the opening of temples, or simply of festivals dedicated to Reason, i.e. 2.5 to 3 per cent of the municipalities if measured against the network of communes, and this number is certainly lower than the reality. But we have scarcely any other means of checking this directly which would enable us to compare – in the way which we did for the abdicators or the question of toponymy – what was actually done with what was finally reported to Paris.

However, in one department at least, Gard, we have the statistics established at the time for the openings of temples of Reason, and we have compared this list with that of the churches which were closed, the two phenomena being generally linked together in these places. Twenty-one announcements reached the Convention covering 233 temples examined *in situ*: i.e. only a tenth of the communes which declared this information or from which addresses were received. It would certainly be unwise to extrapolate from this order of magnitude and to conclude, on the basis of this 2.5 per cent, that a quarter of all communes had their own temple of Reason, even though this number looks realistic. But Gard, where this campaign was very

actively conducted (66 per cent of municipalities had a temple of Reason at their disposal, if we stick to the detail of the inventory), was unquestionably not an average reference model, as the procedure had still not been formalized to that point. At least we can emphasize that the chronology of the addresses received (with the greatest incidence of frequency in Ventôse and Germinal) agrees very well in this department with the real chronology of the movement. The reflection we have may be a poor one (we knew that anyway) but it is not a distorted one for all that. Both in time as well as in space, those areas which welcomed the movement and those which opposed it suggest a geography which is directly linked to the successes and failures of Reason, in the same way that the reports accompanying them gives us a direct view of the ceremonial of the dechristianizing festival.

Festive zones, stubborn zones

About 800 addresses (786) refer to or decribe Festivals of the cult of Reason (see figures 4 and 12) – almost as many as the number of temples which were officially opened. However, the two bodies of information do not coincide – far from it. There was a marked silence in the north-east, in the major part of the south-west and of the Massif Central, contrasting with the prolixity of the Paris Basin and of the axis Paris-Lyons-Marseilles (which was to be expected). Conversely, there was an exceptional and – on the geographical basis to which we have become accustomed – paradoxical number of celebrations in the west, to the depths of Brittany, to the very gates of the Vendée, as if the demonstrative and proclamatory aspect was starting to dominate here, like a 'frontier' site of militant Jacobinism.

Can we take this overview further, and identify in more detail those zones which were pro-festival and those which were not? In the south-east the average number of festivals by department was eight, but on prize-giving day we find both good and bad pupils: the highest numbers were to be found in Rhône (fourteen), Ain (sixteen), Isère and Drôme (eleven), then Gard (fifteen), and strangely enough Var (sixteen). In contrast, there were some departments with very few festivals, and which sent in only two or three reports: Haute-Loire, Lozère, Ardèche, Hautes-and and Bassess-Alpes, Alpes-Maritimes. There is no ambiguity in the split here, which favours the city, the town, the main road, and the plain. We know how such statistics tend to oversimplify matters, and using the number of communes per department as a basis, we see an almost unchanged picture emerge. There are two poles of concentration, one around Lyons (Rhône, Loire, Ain), and the other an area which might be termed that of 'southern sociability' (a grouping which surprisingly includes popular societies): Drôme, Vaucluse, Bouches-du-Rhône,

and Var. The absence of the inter-Alpine region as well as of the central plateau is confirmed and accentuated by contrast.

Let us take a somewhat cavalier overview of the phenomenon before listing its elements. Excluding, of course, the series of Festivals of the Supreme Being, which will be dealt with separately, it was in winter 1794 that the cycle of dechristianizing festivals clearly culminated: not in Frimaire, which was a crucial month in several ways, but two months later, in Pluviôse, or in other words from the end of January to 20 February. The rhythm of the curve here is very clearly defined: it rises noticeably in Nivôse, reaches a climax in Pluviôse, which is maintained at a high level throughout Ventôse, before it starts clearly to subside during Germinal.

It was a movement which fell, exhausted, and which was revived again in Prairial, suddenly and spectacularly, just for a day, by the Festival of the Supreme Being at the beginning of the summer. There was of course some variation in timing between one zone and another. In the south-east, for example, it occurred in the most northerly half of the departments as early as Nivôse, with a further burst in Ventôse. In the Midi on the other hand, the festival season was concentrated in Pluviôse. But, as can be seen clearly, there was no question here of a slow movement of propagation. This can be explained very easily, and without having to look too far: an important section of the festivals – which in fact were in support of recorded events – were the festivals for the martyrs of Liberty and the festivals to celebrate the recapture of Toulon. As they were the object of official encouragement, these celebrations took place almost everywhere at about the same time, perhaps more often during Nivôse in the north and during Pluviôse in the Midi. But over and above this particular justification, which is sufficient in itself anyway, we begin to see a simple fact which we should not pass over without comment. This is that the major thrust of these festivals of liberation has once again moved back to the seasonal rhythm of the carnival.

But what type of festival are we actually discussing? We might be accused of oversimplification if we classify under the same convenient heading of dechristianzing festival the celebrations which took place between November 1793 and April 1794. For many people, and also in the view of comparatively recent historiography, the image of the dechristianizing festival has remained that of the derisive masquerade, an extension of the *auto-da-fé* which we have already discussed. It is not difficult to add to it the ceremonial of a new cult which was finding its way – the Festivals of Reason, the celebration of the martyrs of Liberty, followed by the ceremonies of the cult of the Tenth Day which was now evolving. Should we extend it even further to include the celebrations of the victories of the Republic (essentially the recapture of Toulon)? As far as we ourselves are concerned, we have no hesitation in doing

so, in the sense that these ceremonies are an integral part of the civic cult. Then again, it is in practice very difficult to draw exact dividing lines. Composite celebrations which link together a number of themes are quite common and it was, for example, often the festivals celebrating the recapture of Toulon which lent support to the anti-religious masquerade. As we know, the masquerade was not in itself a festival in the normal sense but was more a form of expression, and so the descriptions of the festivals prominent in our body of documents can be discussed under three main headings: the celebration of the victories of the Republic (40 per cent in the south-east quarter, 50 per cent in the south-west), festivals of Reason or of the Tenth Day (40 per cent in the south-east, 32 per cent in the south-west), festivals of the martyrs of Liberty (20 per cent in the south-east, 15 per cent in the south-west). This overall balance, incidentally, allows for some variations which are noticeable on the map: the festivals for the recapture of Toulon show a fairly balanced pattern which excludes only a few marginal departments, while those for the martyrs of Liberty are heavily concentrated around certain areas where mobilization was pushed forward, like the regions around Paris or Lyons.

Anti-religious masquerades

What has been termed, by a convenient simplification, the dechristianizing 'masquerade' covers a number of similar events which evolved with different regional variations. Most frequently it turned into the *auto-da-fé*, which is its ultimate stage, but sometimes it also took the form of the burlesque procession, in which the remnants of fanaticism were paraded (statues, liturgical objects, church ornaments and vestments). Its most diffuse variant was the donkey procession or the mitred donkeys, grotesquely dressed up in vestments, trailing along in mockery. A ceremonial such as this, even when it was taken up by the authorities, stems directly from a whole heritage of popular culture embracing some elements linked with noisy charivaris (the donkey walk) or with carnivals (the burlesque procession, the burning of Caramantran).

It would be paradoxical to impute to the masquerade a quality of southern originality. Indeed, it would be forgetting that the example came originally from the Paris region, with its burlesque processions of priestly remnants taken from Ris, Mennecy and other localities in the destructive rivalry of the month of Brumaire. It would also be forgetting the Paris street scenes, as they were faithfully reproduced in the water-colours of Béricourt. Then again, similar incidents occured almost simultaneously in the centre of France, in Nièvre and in Allier. Northern France, therefore, did not ignore these events,

even if the echoes of them transmitted to the Convention were comparatively few: ten in all (only three from the north-east quarter, seven from the north-west). Even on the basis of a strict selectivity, the silence from the eastern side of the country must be significant. The departments near to Paris give us some examples. So, at Beaumont in Seine-et-Marne, we are told: 'One of the most solemn *autos-da-fé* that there has been for over two months did justice to all those wooden images, vile objects of stupid adoration; a donkey decked out in pontifical robes represented a sacred ceremony, and under the canopy, at this bonfire.' Or at Chauny, in Aisne, where the sans-culottes rejoiced: 'And we too have just been singing the hymn of Liberty and dancing the Carmagnole dressed up in the vestments of these people who until recently held back for so long the progress of philosophy and deceived our brothers from the country.' Still in Ventôse, the town of Mer, in Loir-et-Cher, described a typical masquerade:

> On a tumbril lay the remnants of royalism and superstition, represented by crowns of fleurs-de-lis, by skull caps, clerical neckbands, Papal Bulls, choir-stalls and lecterns. Pitt and Cobourg stood in the middle of this foul heap: the first carried this inscription (the enemy of the human race) on his back, the second the inscription 'the true slave of a crowned brigand'. The whole thing was pulled along by a donkey dressed in a surplice and neckband, and bearing the inscription 'I am more useful than a King.'

But it was perhaps even more symptomatic to encounter during this same month (24 Ventôse), and in a Brittany which was ostensibly ill-disposed towards such demonstrations, a burlesque representation like the one set up by the sans-culottes of Dol (Ille-et-Vilaine): 'During the last decade we invited Pius VI and the last tyrant to join in our ceremonies ... For this festival we had preapred a bonfire on Brutus Square and had dressed up two old effigies of religious fanaticism, one decked out as a tyrant crowned with fleurs-de-lis, and the other as the Pope, complete with papal tiara and slippers.'

The particular success which the south-east achieved in these demonstrations stemmed no doubt from the fact that the practice was introduced into the revolutionary festival well before the main dechristianizing push: even from 1791 in the case of the earliest examples (Avignon, Arles), more frequently still in 1792. The burlesque procession, which started to become regularized and established in its patterns in 1793, was not fundamentally anti-religious: it had not become exclusively so even by the middle of 1793, as we frequently come across it being used to mock the coalition of monarchs at the time of the festivals for the recapture of Toulon. Nevertheless, the peregrinations of the 'mitred donkey' enable us to follow in detail the spread of symbols and supportive images of popular dechristianization,

even though we find only some half-dozen mentions of it in the addresses received. Although early instances occurred in Provence, it was in Nièvre that it was first recorded in the context of the new demonstrations, with the famous response by Fouché during the debate on whether it was right or not to crown a donkey: it would, he said, be too degrading for the animal. The following month the practice recurred in Lyons, at the time of the deification of Chalier, where a masquerade evolved in which the mitred donkey took its place. We see it taken up again during Nivôse, along the same lines as Lyons, in Armes (Saint Etienne) on 10 Nivôse, at the time of the festival celebrating the recapture of Toulon. Here a tumbril pulled along by donkeys carried the monarchs, while the town of Toulon confessed 'I am the harlot of kings.' We see it taken up similarly in 'Montbrisé' (Montbrison) for the festival of Reason on 11 Nivôse. In this situation, the scenario recurred at varying stages of development across the entire region. In Anse, Commune Franche (formerly Villefranche) the donkey procession on 20 Pluviôse ended with the burning of the effigies of Capet and of fanaticism. It occurred also in a village like Sainte Consorce, where the dragoons of the Revolutionary detachment rigged themselves out grotesquely in consecrated vestments to return to Lyons, dragging the village priest behind them. We discover an identical practice in parts of Isère and Ain, based on these expeditions from Lyons. The bringing back of prisoners, priests or other devout people, accompanied by a donkey or a grotesquely caparisoned horse, was quite a common occurrence in Frimaire and Ventôse. The practice spread: at Viviers in Ardèche the 'old idols of aristocratic pride' were taken to the *auto-da-fé* in a tumbril filled with dung and pulled by donkeys.

Are we looking at something which was peculiar to central France or, more precisely, to the area around Lyons? The fact that it is scarcely mentioned elsehwere proves nothing in itself. Sometimes the bitterness of the struggle exacerbated destructive tendencies and made them more expressive, for example, at Sainte Enimie in Lozère the revolutionary dragoons, furious at having been unable to flush out the priest from his lair, engaged in a burlesque masquerade.

In the Provençal Midi, which we have studied in detail, we find many instances of masquerades, which were sometimes reduced simply to a procession exhibiting the remnants of superstition or of the *ancien régime* (e.g. Nice, 20 Nivôse; Toulon, 1 Pluviôse Year 2). In some cases the procession which preceded the *auto-da-fé* followed the practices of the uproarious charivari and adapted them to the situation, e.g. at Arles, Entrevaux, Grasse and Monaco. At Monaco the trial of Caramantran was the inspiration for passing judgement on a dummy clothed in papal rags which ended its days (to coin a phrase) in the sea. The complete procession of mitred donkeys, or of donkeys decked out in cast-off ecclesiastical robes along the lines of the example from

Lyons, is to be found in only two locations: in Arles, during Pluviôse, on the occasion of the recapture of Toulon, when three effigies of the Pope and the Kings of England and Spain were subsequently burned in the square; and at Entrevaux, where four effigies of pontifical or royal despots were piled onto a cart and dragged along by 'evil asses'. If anticlericalism was present in these parts of the south, its dechristianizing aim was veiled, discreet, and tended to be concentrated on the 'tyrant from Rome'. This practice, therefore, which started during the autumn (Vendémiaire) in Nièvre, came full circle four months later in Pluviôse, at the time of the Carnival, in this frontier stronghold of Entrevaux, where the presence of the National Volunteers gave some indication of the methods that had been used to ensure its successful spread.

Both the masquerade and the *auto-da-fé* were not festivals in themselves: they were rather just one of the ways in which the festival expressed itself, new types of liturgy, created in the heat of the action.

From the banquet to the civic fast

By the same token we may call to mind the civic banquet, a new and rediscovered communion. We come across it on more than one occasion in official reports and, like the masquerade, it is typical of the first part of the period under review, that is to say from the month of Frimaire, through Nivôse (its culmination), to Ventôse, which saw its final manifestations in the provinces. Under the form in which we find it in Rhône, Ain, Haute-Loire, Mont Blanc or Drôme, it is more a speciality of centrtal France than of northern regions or the Midi. This finding does have some value, even though the inquiries which we undertook on the ground in Provence showed, incidentally, that it was certainly not unknown in the areas of southern sociability.

As a paradoxical complement to the banquet, we must record the concept of the civic fast, which was a well-known practice among the Parisian sans-culottes, but was mush less common in the provinces. The demand for a civic fast – a revolutionary re-utilization of an originally religious concept – occurred in only two places, both in the Alps. The General Council of the district of Arc, formerly Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne, publicly proclaimed a civic fast from 1 Frimaire to 30 Prairial, on the grounds of the scarcity of meat. At approximately the same period the popular society of Moustiers (in the Basses-Alpes, or was it Moutiers, Mont Blanc?) called for a decree which would forbid the killing of lambs and calves, and ask for a civic fast of several months. Republicans, they said, should 'enjoy privation,' and the justification for this was reinforced by the desire to see 'the dogs put down, which were destined for the pleasure of the former nobles and ... were a part of their insolent life of luxury'.

What did this new system really comprise? At the risk of erring on the side of excessive simplification, we have classified it under three main headings, mainly as a result of their occurence in the documents examined. The first is the cult of Reason, in its temples, which we have already covered; the second, what might be termed the civic cult; and, finally, the veneration of the martyrs of Liberty.

Festivals in honour of the goddess of Reason

We shall say very little here on the subject of the festivals of Reason, in the sense that we have already covered the cult and the opening of the temples which, in general, coincided with the inaugural festival. These ceremonies usually took place in the more important towns and their celebration occurred in two main surges, the first in winter, from Brumaire onwards but particularly during Frimaire, and the other at the beginning of spring, occasionally starting as early as Pluviôse, but in the majority of cases culminating in Ventôse and Germinal.

Depending on the region, the first or second thrust dominated: it occurred earlier in the north-east quarter, and later in the two parts of the Midi as well as the north-west. In fact we find here, once again, the same phenomenon of diffusion within the different areas which we have encountered elsewhere. Thus, to take only two examples, the first festivals of Reason in the north-east were urban, and followed each other in rapid succession. They evolved from one epicentre, Meurthe. Nancy and Toul had a celebration on 20 Brumaire, repeated at Nancy on the 30th. We can detect here the influence of the representative Faure, in the same way that the ceremony in Strasbourg on 20 Brumaire took place in the presence of Baudot. Besançon, an area which was equally isolated, was enlightened by Reason on 30 Brumaire. The early disposition of these events anticipated that of some of the towns nearer to Paris, like Reims, which did not celebrate its festival until 30 Frimaire. But on the whole most of them occurred during Pluviôse, with around forty addresses from the north-east, and although the main thrust then fell away, it was still sustained to a lesser degree in Ventôse and Germinal. We can truly talk of peripheral diffusion when we see that Sedan inaugurated its temple of Reason, in the presence of the representatives Roux and Massieu, as late as 20 Ventôse in Year 2.

From the epicentre of central France to the Mediterranean Midi we find both a counter-proof and a confirmation of what was happening in the North. During Frimaire the centre and the areas around Lyons joined in the dance (Bourges, Lyon, St Etienne, Feurs, Yssingeaux, Grenoble ... but also Montpellier and Béziers, early sources in the Midi). The example of the large

towns was often rapidly followed here by both villages and market towns (La Guillotière, Neuville, Anse in Rhône). In Nivôse Ain was taken over (Gex, Ambérieu, Seyssel), then in Pluviôse the Alps were affected (Chambéry, St Marcellin ... Gap and Digne) and already parts of the Midi (Aix-en-Provence, Gard). But in this region the big festivals of Reason did not take place until later, in Ventôse (Arles, Draguignon, Manosque) or even Germinal in the case of Marseilles which was particularly late. Published monographs enable us to follow the chronology of the important towns, and to them can be added the flood of addressess from market towns and villages, proof enough that the rural world and the world of the market town had not failed to recognize these festivals. Even so it would have been good to have more documentary back-up. Based on the evidence of the sources, the opening of the temples of Reason was more than an insubstantial phenomenon. However, the celebration of the festivals and the personification of the Goddess in the big ceremonies which so impressed themselves on people's imagination remained, failing any additional evidence, the privilege of a minority of population centres. This impression can perhaps be ascribed to inadequate documentary proof. Maillane was only a small market town when Riquelle, the old woman described much later by Mistral,* posed as the Goddess of Reason, a seventeen-year-old in all the splendour of her youth. And yet Renaison, in Loire, picked an example of a very different type. Here the person chosen to be the incarnation of the Goddess was a woman over a hundred years old, but still in possession of her faculties, crying out repeatedly and with great enthusiasm: 'Long live the Republic! Long live the Mountain!'

Civil festivals in honour of victories

In addition to festivals of Reason, the dechristianizing campaign expressed itself just as much in civic celebrations of the victories of the Republic. We recognize the possible objection to this point of view – i.e. that in themselves these festivals contained nothing of an anti-religious nature, and that there were even occasions when the capture of Toulon was celebrated with a *Te Deum*. This was the case at Millières in Haute-Marne, at Quillebeuf in Seine Inférieure, and also in eastern Provence and the region around Nice. Never-

* Frederic Mistral (1830–1914), the leader of a group of poets known as the Félibres. They attempted to bring about a revival of Provençal literature, but this failed to develop, and only Mistral acquired European standing.

theless, it was precisely at this point that the revolutionary festival completed its evolution to profanity and rejected all compromise with its Christian heritage. Above all, these festivals frequently supported dechristianizing themes and displays, in the framework of an encounter. The previously mentioned example of Entrevaux, where the masquerade expanded the civic theme by introducing anti-clerical elements, was a far from isolated one. In brief, these festivals were almost an experiment, anticipating the civic beliefs which at that time were just evolving and which the following years were to inherit. In fact it was essentially the celebration of the recapture of Toulon which was instrumental in this. Celebrations which occurred subsequently in a different context did not have the same impact nationally, whether we are talking of the victory of Fleurus, which was celebrated particularly in the north during Messidor, or the capture of Saorage, of which the echoes were heard in the Midi.

This is really the explanation of the crowded calendar of civic celebrations in Nivôse and Pluviôse. A decree by the Convention, on 4 Nivôse, gives us the frame of reference for the official celebrations, which is why the decade of the 20th of the month was often chosen. We showed in another work (*Les métamorphoses de la fête en Provence*) how these spontaneous celebrations frequently anticipated the initiative from above, only to recur under official sponsorship a few weeks later. Making due allowance for delays in passing on information and for varying degrees of urgency, it was between Nivôse and Pluviôse that France as a whole celebrated the fall of Toulon. In the south-east the capture of Toulon was celebrated during Nivôse, especially in Loire, Rhône, Ain and the western part of Mont Blanc. It did not pass unrecognized elsewhere (Ardèche, Drôme, Gard) but by what merely seems to be a paradox, the Midi in general did not celebrate the victory until Pluviôse (Hérault, Gard, Vaucluse, Basses-Alpes ...). Toulon was nearby, but Paris was a long way away.

The success of the previous winter continued to be celebrated until Ventôse, even into Germinal, at Bourg d'Oisans in Isère, and also at Beaumont or Saint Nazaire in Drôme. Were the festivals for the recapture of Toulon simply the framework of the dechristianizing explosion, or were they a pretext for it? We should not generalize too much on this point: a very precise study (by Philippe Goujard) of the pattern of these celebrations shows that in a quarter of the cases they were of this mixed or composite type. But the tendency was clear in those places where the dechristianizing forces were harshly active, as in the Provençal Midi, and also in the west. At Port Liberté in Morbihan, on 10 Nivôse, the celebration of the capture of Toulon was associated with a procession, in which busts of Franklin, Voltaire and Rousseau were displayed, while Reason imposed her presence in the flames of an *auto-da-fé*.

The cult of the martyrs of Liberty

The festivals and cult of the martyrs of Liberty bear even more directly on our point. Was this spontaneous devotion, which burst forth during the summer of 1793, simply a cult by substitution? At the least, 'the sans-culottes saw in it ... an affirmation of their Republican principles, a means of popular communication, a heightening of their revolutionary faith,' to quote the words of A. Soboul. The main difference between this surge and that of the festivals for the recapture of Toulon is that here we are talking about something which was not established by official command. It was therefore much more continuous, culminating indeed in the three winter months of Frimaire, Nivôse and Pluviôse, but retaining some vitality after that, even into Prairial.

When we pick up the thread of the historical narrative, in Vendémiaire Year 2, the flood of funeral ceremonies honouring Lepeletier of Saint-Fargeau was essentially over. Indeed, among those regions which were emerging from the federalist crisis we find interest in the martyrs of the revolution deferred, but very real for all that. The ceremonies sometimes regrouped the three members of the revolutionary trinity – Marat, Chalier and Lepeletier and even encompassed, although exceptionally, the child heroes Bara and Viala. Sometimes they linked only two of them, usually Marat and Lepeletier, and sometimes they were dedicated to the memory of one alone. (See figure 22.) When we look at the range of numbers involved, the clear winner at the tribunal of revolutionary posterity is Marat, who was invoked no less than thirty-four times, against only twenty-one for his companions in addresses from the southern half of the country. But we have to differentiate within these groups to understand the reality. Because of a need to expiate the Federalist revolt – which may have been spontaneous or may have been organized but, in either case, was certainly felt – the area around Lyons (Rhône, Loire, Haute-Loire) invoked the name of Chalier, either alone or with others, in every single case (eleven related festivals). He was ignored by the rest of France, if not totally at least very noticeably (four instances in the south-east, never in isolation). Marat was the winner in all regions. For the sans-culottes of Montivilliers in Seine Inférieure 'he forged the thunder and prepared the volcanic eruptions which were the forerunners of Liberty.' As we follow the growth of his cult, it is possible to postulate hypotheses on the modality of its spread, where the influence of some 'Maratist' representatives was very evident, e.g. Monestier (from Puy de Dôme) in the Hautes and Basses Pyréneés, and similarly Dartigoeyte in Gers. It was Dartigoeyte who arranged a ceremony at Auch during which he carried a newborn baby to the foot of the tree of Liberty, waved the tricolour over him three times, and gave him the name of Marat. Exhortations from above were superfluous. Since Federalism had railed

against Marat in the Midi, the local Jacobins responded by focusing attention upon his memory and there were several fervent Maratist groups working to claim his legacy. There was a Marat from Arles, Doctor Pâris, just as there was a Marat from Bourg Saint Andéol.

To be accurate, however, this geography is based on very small samples and needs to be sharpened up, and it leads us to re-examine our facts relating to revolutionary toponymy in order to see what traces of these cults might be found there. Linking together the two maps – that of revolutionary toponymy and that of the origin of the addressess – may perhaps do something to strengthen their inadequate statistical basis. If we look at the whole of the country, de Figuères's catalogue lends itself to a cartography of place-names inspired by the martyrs of Liberty. The initial impression of a wide diffusion soon gives way to a more exact reclassification. Whole regions failed to welcome our heroes and they were the ones (in the west and the north-east) where we know the impact of modifications in the toponymy to have been very marginal. Within the group itself, Marat is the clear leader, followed by Lepeletier and then Chalier, with Bara in the second rank. But the name of Marat occurs across the whole country, as indeed does that of Lepeletier, though to a lesser degree. Bara remains a hero of the west and the south-west, Chalier a hero of Lyons and district.

In this instance chronology carries comparatively little weight: the expiatory liturgies were celebrated around Lyon very early, in the winter of 1794, while the Midi extended its ceremonies into at least Ventôse. To get the best from this approach it is probably more important to study in detail, under a magnifying glass, the exact centres of a cult which was far from being uniformly spread. In the little world of Arles, for example, the ex-priest Lardeyrol, who was the leading light in a group of civic apostles, declared: 'We must have no divinity other than Marat.' The addresses often described exactly how this cult was lived out, and iconoclasts said more than once that God and His saints had to be destroyed and replaced by Reason, whose apostles were the revolutionary martyrs. Father confessors of the new gospel, they made up the embryo of the new pantheon which was in the process of being formed, and theirs were the images which were paraded in the solemn festival processions.

The cult ... of personality?

It is worth asking, however, how far, from the spring of 1794 onwards, the cult of revolutionary heroes continued to remain alive and enjoy popular support. Other enthusiasms came into being, taking over from the cult of dead heroes, and found urgent expression in the addresses to the Convention. At first these consisted of declarations of support for the representatives

on mission, the living and active personification of the Revolution. Some addresses inspired a flood of eulogies depicting them as the indispensable actors, the providential envoys who were absolutely necessary. Laignelot and Lequinio in Charente fell into this category, as did Dartigoeyte (whom others denounced with equal vigour) in Gers, and Chaudron Rousseau in Ariège or in Aude: 'scarcely had he appeared when everything changed.' In Gard and surrounding departments there was an unceasing flow of praise for Borie, as had been the case a little earlier for Barras in Var, who became the object of an astonishing personality cult (hence the equivocal name Bara-Barras in the new toponymy). We know very well how little credence should be attached to manifestations of this sort, and that it was very easy or even essential for a representative under threat, as Barras was, to generate a personal following among the popular societies. However, there is no doubt that not everything in these movements of popular opinion was illusory or spurious. This increased need for reassurance and protection was, from Floréal onwards, invested in an endless flood of addresses associating (often by merging and collapsing separate events) congratulations to the representatives (Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois) on having escaped the attempt on their lives, with either the proclamation of the immortality of the soul or the organization of the cult of the Supreme Being. Was everything in this unique movement, which ranged popular societies and local administrators alongside the Mountain and its representatives, mere conformism? A number of people justified themselves in terms which seemed to indicate a naïve belief in providence, but which at the same time demonstrated their collective feelings. We were concerned, they said, by the absence of this Supreme Being whom you proclaimed: and lo and behold, as if to show His gratitude, He stayed the arm of the assassins which was already raised against you. There was a rediscovered consolation in a system where reassurances corresponded mutally and totally. 'The Supreme Being, Whom you have avenged for the blasphemy of the wicked, has with His all-powerful hand shielded two representatives from the blows directed against them: for which we offer Him our thanks,' wrote the popular society of Vernoux (Ardèche) in a letter received on 1 Thermidor. It simply developed the thought which others expressed more concisely. 'Collot d'Herbois and Robespierre eacaped their murderous hands: Providence has saved them,' wrote for its part the popular society of Pont-sur-Rhône.

Festivals of the Tenth Day

Ritual elements, scraps of improvised liturgies, the brief duration of a festival – does all of this really make up the priming of a new and organized system? The celebration of the Tenth Day, which tried to establish itself during the

course of these months, might be seen as an attempt to establish the basis of an envisaged rationalization of these successive improvisations. Truth to tell, however, it does occupy a modest place within the addresses we have studied. This was limited, perhaps too often, to an arbitrary mention, which in itself does not carry much conviction ... 'the decades were celebrated with all the pomp of the Republic' (Rouen, 24 Floréal). Sometimes it was more specific, albeit still fairly laconic, if referring to a modest locality: at Epinay sur Orge 'the decrees and laws were read out on each Tenth Day.'

Strangely enough, we have to go back to the origins of the dechristianizing movement in order to recall a really sumptuous festival of the Tenth Day in all its inventivity. At Arras, on 20 Vendémiaire, an enormous procession was arranged to symbolize the new calendar: 2000 citizens, both men and women, were split into twelve groups representing the twelve months of the year, while a thirteenth group consisting of old men aged over 80 symbolized the five complementary days – the oldest one for his part represented the intercalary day of the Frankish year. The old men were honoured by positioning behind them children under twelve, indicating in this way the succession of the generations. Everyone was required to touch the tree of Liberty with his tools, and the oldest one raised aloft the Act of Constitution. The festival concluded at the foot of the tree of Liberty with a civic meal, during which the old men were served by the young people, and this was followed by patriotic dances and performances.

These artificially created forms of expression were characteristic of the dominant phase of dechristianization. They were followed in turn by others, although these tended to be more lack-lustre and regimented expressions of the ritual which was becoming established.

A number of communities described their successes, and sometimes their difficulties, in establishing events linked to the Tenth Day. The first significant mentions appear during Frimaire and then, after a period of germination, they multiply and culminate in Ventôse and in Germinal. This pattern was general. After Floréal, however, such announcements were rare – the disclosures then were more of difficulties which had been encountered. The spur of the cult of the Supreme Being began to appear necessary to maintain the temperature of provincial dynamism in a movement that was starting to run down.

Yes, it is she, it is the goddess ...

But before we say farewell to Reason, perhaps we should ask who she really was, and how she appeared to the contemporaries who fêted her? Our curiosity may appear somewhat belated. However, in our defence it has to be

said that, with the exception of the big national festivals held in Brumaire, from Paris to Strasbourg, the documents that we are using contain very few descriptions of the personifications of Reason. Before very long it was clear also that such things were not particularly welcome. But what cannot be found in the Parliamentary Archives is frequently to be discovered in the secrets of the local archives: perhaps we might be permitted to limit ourselves to the example of Provence, which we have investigated in detail and which contains illustrations of exceptional richness.

The most common example is that of the living female statue: the goddess of Liberty, the goddess of Reason or Victory. On 25 January 1794 at Entrevaux, in order to celebrate the recapture of Toulon, Victory, as personified by a young citizeness, was paraded on a carriage, while the goddess Liberty moved forward beneath the canopy (which had certainly never been used in that way before). At Nice it was the goddess Liberty who triumphed in Nivôse Year 2; at Digne, Madeleine, a patriotic daughter of the popular society played the part of the new divinity in the temple of Reason (formerly the church of Saint-Jérôme), reclining beneath a canopy of red velvet and draped in a linen gown. At Fréjus (30 Nivôse), Citizeness Franc played the part of Reason, while Citizeness Laget, dressed as the goddess Liberty, sang appropriate verses. Liberty or Reason? The popular eye saw and recorded them in detail. For Coulet, a weaver from Avignon who kept a diary (which is a most valuable document), it was a question of being 'the mother of our country,' and this was perhaps the way in which these incarnations were most generally perceived. It was only later that the goddesses of Reason from Marseilles, the celebrated 'Cavale' and 'Fassy', paid the price of having been goddesses for a day, at the hands of royalist murderers, who in Year 3 put them to a terrible death. The historiography of the century which followed gives us little by way of detail. Ecclesiastical writers recalled that at Saint-Trophime d'Arles the role of Reason and of Liberty was disinterestedly played by a prostitute, which was certainly not true in the majority of cases.

The scenarios of the festival present therefore a somewhat ambiguous picture of what actually happened, for Reason, Victory and Liberty appeared to be feminine deities which were interchangeable. Are the records themselves more accurate if we go back to the flow of correspondence documented day by day?

In the course of the addressess assembled on the desk of the Convention, we can get a good impression of the diversity of the images which are played back to us. One goddess, that of Reason? Some people certainly said so, for example the emissary Dumoulins from Charente, who declared (30 Frimaire Year 2): 'Reason, this sovereign of the Universe, this true and unique divinity of nations, is finally establishing her dominion.' But it has to be said that he

added later: 'Supreme Reason, Equality daughter of Nature, beloved Liberty, you alone will be henceforth the divinities of the human race; you alone will receive the pure and sacred incense of mankind now formed anew.' He was not the only one to associate Reason with other deities – far from it indeed. The sans-culottes of Lucenay, in Nièvre, replaced their 'disgusting idols' with 'the cult of Reason and of Nature' (21 Pluviôse), the members of the popular society of Burges-les-Bains in Allier asserted that 'Philosophy and Reason' have finally triumphed (13 Frimaire), and the inhabitants of Gonesse declared that they 'revere only Reason; Equality and Liberty are their only gods, the unity and indivisibility of the Republic the sole objectives of their struggle.'

Reason, Liberty, Equality, Nature, Philosophy ... how are we to find our way in this temple of new and invented deities? A few people certainly tried to do so, setting out real genealogies as Citizen Hollier did in his 'Ode to Reason,' presented on 20 Nivôse:

> Reason, you are Nature's daughter,
> And Truth the child you bore;
> Liberty itself shines bright
> In the beams of your pure light ...
>
> And may her faithful friend Equality
> Endow her with all virtue –
> Goodness, Gladness and Integrity.

But although some people, with tranquil materialism, referred the genealogy of Reason back to Nature, as it needed some way to have been created, there were many others who already shared the opinion which Couthon attributed, perhaps somewhat optimistically, to the 'People of Puy de Dôme' in his report of 14 Frimaire: 'The people of Puy-de-Dôme believe today that the only temple worthy of the Supreme Being is the world, of which He is the architect, and that it is in the hearts of men that His altars and the true faith are to be found.'

How did the link come about between the Supreme Being – already invoked by the Freemason Couthon when he made specific reference to the great Architect – and Reason? A member of a political club explained, on 30 Nivôse Year 2, when a temple of Reason was being inaugurated:

> You have sometimes seen a poor blind man trying to find the way home. With his stick he touches everything before him, so as to avoid the pitfalls which might be in his path. He finally arrives at the door of his house. There he puts down his stick and goes in happily to relax, surrounded by his children and his friends who were awaiting him.

> Citizens, we are this poor blind man. Surrounded by the wonders of nature, which we admire but cannot comprehend, how are we to conceive of their creator? This beneficent being gave us at least a stick to help us find our way, and this guide is Reason. The peoples of the earth who refuse to hear his voice plunge themselves into the evils engendered by ignorance and superstition.

Reason flowed directly from the Supreme Being, a gift from heaven, as Citizen Mirbeck said on 30 Frimaire, and did indeed deserve on these grounds to be venerated. Mirbeck, who was a club member from the Section of the Observatory, declared in his 'Homage to Reason': 'Divine Reason, pure emanation of the Supreme Being, who hold in your sway the destiny of men and of empires, we ask you to accept the homage which we bring you today in this august temple.'

It was through Reason indeed that men had been able to regain their natural rights, their 'pure equality, for too long unrecognized,' their 'Holy Liberty, too long profaned'. This was a theme taken up by other orators, like the spokesman at the festival celebrated in Bourbonne-les-Bains during Pluviôse: 'It was Reason who set out the Rights pf Man using the level of Equality ... and again it was Reason who called the French nation to arms in order to maintain Liberty.'

Reason therefore assumed the status of a privileged mediatrix, on whom both Liberty and Equality depended, and of which it was the guarantor. The universe was ordered under its aegis. Trying to synthesize this in a way in which we can follow its different stages, we begin to understand how an artificially created system can gradually come into being, and establish itself with calm assurance, for example, in the address presented on 20 Pluviôse by a youth deputation from the Parisian Section of Lazowsky:

> We swear to devote ourselves unceasingly to those studies which will nurture Republican virtues in our hearts and souls, and to be on our guard against the perfidious insinuations of those who might attempt to make us believe in a happiness other than that of the Republic, One and Indivisible, and in any divinity other than the Supreme Being, whose cult is Reason, and in the presence of whom the unshakeable Mountain hands down its salutary decrees, and whose martyrs are Marat, Peletier, Chalier, the friends of Lazowsky and the brave defenders of the rights of the people. Long live the Republic. Long live the Mountain.

A most interesting text, to the extent that it represents one of the rare examples of an intentional endeavour to bring together in an organized and unified whole the different elements of the civic cult, from the cult of the martyrs of Liberty to the reference to the Supreme Being, by way of Reason.

From Reason to the Supreme Being

If we follow the course of the texts themselves which, from Paris to the provinces, developed in successive strokes the elements of a system based on collective practice, the break in continuity from Reason to the Supreme Being is clearly not as great as has been thought. This is particularly so if we see it in perspective, and take into account the shape and nature of the big collective options which, from Frimaire to Floréal, once again reshaped the course of events, starting from the time when the immortality of the soul and the existence of the Supreme Being were proclaimed. Indeed, in the majority of the more explicit discourses He was already there, biding His time, which perhaps explains why the new cult received such a massive welcome, if we are to judge by the outlines that are left to us. There is a total of 1235 addresses, in less than four months, between Floréal and Thermidor, all on a common theme approving the decree of 18 Floréal on the immortality of the soul and the subsequent proclamation of the Supreme Being. It is a large number, and this enormous weight of documents is the most important of all those we have taken into account. In a very short time, judging by the number of approbatory addresses, the Supreme Being collected more votes of commendation than Reason had gathered over ten months. Critics might object that the majority of these approvals were simply gratuitous declarations, and that to make a fairer evaluation it would be more appropriate to compare the actual number of celebrations of the Supreme Being, the balance sheet for which cannot be properly drawn up as it was interrupted by the events of 9 Thermidor. A comparison also would need to be made between the conditions under which the cult of Reason was established – imposed and yet spontaneous, official and yet at the same time marginal, a leap into the unknown – and the great gesture of protective conformism that was represented by approval of the Supreme Being. That its success was so enormous then becomes less surprising. Nor should we discount our assessment that the Supreme Being was certainly not ignored at the time of the triumph of Reason, which was much more accommodating than has often been said, and which made room for the Great Architect, providing he kept his distance.

The new cult was to be less tolerant. We can follow day by day the see-saw of events, based on the addresses received by the Convention following the major statement of 18 Floréal. (See figures 13 and 14.) On 24 Floréal the municipal officers of Chagny, in Saône-et-Loire, made it known that their commune was abjuring the Catholic faith and establishing the cult of Reason. On the following day the modest popular society of Dornecy in Nièvre did the same, but this was on the very day when the General Council of the Commune

of Paris, not far away but better placed to feel which way the wind was blowing, announced that it was going to remove the inscriptions 'Temples of Reason' and replace them with 'Temples of the Supreme Being'. This initiative was copied by the Parisian Sections in the days immediately afterwards, though not without noticeable reticence: on 26 Floréal approval was given for 'religious principles' without further clarification, and on 6 Prairial the Section of the Observatory announced a lecture on the Supreme Being ... 'in the Temple of Reason'. We have to await the addresses received during Messidor to see that the future course was finally decided, and that from Choisy-sur-Seine (5 Messidor) to Sommerwiller (Meurthe, 7 Messidor) there was to be henceforth no confusion of the two styles. Some went even further, keen to demonstrate that the message had been received and understood. To take a few examples from the Midi, in Hérault persecution and intolerance were repudiated retrospectively; in Vaucluse or Bouches-du-Rhône atheism was bitterly denounced; in the Basses-Alps, the popular society of Entrevaux emphatically affirmed its horror of atheism, 'destructive of all order and morality' (1 Thermidor). All of these arguments, which supported the victory of authority, were perhaps less convincing than the secret discourses, which in the past we had sometimes been able only to guess at.

The sheer number of the addresses demonstrated in any case that the tide had turned, even though they affected only 3 per cent of localities across the country – a very poor reflection. Mobilization had been rapid, concentrated essentially from the end of Floréal to Messidor and Prairial (around 500 declarations for each of these two months). The sudden drop during Thermidor needs to be taken in context: after 10 Thermidor correspondence such as this was no longer given special attention but was simply thrown into the waste-bin. So much so, that the map illustrating the spread of the cult of the Supreme Being will always be incomplete, without losing for all that either its intrinsic interest or its evocative power. The majority of the early addresses, in Floréal and Prairial, came from an area north of the Loire, covering the Paris Basin, the north and the north-east, moving across towards the west but meeting a first barrier of resistence reaching from the Armorican borders through Brittany. The Midi was somewhat later, barring a few early exceptions, notably in the Rhône valley and in Provence. But we can add to these some departments (the exceptions which prove the rule) where the presence of dynamic Robespierrist representatives speeded up the movement (Ariège and Pyrénées Orientales). These were minor variations or modulations that did not affect the massive weight of overall confirmation which derives its real value from comparison with the map illustrating the diffusion of the cult of Reason. Reason was a polynuclear explosion, even if its focal point in Paris did occupy an important place, and it was followed by a diffusion emanating from a number of focal points. With the Supreme Being, Paris was in com-

mand. The constraints of communication and transmission from a centralized national system essentially took into account the modalities of propagation, starting with northern France as being the first affected.

An ambiguous balance sheet

This does not mean that the cult of the Supreme Being was accepted everywhere in the same way. The test of its overall national acceptance is still the balance sheet formed by the map, which is cumulative, and reveals a number of contrasts. At first glance we tend to be struck by a real continuity in the geographical realignment from Reason to the Supreme Being. In fact, if we revert to the classifications established for the cult of Reason by virtue of the number of addresses, these classifications converge in 40 per cent of the cases, and there is near convergence – i.e. to within one classification – in 36 per cent; so much so, indeed, that there is a marked contrast in only fifteen or so departments. We are brought back once more to an overall view of the country which throws into relief the major part of the Paris Basin, the axis Paris-Lyons-Marseilles via Burgundy and the Rhône valley, the Languedoc and Provençal parts of the Midi, and also part of the south-west following the Garonne valley. By contrast it is still the west, the north-east and the heart of the Massif Central which stand out as areas resisting change, whether that change is called Reason or the Supreme Being.

However, when we take a second look, distinct areas of drift become apparent (see figure 14). Some departments, which had been keen to make their voices heard when the cult of Reason was being establishing, now maintained a silence, while others which had shown obstinate resistence were now more disposed to welcome the idea of the Supreme Being. He marked His place on the map in a number of areas: in part of the west (Calvados, Manche, Orne, Ille-et-Vilaine) as in the north-east (Côte d'Or, Haute Marne, Meurthe) or in the Alpine and Provençal south-east (Hautes- and Basses-Alps, Var). Some twenty departments clearly illustrate this progression. They were the areas where dechristianization had been either indifferent (as in the Alpine region) or had affected only a minority of individuals (as in the Armorican borders), and for them the re-establishment of a faith – albeit very different from the old one – seemed welcome. On the other hand, the cartography of the interior of the country, where the score of Reason was higher than that of the Supreme Being, revealed homogeneous areas which owed nothing to chance. If those departments in the immediate proximity of Paris (Seine, Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne) reacted promptly to the impetus of the new cult, there were other important areas – in the north, as also to the south-west of Paris, right down to the centre of France – which stuck to their former alignment. The

same situation applied on the eastern side of the centre, from Saône-et-Loire to Mont Blanc, via Ain and Isère, and including some departments in the Midi.

What conclusion ought we to draw from these contrasting attitudes? Perhaps we can see in them confirmation of a more marked resistance, which tended to express itself in two ways: first, by a refusal to accept the cult of the Supreme Being, following on and linked to that of Reason as it was; and second, by a more welcoming attitude to a demand that was less traumatic than the preceding one.

We can also detect in the apathy of some previously affected regions the reaction of exhaustion. They had been too heavily influenced during the preceding months to get involved in a new adventure. This might well have been the case in the centre, and in the area around Lyons or to the north of the Alps. In any event, it is certainly not without sigificance that a department like Gard (bearing in mind its specific denominational situation) which had issued thirty-six addresses on Reason, sent out only fourteen in honour of the Supreme Being, while in nearby Provence and Comtat there was a comparatively massive rally, and that in an area where dechristianization had been both tardy and feeble, and where success was sharper and more unexpected.

We may well query the importance of municipal conformism in some regions which were both sluggish and docile at the same time, and perhaps query also the part played by the representatives on mission, who were second generation, mainly Robespierrists though sometimes not without hidden reservations. If we start to assess the relative importance of these different elements, we are already getting involved in the work of interpretation, which will be the objective of subsequent discussions. For the moment, therefore, let us simply register the unexpected success – albeit at different levels in different places – of this cult of the Supreme Being, which is all too frequently seen only through the perspective of a one-day ceremony in Paris.

However many questions it may raise, this test does not enable us to give a definitive response to the debate opened up by Aulard and Mathiez on the way in which the move from Reason to the Supreme Being occurred. Was it a clean break, even a traumatic retraction, or was it in many places a very gradual and sometimes unobserved transition? On the one hand we have the rather crude areas of agreement between the two maps which define those regions in which Reason and then the Supreme Being were successful; and on the other, the significant disagreements which proved that the actors – however modest – in this shadowy combat were deliberately malicious, and were nothing like as naïve as might have been thought. Between the two, we are left with an impression filled with fine shades of difference, which is ultimately ambiguous.

8
The dechristianizers

Who were the dechristianizers? A handful of aggressive revolutionaries, invested by virtue of their circumstances with inordinate power? At one time the reply to this question would have been given without hesitation, and the matter closed. For a whole school of counter-revolutionary or hagiographical historiography, whose dissertations formed the accepted basis of French publications, dechristianization was indeed the impious invention of a contemptible minority, the stain of whose actions tarnished the entire Revolution. However, another approach, which we would describe as Jacobin, came close to sharing these views: it derived directly from the Robespierrist argument which at the time denounced the dangerous importance of dechristianization, seeing the movement as a diversionary tactic of the Hébertists, or even a counter-revolutionary manipulation.

To reduce the subject to so grotesque an interpretation, even though it might lend itself all too easily to this treatment, is a deceptive oversimplification – a temptation, incidentally, which Richard Cobb was unable completely to avoid. It would, however, be unjust to say the same of Aulard, Mathiez or Georges Lefebvre: rereading them reveals many more delicate variations of interpretation than it is fashionable to admit. The merit of Cobb in his synthesis on *The People's Armies* – as indeed of Albert Soboul in his contributions – was undoubtedly to rethink dechristianization, without prejudice and from first principles, looking at it as an important phenomenon of collective mentalities and not as a sacrilegious curiosity or as an equivocal blot on the revolutionary adventure. For our part, we position ourselves in the mainstream of this re-evaluation, following a procedure which might be thought excessively scrupulous. We might well have defined the dechristianizers at the outset, and that possibly is what might have seemed the most natural course: but the problems then would have been prematurely defined and set, and the die cast. It is time now, at the conclusion of this line

of thought, to formulate these problems, with fuller information. At the risk of imparting to the phrase 'dechristianizing wave' a sort of magical quality, or reducing it simply to words with no meaning, we must now go further, and ask ourselves the why and the wherefore of this whole adventure.

Initially there will be no spectacular revelations. The writers of old proclaimed that the prime responsibility belonged to the representatives on mission, those proconsuls of the French provinces: and we shall put this responsibility in its proper place, which is not an unimportant one. Richard Cobb has presented a fine-tuned and penetrating analysis of the important position held by the revolutionary army in one whole aspect of the movement (specifically iconoclasm), while at the same time re-evaluating the rôle of these 'missionaries' who have all too easily been made the scapegoats in the counter-revolutionary exorcisms. Representatives on mission, or revolutionary armies, were both aggressors from the outside: could they really understand the movement in all its fullness and complexity? And we must also ask ourselves on whom they relied, as they were made welcome in more than one place.

The representatives on mission: the example of the south-east

Were the representatives on mission, or at least some of them, the people responsible for and the inventors of dechristianization? We think of Fouché in Nièvre, of Javogues in Forez, of Albitte, the scourge of Ain and Mont Blanc, and we are inclined at first to concede that they had an essential part to play. Looking at what they actually did, however, some of them more than justified their reputation, while others, who occasionally talked too much, cut a very different figure. Perhaps the simplest way to judge them – and certainly the unarguable way – is to submit the effectiveness of their work to a very revealing test: what impact did their presence have on the movement of abdications from the priesthood? This was the greatest single criterion, and the most sensitive, of the success of the dechristianizing campaign.

In this type of game, it is not hard to pick out right away a number of different groups. As Alphonse Aulard had already investigated thoroughly the archives of the south-west in order to catch dechristianization in the very act, we ourselves have gone through in detail those of the south-east, and perhaps we might take this as a starting-point, prior to opening up the debate subsequently on a broader basis. Among the representatives who operated in this quarter of France there were some who immediately demonstrated their effectiveness. This applied to Javogues in the northern part of the area under study, and his activities during Frimaire in Saône-et-Loire, the scene of his

expedition to Forez, will long be remembered. There was a similar situation with Fouché, in Nièvre and in Allier, from the end of Brumaire to Frimaire. Is it possible to trace the path of a representative from one department to another, simply by following the rising curve of abdications? This certainly seems to be true of Chateauneuf-Randon in the Massif Central, but above all, and without the slightest doubt, it applies to Albitte, between Ain and Mont Blanc: the representative arrived in Ain during the first decade of Pluviôse and the curve of abdications immediately shot up. His mission accomplished, he then moved to Mont Blanc, where he stayed from Ventôse to Floréal: and his arrival saw the campaign reach its highest level in the middle of Ventôse. The same demonstration, pitiless in its simplicity, is also to be found in the Basses-Alpes, where the campaign led by Dherbez-Latour was immediately signalled during Ventôse in the lists of abdicators. In Gard a similar occurrence took place; here the presence of the representative Borie worked wonders from Ventôse to Germinal, enabling us to follow his tracks as he moved around from one district to the other.

The arrival of Maignet in Provence, which had been asleep until then, immediately made itself felt. He was in Marseilles around 10 Pluviôse, and parish priests flocked there to surrender their letters of priestly authority. He was in Avignon for 27 Pluviôse and the constitutional bishop Rovère abdicated that very day, followed by the parish priests of the town. The test also gives us reverse confirmations: in places where there was no representative – and that certainly seemed to be the case in Drôme, where Boisset paid only a brief visit in Brumaire – the curve was extended over a much longer period, from Frimaire to Prairial. We might say the same of Ardèche, where the representatives (Reynaud and then Guyardin) failed to be accepted by the local Jacobins.

Although some reputations were confirmed, there were others which collapsed. The verbal excesses to Fréron in his mission in Marseilles made no impression, the number of abdications up to the time of his departure in Nivôse remaining minimal, and basically similar to the flow of spontaneous abdications. Sometimes the silence was not surprising, as in the case of those representatives who were denounced at the time for their excessive moderation, like Gouly in Ain, who even so arranged a number of ostentatious priestly marriage ceremonies. We should note also the significant lack of involvement by known Robespierrist representatives, starting in Var with the team which in spite of their disputes was made up of Salicetti, Moltedo, Ricord and the young Robespierre. Here no tidal wave followed the arrival of the representatives in Germinal, and the area remained almost untouched by the movement. In the neighbouring department of Alpes-Maritimes, the practice was disregarded right up to the departure of the younger Robespierre and Ricord during Messidor, and subsequently during the interim appointment

of Salicetti and then of Albitte, who instigated the first abdications during Fructidor, in other words after the fall of Robespierre.

Although on the basis of these conclusive tests it may not be legitimate to draw up an analysis of the policy followed nationally in religious matters by more than 150 representatives on mission who operated across the country between winter 1793 and summer 1794, we can certainly now outline a typology of dechristianizing approaches and activities. A number of distinct strata can be picked out, almost in successive batches, from those who were involved in combatting the Federalist insurrection and ensuring the re-conquest of the interior during the winter, through to the renewal of 19 Nivôse Year 2 and then to the cataclysm following Thermidor.

The first generation: moderates and dechristianizers

There was a total lack of homogeneity within the group of those who operated from autumn to winter 1793–4, and who for the most part were recalled during Nivôse, and it is easy to see why. At the time when the actual theory of dechristianization imposed from above was being translated into action by Fouché in Allier and then in Nièvre, and repeated by Laplanche in Cher, there was still no code of reference, as it were, and each representative used his own imagination. Some were technicians sent to accomplish a specific mission – for Faure in Nancy or Petitjean in Isère it was the raising of horses, although this did not prevent them involving themselves with priests, even to the point of being reprimanded for it. For others – like the team from Lyons (Collot, Fouché, Chateauneuf-Randon), the team from Toulon (Barras, Fréron, Ricord, the younger Robespierre) or from Bordeaux (Chaudron Rousseau, Baudot, Ysabeau, Tallien) – the military imperative carried the day, with all the drudgery of short-term hardships which it subsequently brought in its wake.

But there is no doubt that it was in the centre of France, around what we described somewhat misleadingly as the team from Lyons, that the most typical dechristianizers were to be found, even if ultimately all that they were doing was to regularize in these areas the experimental procedures instituted by Fouché in Nièvre, as they had been too by Laplanche in Cher. Perhaps even more striking than Fouché, an outstanding example was Claude Javogues, whose activities spread out around Lyons from Brumaire to Pluviôse, that is to say over almost four months. We would not for one moment claim to throw any new light on this activist, who has been so much decried and yet at the same time has commanded such admiration for the steadfastness he showed, even in his recantations, right up to his death. Javogues, like Chateauneuf-Randon, was the type of representative who was

always on the move. He arrived in September, and instead of settling down in Lyons we find him in October at Armeville (St Etienne) where he purged the municipality and formed a revolutionary army. On 29 October he was in his home town of Montbrison, which he re-named Montbrisé, and then set up the Commission of Popular Justice in Feurs. Next he moved to Saône-et-Loire, where he was operating in Macon at the beginning of Frimaire, setting up a further Popular Commission there. We then find him in Ain, on 19 Frimaire, accompanied by the revolutionary army, and on the 29th dealing with Bourg (not yet Bourg Regenerated) almost as if it were a town which had been taken by assault. By Nivôse he was back in Armes, where his dechristianizing policy really began to unfold. He decreed (on 1 Nivôse) that all churches were to become temples of Reason and, denouncing the wickedness of the rich, demanded that the people should be freed from 'these rhinoceroses known as the rich and the priests'. After being denounced with great bitterness and recalled by the Convention, he dug himself in, concentrating his activities firstly on Armes, and then on Villefranche, Feurs and Roanne. To make matters worse he returned the attack, sending in from Montbrisé on 13 Pluviôse a denunciation of Couthon, which caused a scandal. When an accusatory warrant was brought against his right-hand man Lapalus, and denunciatory calls were made about him, Javogues developed his own ideal of radical dechristianization which was counter to accepted practice, hence his quarrel with his colleagues 'from the Auvergne,' Couthon, Maignet, Chateauneuf-Randon, and their men. He attacked the moderate policies of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, telling them:

> I do not understand the proclamation of the Committee of Public Safety, which can only slow down the progress of the Revolution. Apparently Couthon needs some sort of religion in order to uphold the reign of the swindlers. Talking about civil wars of religion is the best way of encouraging them. The chameleons who call themselves apostles of different sects will evade all the various coercive measures that you take against them: it would be much simpler just to shoot them'.

Javogues quoted as an example the swift and decisive policy which he followed in Saône-et-Loire, 'where all the priests and all the charlatans from the court of Rome came spontaneously to place the airs and graces of superstition and fanaticism on the altar of philosophy.' He was brought back to the bosom of the Convention on 23 Ventôse, at the time when repression had been unleashed against the Hébertists, and made a fairly pitiful confession of his own faults when giving his excuses to Couthon: he had not wished to be the last one applying the big dechristianizing policy in the provinces.

Was Javogues an extreme case, almost to the point of being pathological?

The answer to this question is both yes and no. Let us take a look at what was happening north of the Loire during these same months. Around Paris we find Lejeune, in the district of Chauny in Aisne, initiating the same policy of activism that he was to pursue later in the Jura. Faure, who on 30 Brumaire presided over the inauguration of the Temple of Reason at Nancy, was just as involved in the abdication of priests as he was in raising and rounding up horses. In the north Chasles wrote in from Armentières on 25 Brumaire giving an account of his exploits, and Hérault, in Colmar, perhaps inspired by the example of Baudot in Strasbourg, announced: 'In two days' time I am arranging a festival of Reason in the chief town of the department, which in this part of the country is a remarkable victory over the most profound ignorance and deep-rooted fanaticism. And I have reason to believe that the destruction of these temples of prejudice, which we know will be repeated in the districts, will be repeated also in the communes.'

At about the same time Couturier – who like Javogues was a bustling activist – went through Seine-et-Oise, from Etampes to Rambouillet and Dourdan, travelling subsequently with Delacroix and Musset to Versailles, and then Corbeil. From bases in Beauvais and Amiens, Dumont thoroughly raked over the region under his control, in the Oise and also in the Somme, sending in from Boulogne on 11 Nivôse, a detailed account of victories over fanaticism and superstition. In Loir-et-Cher and in Indre-et-Loire, Guimberteau extended his activities from Brumaire to Nivôse, while Carrier, in Nantes, apparently preferred to rely on envoys with discretionary powers, like Le Batteux, who terrorized the villages of Morbihan.

The south-west overall had experience at that time of a number of representatives who left behind them a solid reputation as dechristianizers, which no doubt explains the importance attached to this region by Aulard in his work on the cult of Reason. But these early activities remained very localised. The team consisting of Laignelot and Lequinio operated in Charente and Charente Maritime from Brumaire right into Germinal, precipitating a mass of abdications in Frimaire and Nivôse, leaving us with the memory of the spectacular expeditions to Marennes and elsewhere, and of an extraordinary address in the temple of Reason at Rochefort. Dartigoeyte was even more fierce and intense (Laignelot and Lequinio seemed to dampen their ardour after Pluviôse); from the end of Brumaire to Germinal he combed through Gers, then the Landes, and finally Haute Garonne, his passage marked at each stage by a whole series of abdications which he instigated. However, with the exception of Bordeaux, where Tallien and Ysabeau appeared to leave the responsibility for the abdications which culminated in Frimaire to J.B. Lacombe, President of the Watch Committee of the Revolutionary Tribunal, the rest of the south-west region was still at that time relatively untouched.

In this sense we really have to make a comparison with the other part of the Midi – from Lyons to Marseilles – where, as we have already indicated, the epicentre of activism on the part of the representatives was situated around Lyons, from the back of the Massif Central to the foothills of the Alps, though neither Provence, Bas Languedoc, nor even the southern part of the Alpine area was as yet seriously affected. We may well be surprised at this, as there was no shortage of representatives on this particular front of the struggle against Federalism. But we have already noted the dichotomy between the harsh dechristianization of the utterances of someone like Fréron – whose ambition was to score a double blow against both the priests and the wealthy merchants of Marseilles by filling up the Old Port with the rubble from Our Lady of Protection – and the comparative paucity of his actual accomplishments. We might say the same of Rovère, in Vaucluse, or of Boisset, in Hérault, whose dechristianizing words left to others (the political club and the revolutionary army of Montpellier) the responsibility for actual initiatives on the ground.

Nivôse Year 2: new teams

In these areas of the Midi, whether we are dealing with south-west or the south-east, the initiative in extending the dechristianizing movement now reverted – following the new nominations of Nivôse Year 2 – to a new generation of representatives on mission. This looks even more paradoxical, as in spring 1794 these representatives (who were familiar with the decree of 18 Frimaire on religious liberty) could no longer plead ignorance. They had all been formally warned in the circular from the Committee of Public Safety, which recommended prudence 'particularly in matters of religious opinion, where violence leads to bitterness but fails to convince.' It was on the basis of this charter that new nominations of Nivôse were made, and these had a major effect on the regions. By a further paradox, which Mathiez had already seen, we are now in fact about to encounter a number of representatives who were the most bitter dechristianizers.

Some had only to continue with their previous policy, as they were reassigned to the same place – for example, the team from Lyons: Fouché, Méaulle, Laporte – until Floréal. In the correspondence relating to their activities bitter complaints sometimes showed through, beneath the appearance of docility, although they did not prevent what was actually happening. It was on 17 Nivôse that a decree by Fouché, Albitte and Laporte stipulated that no cult was to be permitted other than that of Reason and Morality, every public demonstration of religion was forbidden, as was the wearing of religious dress, church bells were silenced for ever by being dispatched to the

foundry for melting down, while burials were regulated in accordance with the experimental format introduced by Fouché in Nièvre.

Staying for the moment with the south-east, it was elsewhere, in areas which until that time had remained comparatively untouched, that the activities of the really important dechristianizers began to unfold, that is, Albitte, Chateauneuf-Randon, Borie, Maignet, Dherbez Latour.

Chateauneuf-Randon, in the spring of 1794, was no novice at dechristianizing action, having started at the siege of Lyons, but initially in an area which was enormous and which covered a large part of the Massif Central. We can follow him, with his troops and apostles, to Cantal and Lozère, from October to December 1793, where he announced a decree (22 Frimaire, and then 11 Nivôse Year 2) on the dismantling of bell-towers and the destruction of crosses. Commissaries were dispatched to the cantons, and there was an ever-present threat from the garrisons of the revolutionary army. Where priests themselves were in hiding, he vented his iconoclastic rage on inanimate objects, though this did not stop him meeting strong opposition, in Gard, at the end of his circuit.

Albitte, who had to cover the ground between Marseilles and Lyons, from the Jura to Savoie and Isère, so as to complete his tour by arriving at Nice in Fructidor, succeeded nevertheless in linking his name with one of the most extreme and persistent attempts at systematic destruction. Ain and Mont Blanc were the territories chosen for this, between Nivôse Year 2, the date of his arrival at Bourg-en-Bresse, and the end of Floréal when he left Savoie for a brief foray into Isère. This representative, for both national and local historiography, remains the man of the oath and the bell-towers. He ordered the razing of bell-towers 'to the ground level of the nation' in Ain and part of Mont Blanc, as Chateauneuf-Randon had done, but also the requirement that priests take an oath abjuring and denying the Catholic faith, and it was rumoured that the form of words used had been secretly given to him by an apostate priest, who ensured that the phraseology was sufficiently subtle to eliminate any possibility of ambiguity.

From this example we can now move on fairly rapidly to the representatives who to a greater or a lesser degree imitated Albitte, such as Reynaud and Guyardin in Ardèche, although they were undoubtedly less effective. The man whose policy followed the same lines most closely, and who is therefore the most directly comparable, was unquestionably Borie in Gard and then in Lozère. He arrived in Nîmes at the beginning of Pluviôse, covered Gard, moved on to Lozère at the end of Germinal, and finally returned in Floréal and Prairial to his starting-point. The two-fold statistics of priestly abdications and of renunciations of the Catholic faith followed by the opening of a temple of Reason, demonstrate the continuity of a policy which would adapt itself

without undue problems to the new conditions about to be imposed by the cult of the Supreme Being.

There was no noticeable difference between the measures introduced by Borie and those followed at about the same time by Maignet in Bouches-du-Rhône and Vaucluse: the same, almost immediate, impetus given to the movement of abdications, the same attention devoted to carrying out punctually a coherent policy (plate, bells, the celebration of the Tenth Day), but retaining nevertheless the Robespierrist scruple of questioning the Committee of Public Safety in order to ascertain how far it was legitimate to go while at the same time respecting the decree on religious liberty. Finally Dherbez-Latour, the representative in the Basses-Alpes who unleashed during Ventôse the movement of collective abdications in the districts of Forcalquier and Sisteron, also seemed to apply, and without apparent scruples, this powerful and narrow interpretation of the decree on religious freedom.

By contrast, it is not difficult to pick out the much more prudent or neutral line followed in Var and in the Alpes-Maritimes under the vigilant eye of Augustin Robespierre. There was no official list of those abandoning the priesthood, and the decrees of Ricord during Ventôse on the removal of plate, or on the laïcisation of the civil state in the region around Nice, seem to have been the boldest and the most extreme measures in these areas. A letter from Robespierre regarding Oneille explains pretty clearly the rationale for their prudence at this time: 'The defenders of our native land have not laid hands on a single image in a part of the country where the brush of superstition has painted all the walls.'

The south-west part of France appears fairly comparable with the other part of the Midi. Among the first-generation representatives who were still operating until spring, whether they had been reinstated or had simply clung on, a number turned a deaf ear to the directives they received from above and continued with their active dechristianization. (Dartigoeyte would have fallen into this category, as he continued to force through priestly abdications in Haute-Garonne right into Ventôse.) Others reduced this aspect of their propaganda to a lower key, as Laignelot and Lequinio did, at least from Pluviôse onwards.

Nevertheless, in this central part of the west near to the initial focal points of the movement, a lull seemed to settle in the majority of departments, even if it is possible to find a few exceptions to prove the rule. In Creuse, for example, we can clearly link a second dechristianizing blaze, following that of winter, to the visit of the representative Vernerey in Pluviôse or Ventôse. Further south, in Lot-et-Garonne, the arrival during Pluviôse of the representative Monestier from Lozère unleashed similarly a brief renewal of activity. As in the south-east, however, it was the peripheral departments which gave

to the new representatives the opportunity of intervening belatedly and at the wrong time, or so it would appear, in places which up to that point had been comparatively, or even totally, unaffected. A different Monestier ('from Puy-de-Dôme'), the former Canon of Clermont-Ferrand, unleashed activity which reached its climax in Ventôse and in Germinal. Later still Chaudron-Rousseau went into Aude during Floréal and initiated dechristianizing measures which until that time were virtually unknown there. In the Pyrénées Orientales, which he visited subsequently, the equally belated outbreak seems to have been hampered rather than encouraged by the representatives Milhaud and Soubrany, and the initiative reverted more to Perpignan, to activists of lesser stature (Doppet and Ricord) who achieved only mediocre results. Overall, then, the balance sheet of southern France presented a very varied picture. But the contrasts were even sharper north of the Loire, or in the central part of the country to which calm seemed to be returning. The old activists, like Lecarpentier (in Manche) or Guimberteau (who had moved from Loir-et-Cher to Seine Inférieure) had grown wiser. Outbursts of belated activity were rare, even if a few examples did occur. Joseph Lebon, who had been in the Pas-de-Calais since Brumaire, did not turn his terroristic activism onto the religious sphere until winter, although from Nivôse onwards he seemed to apply lessons he had learned from his colleague and neighbour Dumont, with spectacular results.

Whilst the teams operating around Paris were concentrating on calming down the situation, as they had been faced with hostile reactions from the people (e.g. Morisson and Godefroy took up the defence of the rebels from Courtalain in Seine-et-Marne), Burgundy and Franche Comté were visited by a number of formidable individuals. Bernard (from Saintes) attempted during Nivôse to initiate a dechristianization movement in the department which had recently been annexed from Mont Terrible. He went on to the Côte d'Or, and then to Seine-et-Loire, where he achieved significant results right through till Germinal (the final offensive in the district of Arnay le Duc). But his colleague Lejeune, who was active in Doubs and then in Haute Saône from Ventôse to Messidor, ought to have the last word in this part of France. As soon as he appeared, in the district of Orgelet towards the end of Ventôse, priests immediately began to abdicate, and (to quote local officials): 'Lejeune, the representative of the people, had only to appear in our district, and like the sun which dissipates and sweeps away the mists, this member of the Montagne gave back to us our golden age, and made us forget about the very idea of priests who had generated a century of iron rule.' By comparison with these stars, the influence of most of the other representatives in the East (Maure, Thirion, Roux and Massieu) seems very mild.

After what was intended to be merely a survey of the dechristianizing

initiatives of the various representatives, is it possible now to draw up a balance sheet?

The responsibility of these individuals appears incontrovertible from several points of view, but at the same time we soon sense that the old traditional interpretations, which ascribed to these formidable emissaries of centralized Jacobinism full accountability for a policy which was not that of the Committee of Public Safety, are very restrictive. However, we should not lose sight of two important pieces of evidence. First, there were important areas where the initiative of the representatives was completely blocked and rejected by the collective will of the people, or alternatively was deflected to more marginal forms of activity (like the destruction of bell-towers). Behind the map of the deliberate policies of the representatives we begin to see the outline of another map, which is that of the areas of stubborn resistance. Secondly, there were some regions where dechristianization was very strong, and where the policy of the representatives could scarcely have been held responsible. We have to look further back, or indeed elsewhere, for the reasons. Among the ranks of external aggressors, the revolutionary armies feature prominently, but today we possess the elements of a more considered and varied response.

The revolutionary army: an instrument of the terror

Old monographs dwell incessantly on the misdeeds of the army or of the revolutionary armies. There was undoubtedly some justification for this, and although they frequently exaggerated the facts, they were nevertheless a very real reflection of a genuine and widespread panic.

Based on the research of Richard Cobb, however, we can now assess more accurately the part played by these armed missionaries of the Revolution. We need first of all to identify them, and then to position them: using the synthesis Cobb put forward in *The People's Armies* it is not difficult to draw up the map of these internal armies and their movements, which the author, somewhat tantalizingly, has left the reader to establish.

First and foremost, of course, we have the Parisian revolutionary army, its different detachments and its major expeditions. Around Paris it did more than just assist the operations of the representatives: in Oise, Seine-et-Oise, and Seine-et-Marne, for example, it seemed to be present everywhere, throughout the winter. At Nogent-sur-Seine, during Brumaire, we come across the 'Brothers of Paris' from the battalion of the Section of the Temple. On 10 Brumaire, at Laon, the iconoclastic festival linked the militants of the popular society with the sans-culottes from Paris, for whom Bardin, the orator

of the Section of the French Panthéon, assumed the role of spokesman. These are just a couple of examples from many other possible ones.

Then the revolutionary army from Paris set off for Lyons to join in the anti-federalist struggle. As Cobb describes it, their passage was strewn with outbreaks of savage dechristianization, of which iconoclastic vandalism was the dominant feature, though other tests of dechristianization (abdications, etc.) do not really bear out the intensity of the shock they caused in the places through which they passed. There is nevertheless no doubt that over part of the south-east the revolutionary army of Paris played an extremely important role. It arrived in Lyons on 5 Frimaire, under the command of Ronsin, and stayed in the area until it was disbanded four months later on 7 Germinal. The strength of the army had been increased during the journey by the addition of the revolutionary battalions of Nièvre (some 300 men) and of Allier (350 men), and they operated under the direction of the temporary Commission in Lyons, whose story for the most part merges with theirs through to Germinal. It was on the initiative of this temporary Commission and its leaders that detachments of the revolutionary army were sent on expeditions, round and about, during the winter of 1794. Even before the British author undertook his research, writers of memoirs in the previous century had detailed the chronology of these movements. Reading these, we find that Rhône, Loire, Ain, and Saône-et-Loire were terrorized by the activities of the Parisian revolutionary army, as was a great part of Haute-Loire, Ardèche, and the north-east of Isère. Some names were particularly reviled, recurring constantly, and they were not the representatives on mission but the commissioners – Lapalus in Loire, Vauquoy in Ain or Terres Froides, Chepy in Isère, all of them responsible for these commando operations.

One of Richard Cobb's great merits was to identify and highlight the multiplicity of local armies, or even municipal armies, which sprang up in consequence of the presence of the revolutionary army from Paris on which attention has usually been focused. Indeed, he stressed in particular the number of these that existed in the Midi, and regarded them as 'a much more vigorous instrument of dechristianization than the Parisian army'.

The provincial armies

Thus we discover a revolutionary army from Loire, with a strength of 1200 men, formed by Javogues in October, operational in Frimaire, maintained under arms in Nivôse, and finally disbanded only in Ventôse – an exceptionally long time, particularly as the Committee of Public Safety had decreed in Frimaire that these local armies should be disbanded. Elsewhere, initiatives were rather more limited, although we can think of the army from

Macon, the formidable but modest army from Crémieu (only thirty-two men strong!), the company from Valence, and the small troop of men from the Hautes-Alpes, strengthened by additions from the neighbouring Basses-Alpes. With the exception of a small number of municipal troops, the Midi, whether we are talking of Provence or of Languedoc, really had only one active battalion, which was at Montpellier. Here 500 men operated from the beginning of Brumaire to the end of Frimaire.

Looking at the other part of the Midi, i.e. that of the south-west (which was also studied in great detail by Cobb), we are suddenly presented with a picture showing much greater contrasts. Local revolutionary armies did indeed exist, and in quite large numbers. Many departments, however, were completely free of them, while among those in which they were operating, dechristianizing activity was minimal, or even non-existent, as was the case with the army of the Basses-Pyrénées. The impact of the army of Lot, which also operated in Aveyron, was also quite modest: it certainly rounded up refractory priests, but was never really involved in organized dechristianization. A similar situation applied in Gironde: the declared atheism of the officers of the army from Bordeaux (like Peyraud d'Herval, who passed on news from Paris to the national club) did not result in brutally anti-religious activism.

There was only one really visible exception to this, which was that of the revolutionary army from Toulouse, and here Cobb has followed the course of its dechristianizing activities, from Vendémiaire to Frimaire in Ariège (Seix, Grenade, Le Mas d'Azil, then Pamiers and Saint Girons) and also in Haute-Garonne around Toulouse. The tests which we were able to apply showing the effectiveness of this activity were more positive on the question of church closures than on abdications, but even so there is no doubt that here, as in Lyons, though on a smaller scale, the revolutionary army was directly involved and responsible.

What was happening in the northern half of France? We need not revert to the subject of the Parisian army and its expeditions around Paris itself (but we should not forget these either), even though its theatre of operations moved subsequently to Lyons. Local revolutionary armies were not unknown in the north, although they were much less widespread, but it would be remiss not to mention the one from Strasbourg, headed by Euloge Schneider, which ploughed through Bas-Rhin during Frimaire and was much more aggressive than the team of representatives (Baudot, Lacoste) who at the time were in charge of the area.

This review, brief though it may be, gives us some appreciation of the part played overall in the sphere of dechristianization by the revolutionary armies. Following lines similar to Richard Cobb (but also making clear the differences between his interpretation and our own), there seems little doubt that their

active involvement was an essential element if we are to understand the intensity of the campaign in which the revolutionary army from Paris, and the groups operating with it, were engaged. This was mainly around Paris, the stretch between Paris and Lyons, and of course in the area around Lyons itself. Elsewhere, with the exception of a few places, it seems unlikely that the small municipal armies from the Midi made much of a contribution, if only because the majority survived at best until Nivôse, while in virtually the whole of France outside the main centres dechristianization was happening between Ventôse and Germinal, sometimes later. So the revolutionary armies are acquitted absolutely by the chronology of events.

Staying for the moment with the revolutionary armies proper, we readily agree with Cobb that the part played by the troops was not restricted only to what they accomplished in action. Less well-known in this connection is the sometimes active propagation of dechristianization during the marches and in the encampments by the battalions of national volunteers. We need to emphasize here the importance of the major roads, in the north, in the east, between Paris and Lyons, and in the Rhône valley. The studies currently being conducted under the direction of J.P. Bertaud will no doubt enable us to go beyond the references to it which are few and scattered today.

And yet we do find these references. On the frontier at Gex, in the winter of 1794, the volunteers of a regiment from Gironde took advantage of a fair being held there in order to raise the people from the surrounding countryside against the priests, and the whole thing ended in confusion. All along the Mediterranean coast the part played by brothers in arms often looks important, and we begin to wonder whether part of the dechristianizing ritual, as well as its symbolism, was not in fact passed on by them. In Nivôse, for example, at Entrevaux – which incidentally was a little town well off the beaten track – the extraordinary procession of the mitred donkey seems to have come straight from a Lyons masquerade, and might well have been suggested by the brothers in arms who were stationed there.

What we have been trying to assess, from the role of the representatives on mission to that of the revolutionary armies, is the strength of imported, or external, dechristianization and although the last word has not been said on this subject (we still need to ask ourselves who the apostles and the prime movers were), we can now start to put together a few basic conclusions. The part played by the representatives on mission was important in a number of ways, but it was not solely responsible for the successes and failures of dechristianization. The intervention of revolutionary armies at a local level was a significant additional factor, even a prime element of collective instigation, but in its geographical spread, as in its various manifestations, it explains only a limited part of the phenomenon. Should we not finally go

back to grass roots, and ask ourselves who were the agents and the actors of dechristianization in town and village?

The local agents of dechristianization

Perhaps we might be forgiven if we take a look for a moment at the numbers. It is important to assess at its foundation, that is to say at the level of local examples, the people who took charge of dechristianization in practice, in a word, those whose affair it was. Subject to pressure applied if not from above at least from outside – by administrations, municipalities, popular societies – were they active agents of dechristianization, totally involved concelebrants, or were they simply passive channels, who absorbed the impulsion and played its echo back to the centre? Were they in fact dechristianizers, as at first sight they appear to be or were they – if we can use such a word – the dechristianized? The question is misleadingly simple, as we might guess.

In order to answer it, it is possible to re-utilize the whole collection of the thousands of addresses on the subject of religion, and look at them from the points of view of the origin of the documents; the types of organization or institution sending them, and their exact geographical position; and the dates on which they were sent in. (See figures 16–18.)

From this perspective we have classified the addresses received by the Convention under several different headings: the correspondence of the representatives on Mission (or the representatives of authority speaking to authority), and then addresses from departments and districts, which it seemed reasonable to put together in the same group. District or departmental tribunals intervened only occasionally, and under specific circumstances, but on occasion they do need to be differentiated. Next in this descending pyramid of power comes the flow of municipal, urban or village correspondence. Then a separate classification was made for revolutionary committees and particularly for popular societies, who had such an important part to play. There remains a group of mixed addresses sent in by an assortment of different authorities: districts and municipal bodies of a town or, more often, municipal bodies and popular societies – a type of document too specific not to be treated separately. Finally, correspondence from individuals, among which letters from priests occupy a significant but not an exclusive place, have been taken into account because of their importance, at least at the start of the movement. All of this information has been listed, by department and on a monthly basis, discounting the usual methods of synthesis by large regional groupings. Using similar thinking we chose to regroup the sub-divisions by major categories (the voice of authority, linking together representatives on mission,

Table 8.1 The sources of addresses

Quarter	*North-west*	*North-east*	*South-west*	*South-east*
The voice of authority	25%	33%	27%	18%
Municipalities	30%	24%	21%	25%
Popular society	32%	34%	41%	46%

departments and districts, contrasting with municipalities on one hand and popular societies on the other).

The first overall split, taking into account only the most important categories, already starts to suggest significant variations.

Without going into too much fine detail, we give below (table 8.2), as an example, an analysis of the southern half of France, showing a more exact classification by category which illustrates the evolution on a monthly basis.

By linking with these documents the maps established on a departmental basis to assess the relative importance of popular societies, municipalities and local authorities, we now have a number of keys which will enable us to appreciate the part played by the different actors.

As a first observation, we note, via the various headings we have used, that almost immediately a sort of hierarchy is established. The role of the representatives on mission, which initially was quite important, as we saw in the Midi, became subsequently much more discreet, in spite of a brief resurgence during the spring. As we have just seen them in action on the ground, we know that this discretion is only apparent. Put on their guard by directives from the Committee of Public Safety, they no longer emphasized their dechristianizing exploits, but their silence should not deceive us. From within the group of more modest partners, although there is little to say regarding the tribunals, we observe in contrast that Year 2 saw an increase in the statements from Watch Committees. These were virtually non-existent at the beginning, but they were noticeably present from the spring onwards. Conversely, the correspondence from individuals (and these were mainly priests), which in the first phase was considerable, particularly in Brumaire, ceased almost entirely from the spring. But how much of this correspondence flowed back whence it came, or was subjected to a very careful process of selection when it arrived on the desk of a Convention where such things were no longer acceptable?

The main partners, then, were the authorities of the districts and the departments (mainly in fact the districts), then the municipalities, and finally

Table 8.2 The evolution of addresses issued to the National Convention month by month in the southern half of France (SW: south-west; SE: south-east)

In % (*rounded*)		*Bru*	*Fri*	*Niv*	*Plu*	*Ven*	*Ger*	*Flo*	*Prai*	*Mes*	*Total by month over period*
Representatives	SW	14	8	4	1	0	6	2	0		5
	SE	10	6.7	1	3	1.7	2	2	0.8	0	2.5
Departments	SW	22	19	13	15	23	26	23	32		22
and Districts	SE	3	23	8	20	12	19	19	19	12	15
Municipalities	SW	12	20	38	27	27	14	11	15		21
	SE	6.6	35	46.6	32	26	24	16	17	13.5	25.4
Popular societies	SW	36	43	34	43	36	42	51	43		41
	SE	36.6	29	36	37.5	49.5	46	49.4	60	61	46
Committees	SW	2	1	0	3	7	1	4	5		3
	SE	0	0	2.6	2	2.6	2	4	2.5	0	2
Mixed addresses	SW	0	0	1	6	5	1	2	0		2
	SE	3	1	2	4	4.3	4	6.4	1.7	7	3.5
Individuals	SW	10	6	9	2	0	3	4	0		4
	SE	36.6	2.7	2.6	1	3.4	1	0	1.7	1.7	3.4
Tribunals	SW	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7		0.6
	SE	3.3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.7	5	1

the popular societies. However, as we might imagine, the level of their activity varied considerably, both from one place to another and from one period to another.

Revolutionary activism: the three faces of France

The overall evaluation contrasts northern France with the Midi, both in the scale and in the rural character of the dechristianizing phenomenon, and we are talking about a Midi where the initiative had reverted largely to the popular societies, particularly in the south-east, while north of the Loire the scenario was much more complex. The voice of the hierarchy – by which we mean that of the representatives but mainly that of the departmental and district authorities – was particularly influential in the north-east quarter, as it also was in the west, from Brittany to the regions around the Loire. (See figure 17.) A third grouping emerged around Paris, but covering also the north-west, into Normandy, where addresses originated most frequently from the municipalities. In this respect the maps enable us to draw up with an almost unexpected clarity and accuracy the political geography of revolutionary France. We see there the heartland of the popular societies, that enormous triangle stretching from Lyons to Nice and to Montpellier, and its extension – albeit somewhat diminished – into Aquitaine and the south-west. (See figure 16.) The part played by the municipalities, which was very evident around Paris, was equally strong in the greater part of the south-east, though it did not match that of the popular societies. However, we might say that here it was from the very grass roots – the communes and village clubs – that for the most part the voice of dechristianization arose. (See figure 18.) The contrast is all the more marked with those places where the initiative came from above, i.e. the north-east quarter, and to a certain extent along the frontier of the north, the Armorican and Ligerian west of France. When we look at the maps we have suggested of the overall flow of dechristianizing addresses and manifestations, many possible explanations suggest themselves immediately, for these were the areas where the greatest stubbornness and resistance to the movement were to be found. Taking a broader view, if we compare these maps to those established within the framework of a more detailed investigation into the geopolitics of the country, based on the overall flow of the addresses received by the Convention in Year 2 (whether they were concerned with the religious problem or not), we find here once again, perhaps in a crude way but certainly in a way that is enormously expressive, that the revolutionary initiative manifested itself in quite different ways from one major area of France to another.

Table 8.3 Percentage of dechristianizing addresses by source of issue in the north-west quarter

	Bru	*Fri*	*Niv*	*Pluv*	*Ven*	*Ger*	*Flo*	*Prai*	*Mes*	*Ther*
Authorities	14	19	27	26	28	37	31	24	23	21
Municipalities	29	40	34	34	30	29	23	19	20	24
Popular societies	21	15	24	28	24	33	33	52	48	50
Individuals	32	24	12	10	12	6	9	5	7	3

Perhaps we have thus demonstrated simply that the successes and failures of dechristianization depended on local political conditions, and that an overall summary would not be without interest. But we also need to build into it the impact of time, so as to take fully into account the evolution of swiftly and continuously changing conditions. Depending on whether the regions had been affected at an earlier or at a later stage, the spokesmen were by no means identical. We can assess this if we follow month by month, looking at the whole of France, the source of the documents addressed to the Convention.

A calendar established for the north-west quarter of France is more concise in its categories of reference, but it corroborates the view already given for the sourthern half of the country.

In spite of the structural differences stressed before, the convergence of the movement month by month is very clear, from the north to the south.

Initially, say in Brumaire, the addresses were evenly spread: representatives on mission held forth, individuals poured out their hearts, departments and districts expressed their thoughts, but the municipalities stayed somewhat reserved, and the participation of popular societies was perhaps not minimal but was certainly comparatively modest. The first major explosion, in Frimaire, saw the communes speaking their piece, right across the northern part of France, but very clearly in the south too, while the representatives on mission grew more reserved, and the flow of individual confessions and exhortations also started to dry up. The addresses from municipalities were sustained at a high level, certainly until Nivôse and often right up to the push of Ventôse/Germinal, after which they dropped away noticeably, for the political context had been changed by the repression of Hébertism and municipal officers had learned to hold their tongue. But the ball was picked up mainly by the popular societies, who after Ventôse took over the role of prime movers and major speakers in at least half of the cases and sometimes more. It seems, too, that the part played by local authorities – departments and districts –

increased in tandem, even though the movement at this level was less clear. But after Prairial was it really any longer a question of dechristianization at all, at a time when the Supreme Being was being imposed right across the country?

Beyond any mutually conflicting aspects, however, there were some proofs which imposed themselves irrefutably. The dechristianizing movement, which had frequently been set in motion by higher authority, particularly by the representatives on mission, was handed on by the popular societies and then carried through by the municipalities. But it had created its own dynamic, adapting itself to local political conditions, which varied from one region to another. In the more stubborn areas it remained dependent on the authorities – departments or districts – while elsewhere it found its support from within society itself.

Behind this analysis we can sense that the face of local dechristianization appeared quite different from one place to another, even though the important part played by the popular societies was always predominant. It might be said that our approach is incomplete, and therefore perhaps unbalanced. If, however, we attempt an analysis on a different basis – for example, who inspired or even who recorded abdications from the priesthood? – it results in an entirely different profile, which gives undue emphasis to the part played by the authorities and, particularly, by the districts. The responsibility of the districts shows very clearly on the map illustrating the pattern of those priests who left the priesthood, as we have seen, and it highlights the contrast between the districts which were apathetic and those whose activism could not be faulted. Occasionally we get direct confirmation of this impression, when a region took the trouble to indicate who actually received the abdications, and this was the case in the district of Louhans. Here, out of forty-four individual cases, twenty-two were heard by the district authority, seventeen by the municipality, two by the popular society, two by the Watch Committee, and the last one was addressed directly to the Convention. This cumbersome weight of administrative authority can be found in other areas of dechristianization, for example, in dealing with the removal of plate, and we might conclude on these grounds that in its way it gives rise to similar distortions.

In fact dechristianization, both by the mutual convergence and superimposition of different initiatives, defies any attempt at univocal oversimplification. What clearly appears behind the statistical analysis which we have just shown is, however, the indisputable and very real involvement of one section of local forces in a a movement which was only partially imposed or brought in from the outside. Behind this conclusion, which retains the neutrality and the impersonality of all statistics, it would be nice finally to catch a glimpse of these apostles of dechristianization at work.

In search of the 'basic' dechristianizer

The point at which the impetus from the outside was felt, and where local dynamism began, is where we now have to try to pin down the active dechristianizers. Who were they? Unimportant dechristianizers, major dechristianizers, leaders as people said, or merely little people?

What makes the sociology of this question even more difficult is without any doubt the astonishing work of myth-making and concealment which has been practised by the world of historiography for over a century. An elite, and more specifically a middle-class elite, dedicated itself to shedding all responsibility for an adventure of which it was at the very heart. The author of an indifferent monograph on Ain sums up, without undue nicety, the essence of the authorized version which was passed on: 'It was the crime of a handful of men without education, without talent, without principles, without conscience, and almost all of them outsiders.' All that remained was to pick out from within this miserable and anonymous group a number of scapegoats, either collective ones (the 'red priests' whom Brégail wrote about in the early part of the century, with reference to the south-west) or individuals (Chépy, Vauquoy, Lapalus in the area around Lyons).

Far be it from us either to gloss over this aspect or to validate it, or even to dismiss it out of hand – we shall be coming across these 'red priests' again. The work of rereading and impartially analysing this subject has already been thoroughly tackled by Richard Cobb in his study of revolutionary armies, a vital contribution, even though the author was unable entirely to restrain himself from substituting a whole network of new illusions for those which had been exorcized, to which the subject lends itself so easily.

The 'persecutors'

By following the histories it is possible to differentiate between the 'persecutors' and the 'apostles', and perhaps we may be forgiven for conveniently splitting the two groups. What persecutors? Charles Lanteirès, the national agent for the district of Alès, aged 30, was tried at Nîmes on 13 Messidor for his brutality, of which the story of one of his expeditions to Saint Florent on 25 Floréal was a fairly typical example. Accompanied by gendarmes from Alès and Pont de Cèze, he visited the commune, looking for crosses on the doors. At Montmajoud his search was rewarded by the discovery in the road of a small wooden cross, which might have been simply a child's plaything. He immediately assembled the entire population in the temple of Reason to harangue them, dragging several of them off to prison in

Arles. Another persecutor was the revolutionary commissioner Vauquoy. In his expeditions around the region of Crémieu or the district of Tour du Pin, he made a point of drinking from the sacred chalices, defying the Eternal Father to punish him ... if He actually existed.

Ranked with the famous ones was the group – in fact the large majority – of those who were anonymous, or almost anonymous: Séchier, the parish priest from Barcelonnette, who travelled around the hills destroying crosses; Gauthier des Orcières, the former attorney in Ain, 'furiously dedicated to closing down churches'; the mayor of Chanoy, near Trévoux, who read and wrote a commentary on the blasphemous addresses of Lequinio, then bought the village church, took up residence in it ... and died there, in agony, as was just and proper.

In addition there was the group of 'commissioners', some sent on behalf of a popular society, some by a representative, some by the executive authority. We know who the delegates of the representative Laplanche were in the districts of Cher: Dabouvrie at Vierzon, Bonnaire at Sancerre, and – perhaps most important – Chedin, an apostate priest who arranged forced marriages for his colleagues in the district of Sancoins. In Nièvre, and in Saône-et-Loire, we meet their counterparts, like Lanneau, formerly a canon at Autun.

In the Massif Central, the delegates of the representative Taillefer in Aveyron came and went one after the other: Lagard, a judge from Cahors, Cléophas Perier, a national agent from Lauzerte. Then there were those of Chateauneuf-Randon. The representative Bô believed that these had done more harm than good in Cantal by their brutality in destroying bell-towers during Pluviôse. Having revoked their actions he flattered himself that he could finish the job by using gentler methods.

Along with the assistants of the representatives on mission, one group who maintained a high profile in the front rank of the persecutors was that of the 'commissioners'. They were of all sorts and of all kinds. In some places their influence and scope for initiative were equal in every way to those of the representatives. This was the case, in particular, for those commissioners of the executive authority who operated on behalf of the temporary Commission from Lyon. Among them, as indeed among the political commissioners who backed them, we find once again a number of the major activists of dechristianization: Vauquoy, who instigated expeditions in Ain as well as in the district of Tour du Pin; Chépy, the jack of all trades in Isère, whose praises the representative Petitjean never ceased to sing; Lapalus, the man responsible for the expeditions in Forez; and many others, perhaps more often orators than men of action, like Dorfeuille and Millet (although frequently it was not easy to differentiate between the two styles).

It was around these men that the dechristianizers from the outside and the

local recruits merged, people who had come from the authorities or the popular societies in the locality. A cloud had developed linking local Jacobins with outsiders, and historians have concentrated on this. But Richard Cobb has demonstrated that Vauquoy, as the time of his expeditions in Isère, made much more use of the army from Crémieu (a band of thirty-two men) under their dubious leader Marc Dolle, than he did of the Parisian army.

The 'apostles'

There has been complementarity and often confusion between the role of persecutor and that of 'apostle'. The requirement for apostles to give civic sermons was something which antedated the major dechristianizing push, and it had been used from these earlier years by the constitutional clergy themselves to 'patriotize' or even 'de-fanaticize' the country districts.

This apostolic or more simply pedagogic ideal spread during the following months and made itself felt at about the time of the dechristianizing campaign. We encounter it almost everywhere, but particularly in those places where resistance was becoming apparent. To give just a few examples, we recall the civic sermons which were given around Lyons during Nivôse in Year 2 by the actor Dorfeuille and the journalist Millet, the editor of *Père Duchesne de Commune affranchie*. At Louhans, on 12 Pluviôse, the popular society conceived the idea of nominating in every commune a worthy citizen, who would both give instruction and edify his fellow citizens by his exemplary life. At about the same period, in Ain, the popular society of Trévoux increased the number of its expeditions to the villages of Dombes by its own apostles, who included the former curate Tollet as one of the orators. At Bourg the local doctor, whose name was Rollet but who was called Marat, came to the fore, while in Mont Blanc the Revolutionary Committee of Aix-les-Bains wrestled somewhat irritably with the problem of how to save the inhabitants of Chautagne from their ignorance and from being deluded by the wealthy.

The representatives in the Massif Central paid particular attention to this problem, mainly because the area was so difficult of access. In Aveyron, the representative Taillefer sent his missionaries all over the countryside from the beginning of Brumaire, backed up by the popular society of Rodez, and we also hear of the constitutional priest from Espalion who combed the district accompanied by three members of the political club. Undertakings such as these were not without their difficulties. There was real danger for the apostles in such wild countryside, and those of Chateauneuf-Randon experienced this on several occasions in Cantal. Furthermore, it was not always easy to recruit proselytes who were up to the requirements of their mission. In Cantal at the

end of Pluviôse, Bô attempted to replace sermons at mass by civic preaching and instruction, but he complained bitterly that the popular societies were providing him with very few worthwhile instructors.

In Languedoc and Provence there was a strong network of popular societies, and *a priori* these areas of the Midi did not experience such problems, for revolutionary proselytism was solidly grounded there, well before the main dechristianizing episode. Even so, things did not always go smoothly, as there was frequently a marked lack of support. Thus the patriotic mayor of Puimoisson, in the Basses-Alpes, who was in despair at his inability to force his parish priest to abdicate, was reduced to setting an example by having himself solemnly de-baptised, and giving himself the new forenames of Hyacinth-Coriander. But in Hérault, where the educational effort of the popular society of Montpellier was very impressive, a small popular society like that of Aigues-Vives really tried hard to teach all its fellow citizens by turning itself into a 'school of patriotism'. This was a common occurrence in Gard.

If we want a typical example of these groups of militants who put the revolutionary, dechristianizing apostolate at the very heart of their activities, we should perhaps consider Arles. Here, during Messidor, against a background of anti-Hébertist repression, the representative Maignet brought thirty or so patriots before the People's Commission of Orange to account for their excesses. They were all mature men, their average age being 38. Artisans (e.g. rope-maker, shoe-maker) accounted for roughly a quarter of this group, businessmen and tradespeople about the same. Those within the framework of or actually belonging to liberal professions formed more than a third, and to these must be added a group of three abdicating priests. Wage-earners were represented by just one sailor, and the peasantry by two small farmers. It is not difficult to pick out the leaders of this group: Honoré Paris, the doctor turned editor of *Père Duchesne du Midi*, Firmin Lardeyrol, the former parish priest from Arles, and Athanase Paris, once a canon of Angoulême.

Was Arles a typical example of these dechristianizing groups? It is not easy to take enough soundings, though there is one curious aspect still to be investigated, which is that of all the 'Marats' from villages and small towns (there was a Marat from Bourg Saint Andéol, who was incidentally an abdicating priest).

A difficult group portrait

We need now to draw up a summary and try to assess, between the group of the 'persecutors' and that of the apostles, who the dechristianizers actually were. If we try to clarify the rather hazy sociological outline of local activists,

we tend to reach a profile very similar to that which Cobb suggested for the political commissars of the revolutionary army. This group was quite young, without being really juvenile: its average age was 36, and the higher levels of society were predominant in it. Of the eighty cases quoted by Cobb no less than fifty-one – or almost two-thirds – were either lawyers (eighteen), solid members of the middle classes (fifteen), doctors and teachers (six), or former priests (twelve). Manual workers and small traders amounted to scarcely a fifth of the total (seventeen) and there were only three agricultural workers, three wage-earners (who were all domestic servants), and similarly three soldiers. This group was extended to include small independent traders who kept stalls or owned little shops, but the middle classes – and effectively the landowning or educated middle classes – made up over three-quarters of the total.

Was dechristianization, therefore, a middle-class phenomenon? These militants we glimpse in the course of their dechristianizing activities were by no means all commissars and unless we take care we run the risk of picking out only one selective group. The conventional view of dechristianization as the work of a small group of extremists would be reinforced by this approach, which is based only on the fact that we know nothing of the other people who were involved, those who danced at the *autos-da-fé* or those who joined in the festivals. These 'primitive rebels' (to use Eric Hobsbawm's term) of dechristianization left no records other than what remained in the memory of society. There is one particular village from the region of Apt where even as late as the beginning of the present century the descendants of 'lou cagaïre'* were pointed out. He was a sans-culotte from the village who in Year 2 had demonstrated by an appropriate gesture (hence his nickname) the scorn with which he viewed the altar of the parish church, and the use to which he was going to put it.

These were the anonymous ones of the dechristianizing movement – the dechristianized rather than the dechristianizers – and we need to find other ways of identifying them, in places where texts and conventional historical documents no longer serve our purpose. We need to track them down, if not in individual detail then at least jointly, by a careful study of the rich source of material which we can now draw up from the maps. This yields a statement of collective attitudes which is incontrovertible, by virtue of the fact that it is indirectly based. This is the only procedure which will enable us to make a reasoned response to the collective accusations which have been brought or implied since that time: the struggle of towns against villages, the revenge of

* a phrase from Provençal dialect, equivalent to 'the crapper'.

Protestants on Catholics ... These tracks should not be dismissed lightly, and they warrant serious study. However, before going back to our records once again, we need to redress the balance by showing the other side of the dechristianizing picture, in other words, its negation, the history of the stubborn individuals who refused to accept it.

9

The resistance to dechristianization

We cannot deal with the dechristianization of Year 2 without taking into account the various forms of resistance to which it gave rise, primarily because they played an essential part in defeating the movement and provided one of the basic arguments to opponents of the dechristianizers, starting with Robespierre. The irresponsible attacks which had been made on established religion had mobilized a whole section of the people against the Revolution, particularly in country districts, and the view was that this could only serve to conceal Machiavellian or counter-revolutionary thoughts and schemes. It was on these grounds that the dechristianizing campaign, and the reaction it produced, was harnessed in the destruction of the Hébertist movement. From this point of view we are better able to understand the importance which Robespierre and his friends attached to the echoes which reached them from the provinces.

A problem both old and new

Although the theme was in dispute even at the time, the problem ranks among those which have not been totally misunderstood by historians. Frankly, in the view of many conservative and clerical historiographers it was an open and shut case, as it was very clear that the large majority of the population, with the exception of a small excitable element, was totally hostile to the new ideas which were being imposed. Under these circumstances, the martyrs and confessors of the faith have traditionally aroused much more interest than the reactions, or more simply the behaviour, of the 'Christians without a Church' of Year 2. Interest today tends to be concentrated on the various clandestine forms of religious life inspired by refractory priests – secret registers and hidden pastoral activity – and although Year 2 was an important time for this, it also occurred during both the period before 1794 and afterwards, while more

open forms of resistance, like marginal improvisation, do not really hold our attention. Until recently, it was only the 'lay' historians of the French Revolution who had either the courage or the naïveté to put the question (which for most of them would have been incongruous); to appreciate just how strong the resistance was; and in consequence to take a realistic view of the outcome of the dechristianizing campaign. Aulard, whose thinking on this subject was continuously evolving during the early years of the present century, questioned whether dechristianization might in fact have been successful, culminating in total eradication of the faith. In 1906, when he wrote *Le Culte de La Raison*, he believed that dechristianization would inevitably be defeated by the intensity of the opposition from the peasants. Later, however (in 1925, in *Christianity and the Revolution*), he was struck by the enormous indifference of the masses, which suggested that Christianity itself was only very superficially absorbed into society. Had the movement continued 'it is by no means certain that a religion, which perhaps had only shallow roots, would not have been completely expunged from the peasant mind.' This reflection by Aulard is in historical terms not as dated as it might appear; indeed, it seems to have rediscovered a certain youthfulness, as the most modern religious sociology – from Le Bras to Delumeau – has demonstrated the need to question the level of true Christianity in the mass of the rural population today.

We no longer think in the same terms as Aulard, but what is nevertheless fascinating today is to open a chapter on the history of the masses, their mentalities, their beliefs, and their reactions when faced with the operation of an influence (an aggressive force?) of major consequence.

When formulated in these terms, all the difficulties of the question are immediately opened up. If we refer back to the sources which brought us to this point, what we have to clarify is the hidden face of this episode of history. Everything which the dechristianizing dialogue had exorcized in terms of fanaticism, superstition or credulity, and which it tended to conceal beneath a flood of triumphalist expressions of authoritarian conditions, passed unnoticed, or was at least partially hidden. Open resistance was of course not completely concealed, but between the alarmist announcements and the accounts of the victories which ensued, we end up with a garbled and frequently distorted description of the facts. The most interesting and accurate accounts – on the grounds that they were the most explicit – were those contained in the correspondence and the reports of the representatives on mission. And it is in this collection of correspondence, compiled under the direction of A. Aulard, that part of our documentation lies. But at the basis of it all, in the reports from national agents as in local archives, there remains an abundance of incidents which for the most part we know nothing of, episodes in a daily struggle where many of the elements remain concealed in the

intimacies of village and of family life. Just occasionally the ledger of a peasant from Maurienne or elsewhere enables us to catch a glimpse of the other side of this barrier, but these opportunities are as rare as they are welcome.

Our survey is therefore inevitably less thorough, the structure linking acts of resistance is weaker, by virtue of its being restricted to the most important or to the best known incidents. Nevertheless it gives us an authoritative overall view of the distribution, both in time and in space, of these outbursts of hostility during the dechristianizing campaign, a summary of their interconnecting links, and a conception of their form and their sociology, as well as of the psychology of the participants.

A map of the trouble-spots

The map which we are using to determine the localities in question, and which we take as a starting-point, reveals immediately that it is fragmentary, incomplete, and claims at best to offer merely a suggestion of the overall outline. (See figure 15.) One aspect of the contrasts shown there stems from the fact that our documentary sources are so unevenly distributed, for we are so much better informed on the southern part of France that we run the risk of our interpretation becoming partially unbalanced. Making allowances for this, however, the overall view of the country is nevertheless extremely interesting. Within whole regions there was no trace of focal points of opposition to dechristianization; and our belief, quite simply, is that this was because the movement did not effect any real penetration there. A large area of the west, from Normandy to Aquitaine, was not apathetic, as we know, but overt opposition appeared only in areas which were actually rebellious or which were only marginally affected by a dechristianization which at heart was urban, limited in its assimilation and restricted in its spread, in other words, areas which were well organized and well policed. And how is it possible, in many places, to differentiate between acts of resistance to dechristianization, and acts which were overt expressions of the Counter-Revolution?

Similarly, we note the apparent void that was the north-east of the country, even though we are not unaware – thanks to the reports from the younger Robespierre as he moved around Haute Saône – of the discontent among the peasants, which he pointed out to his colleagues and to his brother! But here a dechristianization which was limited in its effects merged not with a generalized, counter-revolutionary unwillingness, but with an apparent docility which was perhaps fostered by its position as a border region. For a similar reason, and discounting all differences, the position is comparable to that which existed in part of the Alps.

On the other hand, really fervent centres of opposition did exist. Among them, paradoxical though it might seem, we find quite a number of the very places which had been subjected to the most intense dechristianization: the departments around Paris – Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne; those from the Centre of France – Cher, Nièvre, Saône-et-Loire; and the peripheral area around Lyons – Rhône-et-Loire, Haute Loire, Ardèche – which leads us into the Rhône corridor that we now know so well. The reaction of the Midi, from Languedoc to Provence, was remarkable. But the most extraordinary situation was the diffuse and fairly typical revolt of a whole area of the Massif Central. An old epicentre, worked over since 1790 and continuously reanimated, demonstrated its dynamism, linking Lozère, northern Gard, Ardèche, Haute-Loire, Cantal, Lot and Aveyron. Here revolutionary activism met one of its natural barriers, coming up hard against a pole of deep-rooted hostility. One might almost be tempted to describe it as a real Vendée which miscarried.

Is it admissible to analyse the movement, based on less than a hundred or so important focal points as bench marks? If we follow events in more detail, the nationwide tour of the dispute is very revealing.

It would be correct to say that there was no specific point of origin for the surge of these actions. In the autumn of 1793, the religious question in France was by no means resolved – it was on 15 July 1793 that the notary Charrier, who had headed the Royalist uprising in the Midi (Lozère and Aveyron), was executed. In the district of Sauveterre (Aveyron), the trouble which had been fomented by refractory priests faded away during September and October 1793. Lozère was still experiencing these same problems in summer 1793, but in October they broke out again on the question of religion in the region of Saint Ambroix, on the borders of Gard and Ardèche. A report on 17 Vendémiaire from the representatives Baudot and Chaudron Rousseau indicated that priests were concealed everywhere, at Lacaune in Tarn, in the forest of Aubrac, in the castle at Sernac, in the forest of Polanges in Lozère, and in Aveyron. In the rest of the Midi there were many similar areas, which were either rebellious or simply deviant. From the beginning of Brumaire refractory priests were being hunted down in the Landes. The authorities in some places were by no means ready to welcome a new direction. On 23 Brumaire the department of Ariège was denounced for having imprisoned the town council of Mas d'Azil because of a decree prohibiting all outward signs of the cult.

In northern France there was nothing comparable at that time to the disturbing concentration south of the Massif Central. On the borders of the rebellious west, the authorities were continuously on the alert for anything which might resemble another Vendée. There was concern, towards the end of Brumaire, regarding suspect crowds gathering in Loir-et-Cher, in the region of Mondoubleau. But vigilance was exercised everywhere. At that time, Ruhl,

the representative on mission, boasted of having broken up gatherings of refractory priests in the forests of Marne and Haute-Marne.

What the authorities still feared, from the north to the Midi, were concentrated groupings of refractory priests, backed up by the mass of the people. Things changed from Frimaire to Nivôse, particularly in Frimaire, when the greatest number of trouble-spots erupted (twenty-nine focal points, out of a total of seventy in the whole period).

The winter outburst

The first notable reactions against the dechristianizing initiatives then burst out, in both the north and in the centre of France, in the very places where operations had been at their most intensive and their most brutal. In Picardy, the representative Dumont indicated on 13 Frimaire that suspicious crowds were gathering, and that priests had been seen moving around the church doors in Amiens. His fears were well founded, since on the 18th he reported that the 'tree of Reason' had been sawn down by evil-minded persons unknown, and this provoked him to issue a decree imposing a strict curfew on all ecclesiastics after six o'clock in the evening. This urban focal point, which is fairly exceptional, seemed subsequently to revert to order.

In Seine-et-Marne, and then in Seine-et-Oise, very near to the places where the dechristianizing campaign had started, the reaction affected the country districts, where the people started to organize themselves in order to defend the cult. This happened around Corbeil and Meulan, as indicated at the end of Frimaire by the representatives Musset and Delacroix, and also in the region of Coulommiers and La Ferté Gaucher. Order was established once again, but on 13 Nivôse at Melun there was a further denunciation of the 'tenacity of some priests in continuing the exercise of a cult condemned both by philosophy and by Reason'. In Seine-et-Oise, it was the popular society of Etampes which denounced at about the same time the 'assemblies gathered on the pretext of religion' in the commune of Chalons Saint Mars and surrounding districts. There again, the priests were accused of 'abusing' the arrangements permitting religious freedom.

Taking all these centres, the most important effects were without any doubt those felt in the region of Coulommiers. The paper-mill at Courtalain, where there was a heavy concentration of manual workers, and which was in its way a strategic enterprise, formed the basis and the starting-point for one of the first concerted actions where men, in this case the workers, played an important part, as distinct from the various groupings of women that we meet elsewhere: according to the representative Godefroy, they wanted 'their sacred relics, their priests, their ornaments'. In northern France, the representative

Bô indicated that there was another focal point at Sézanne, in Marne, but its involvement remained limited, particularly with regard to what was happening at that time in the centre of the country.

At the same time that he was reporting the troubles in Courtalain, Barère, the official spokesman at the Convention, pointed also to the disturbances which were unsettling Cher and Nièvre, in the very places where the recent exploits of Laplanche and Fouché had occurred. The popular society of Bourges was to give an account of these some three weeks later, in a triumphal address, during the course of which it paid tribute to the work of the representatives Lefiot, Legendre and Noël Pointe, who had re-established calm at the cost of punishing a number of rebel leaders. The people who lived in the country districts – according to these political club members – recognized and abjured their errors, but even so we sense the need to overwhelm them with civic instructions; and we have to wait until the beginning of Germinal for a letter dated 15 Pluviôse, from the sans-culottes in Nérondes, which tells us more. In a highly instructive reversion to the first stages of dechristianization, they describe how the members of their Society, starting on 10 August 1793, destroyed the statues of saints and all the other religious symbols in their church, which resulted in their being threatened the following day by an angry crowd, whipped up by a 'pious man'. The representative Laplanche, in the course of his missionary work, imprisoned 'fanatical priests', inciting other priests in the area to abjure, and this seemed to put things back onto an even keel. However, the evicted priests secretly plotted a new uprising, which broke out on 25 Frimaire. This in turn was quelled by the representatives on mission Lombarine and Legendre, before 'another Vendée' started. Although the report of this is somewhat one-sided, accusing the priests (both constitutional and refractory) but not giving us any information about the people, it does nevertheless have the merit of locating these events within the framework of a village which was involved in the dispute, rather than seeing them simply imposed from the outside.

In these same months, from Auvergne to Limousin, things turned out equally badly. In the places where Couthon had reported triumphantly on the progress of Reason, the real problems of maintaining instruction to a generally stubborn people began to be felt. On 25 Frimaire the Convention received a pessimistic report from three former priests in the district of Thiers. They had become civic apostles, but their campaign had achieved a very poor result: they were merely regarded 'as Protestants'. There was decidedly still much to be done. This was confirmed the following month, in Nivôse, by a report from the representative Chateauneuf-Randon, who disliked resistance, but had been forced to take account of fanatical movements in the district of Saint Flour (Cantal) and in that of Rochefort-Montagne (Puy-de-Dôme). In both cases the representative blamed these intrigues on constitutional priests – all in all,

he still preferred Lozère, where there were none! The most serious troubles erupted next to Corrèze in the district of Ussel. Here the festival of Reason at Meymac resulted in a gathering of some 400 'brigands', whipped up by priests, or so it was said, as well as by the agents of people who were imprisoned, who persuaded them that 'religion was lost' and talked of imaginary massacres. It was the patriots who were attacked (some people even said 'massacred') and revolutionary symbols which were destroyed. Here, as elsewhere, the intervention of a representative, in this case Lanot, brought the situation back under control.

In the south-east, trouble was already stirring during these preceding months, and in Frimaire a major disturbance 'under the guise of religion' broke out in one of the main centres. This was in that area around Lyons which had experienced the harshest attacks both by dechristianizers and by the revolutionary army – and no doubt one thing explains the other. It was just after the beginning of the month (6 Frimaire), between Roanne and Montbrisé (by which we mean Montbrison), that things started to turn sour. The ill-chosen words of a speaker from the popular society of Mont Marat (St Just en Chevalet) stimulated a lot of feeling, which by the end of the month had spread to Feurs, Fontfort, and Mont Chalier (St Germain Laval). In this last-named town, the women knocked down the statue of Liberty and trampled it underfoot. A deputation was sent into the districts of Roanne and Montbrisé to report on these disturbances, which spread to other places and became worse during Nivôse. The peasants demanded 'priests and masses', while it was said that the young people conscripted put a cross in their hats and demanded 'no religion, no soldiers'. But do we not hear also of a 'letter, claiming to be written by God Himself, in letters of gold, recalling the faithful from their foolishness and back to the Catholic faith, under threat of the strictest penalties'? The representative Méaulle, as late as Germinal, was still taking steps to seek out the people responsible for spreading this subversive document.

As a continuation of these events, and as if working simultaneously with the heartland of the Loire, the department of Rhône – which was just as much rural as it was linked to the area around Lyons – also experienced similar problems at that time. On 20 Frimaire a crowd of women surrounded the popular society at Condrieu, demanding the right to choose of their own free will the place in which they would 'practise their customs' and the society tried in vain to calm them down by reading to them the address of Armeville (St Etienne) claiming that the sans-culotte Jesus should be put in the pantheon. It was at this time that the Jacobin Gillet, from Echalas in the canton of Givors, wrote to Robespierre telling him that the peasants 'after having blessed the Revolution, now curse it,' as they wished to keep their priests subject to the law. At Belmont, on 30 Frimaire, women demonstrated

in the cemetery, refusing, they said, 'a religion of goats' ... But the women of Lyons themselves sent a deputation at this time, and at Condrieu, still in Nivôse, the peasants sounded the tocsin for fear of seeing their church closed.

During Pluviôse, in order to bring back some degree of calm, measures of apeasement were introduced, at the express demand of the Committee of Public Safety, and these alternated with measures of repression – the execution of women who had sheltered a refractory priest (22 Pluviôse), and again on 25 Ventôse that of day labourers who had cut down the tree of Liberty at Vaisannes in Turiange and replaced it with a cross. It was about this time that Berlié, the national agent in the district of Lyon-Campagne, declared that Reason was still not supreme and public spirit was poorly developed. Although it is not possible to talk in any real sense of propagation but rather of coalescence by contact, it is nevertheless clear that it was in this same month of Frimaire that comparable troubles occurred in the northern tip of Ardèche (Serrières), as in the north-east of Haute Loire. The representatives Reynaud and Chateauneuf-Randon emphasized the disturbances in Monistrol and Yssingeaux. It is important to point out, by contrast, that Saône-et-Loire, Ain and Isère – although for their part thoroughly worked over by detachments of the revolutionary army – did not always react so sharply to this pressure. Various trouble-spots were indicated, in Ain and in Saône-et-Loire too, in Louhans, and especially in the districts of Pont de Vaux and Nantua, where the authorities agreed in Nivôse 'that in several communes fanaticized citizens were on the point of taking up arms against those wiser ones who had yielded to the power of Reason, and that public officials had been insulted.' Local Jacobins blamed the weakness of the representative Gouly for this step backwards, for since his arrival 'the good and loyal tillers of the soil had returned obstinately to a cult which they had begun to abandon joyfully.' And to quote a second observer: 'Mass is being said right across the countryside, Epiphany is being observed, and in rural districts crosses which had been pulled down are being re-erected.' Sometimes local people 'mounted guard around their churches with as many as fifty peasants at a time' to protect themselves from the forays of Rollet Marat and his armed missionaries. And the correspondence from a moderate, hostile to the Jacobins, added that crowds from the country districts threatened to attack the town: 'Old men, women, children, all are armed in order to rout the apostles of disorder.' However, mentions of incidents elsewhere become more scattered, although in the area of Gex the chief town of the canton of Collonges was denounced during Nivôse as having been fanaticized by its parish priest, as was the uprising of the women who cut down the tree of Liberty at Thonon, further away in Mont Blanc.

Another focal point, albeit on a broader basis, can also be found at that time in the Languedoc area of the Midi. The epicentre here is well known, which

positions these disturbances as a continuation of those of the preceding months, or even the preceding years. It was Aveyron, and more precisely the border regions between Aveyron and Lozère, which the representatives on both sides (Boisset, Taillefer) agreed in denouncing as fanaticized. The memory of Charrier was not far away here. In lower Languedoc, Saint Ambroix, in the north of Gard, experienced troubles during Frimaire which recalled those of autumn 1793; in Hérault, the representative Boisset had to deal with an urban uprising at Montpellier, on 28 Frimaire, for which he held the priests responsible; while at the same period there was some agitation by womenfolk at Lodève.

Even discounting these two focal points in the Lyonnais and Languedoc, there is no way that we can claim that calm reigned in the south-east. We learn that at Barcelonnette, the national agent narrowly avoided being given a bad time during Frimaire when he attempted to have the church bells taken down. In contrast, we can better appreciate the success of the representative Beauchamp who 'burned Saint Ours, having prised him from his alcove'. From another source we learn that burning the confessional boxes on 25 Frimaire caused a scandal in Monaco, as it had also done at Brignoles shortly before. However, these were merely small difficulties of assimilation in an area of the Midi, covering both the Mediterranean and the Alpine regions, which reacted in only a minor way by virtue of the fact that it had scarcely been affected by the more violent forms of dechristianization.

Nevertheless it must be said that, from Amiens to Montpellier, by way of Bourges or Montbrison, a minimum of some twenty departments reacted in a violent way, between Frimaire and Nivôse, to the first major dechristianizing offensive, certainly sufficient for us to understand the anxieties of Robespierre, his friends ... and a few others. Condemnation of the dechristianizing movement did not depend solely on the motive power of Parisian politics.

Mobilizing in the spring

Perhaps it would be slightly artificial to try to draw too clear a dividing line between the outbreak of the winter disturbances (primarily in Frimaire) and those of the spring (from Ventôse to Floréal), if only because there was in fact no real break between them. During Pluviôse, it was the Languedoc area of the Midi which attracted the attention of the Committee of Public Safety. Saint Jean du Gard experienced on 7 Pluviôse a riot which was all the more remarkable as it involved a population which was already Protestant and which in fact rose against the new religious persecution. Chateauneuf-Randon, who at that time was making a tour of the region, demonstrated his over-hasty clumsiness by presiding at a meeting within the popular society which called

for a public abjuration of all superstitious cults and the proclamation of the cult of Reason. The following day, according to the official report, a 'fearful tumult' arose, and punishment was demanded for the 'prominent patriots who the previous day had consigned to the flames the symbols of superstition and lies'. One woman, Marie Larose, even proposed the reinstatement of the royal family. The epilogue to this scene occurred on 9 Prairial, when the accused were acquitted by the revolutionary tribunal at Nîmes as being 'workers and tillers of the soil', but it illustrates even so the tensions corroborated by other incidents. The representative Borie who had just arrived on the spot had one individual in Nîmes arrested for fuelling fanaticism by selling small crucifixes: 'Fanatics were crowding down every evening to buy these ridiculous items.' The Committee of Public Safety was aroused, and the answer to the affair was discovered not far away, in Montpellier, where the manufacturer of the crucifixes lives and where the representative Boisset had him arrested, all of which proved that 'arsenals of fanaticism existed in the Midi.' We might well object that these also existed elsewhere, indeed at the very gates of Paris – in Seine-et-Marne the district of Meaux was the setting of a disturbance during the second decade of Pluviôse, in the vicinity of Rozoy.

In the same way that the Convention had started to ask itself serious questions in Frimaire, the results of which we know, so the sans-culottes in the towns and the country districts began in their turn to be puzzled when faced with hostile reactions from a large section of the people. An echo of their discussions, in the form of a text which is frequently enjoyable, mingling goodwill and good sense with a certain touch of naïveté, may be heard in the copious report received on 24 Pluviôse by the popular society of Charolles in Saône-et-Loire. The theme of it is made clear right from the outset: 'Overturning the altars of fanaticism has in some country communes resulted in crowds gathering together, which consist entirely of women.' It was this aspect, exaggerated no doubt but certainly reflecting communal realities, which prompted the writer of the document to ask himself whether this was a result of 'the ascendancy which these imposters held over the women, and of their taste for the mysterious'? Going back to the past, our anthropologist from Charolles recalls what the day of rest on a Sunday really meant: 'The elderly ladies took advantage of the long journey (to church) to exchange old stories with other old gossips ... they met friends and relatives on the way, or when they reached the county town, whom they enjoyed seeing ... there then followed a meal or perhaps a reciprocal invitation, which led to one relative or another.' Clearly, 'for those whose passions have been exhausted by the years ... this congenial and worthy recreation offered a great deal of pleasure.' But if that was the way it was for the old ladies, what did Sunday mean to 'young girls, whose blood throbbed with the sweetest desire of nature!' We

can well understand their impatience, 'they waited for each other at the start of the road they shared,' they danced.

Now, however, when the Tenth Day came around, 'the men were left to the devices they always had:' the old men went to the tavern, and they bargained. The young men drank and, deprived of their 'lovely village girls', they quarrelled. As for the women, they had nothing left to do in village. The mothers were miserable in their little hamlets, the daughters too, and out of this came their need to gather together in crowds. If the need for recreation is necessary because of moral forces (and for women, as is well known, mainly because of their physical make-up), there is absolutely no doubt that village girls find it very hard to bear privations which are likely to prolong their unmarried state: 'in all regions the pleasure of love is the greatest pleasure.' A little entertainment and dancing on the Tenth Day would be some compensation for the women, and 'that is what they were asking for, although not always outright ... In those communes where this puzzle had been observed, the municipal officers provided this diversion at very little expense.' And our analyst concluded somewhat prosaically that if the cost of one parish priest were 2000 francs a year, they could turn out excellent Republicans and very few priests for a third of the cost: 'The benefits are incalculable.'

We hope that we may be forgiven for this rather lengthy summary of a report which itself is even longer. And yet behind the naïveté there is undoubtedly some acute observation. Just as we need Papageno and Papagena to appreciate the adventures of Pamina and Tamino (in Mozart's *Magic Flute*), it is perhaps no bad thing to savour in this low-key way the rustic anticipation of the considerations behind the pronouncement of 18 Floréal.

But after all the relaxation of Nivôse and Pluviôse, the months of Ventôse and Germinal saw a resurgence both of dechristianizing activities and of violent reactions from the people, the two movements now synchronized. The map of the second series of events follows identically that of the first: just as the dechristianizing wave moved towards the Midi, where the campaign was picking up a final burst of strength, so the well documented centres of trouble in the north and the centre of the country began to diminish and became a few isolated spots. The citizens of Noisy sur Oise (Seine-et-Oise) stressed in a somewhat furtive way their own virtues when on 5 Ventôse they sent in their plate 'in spite of the fanaticism which still reigns in the canton'. Similarly, on 3 Floréal, the club members of the popular society of Bazolles La Collancelle, in Nièvre, talked in the past tense of the recent disturbances, as of an incident which was over and done with. Their life had been endangered for the sake of 'playthings', at the instigation of priests who had forsworn the priesthood but were none the less villains for all that ... so in spite of everything they would replant the tree of Liberty, and if possible celebrate the Tenth Day. But

behind the enforced optimism the situation appeared very tense in this department of Nièvre, which was in the van of the movement.

The troubles in the Midi

New trouble spots exploded in the Midi: to the best of our knowledge these were limited to the south-west, and involved primarily the south of the Massif Central and to a lesser degree the Mediterranean area of the Midi, from Languedoc to Provence. Indeed, the representatives Pinet and Cavaignac announced on 6 Germinal that they had uncovered a conspiracy to start a civil war in the Landes, instigated by priests and noblemen. But they were confident that it had been stifled at birth, and proposed as the only countermeasure the arrest of the fanatical priests. Later we hear that in Ariège an inspired prophetess had been denounced, but for the rest the epicentre was henceforward clearly situated in the Mediterranean area of the Midi. Not that dechristianization in the north had stopped entirely, but it seemed to have lost its conviction, if not its cutting edge. When the representative Albitte, in this same month of Ventôse, undertook a tour around the valleys of Maurienne and Tarentaise, he returned very pessimistic about the possibility of changing men 'who were naturally good, but who were still ruled by old prejudices'. Indeed, people had now learned to defend themselves. Albitte wanted to take down all the bells in the commune of Chapelles, in the district of Moutier, and following a complaint addressed to high places, they caused him to be reprimanded by the Committee of Public Safety (11 Germinal). There was little activity – even complete silence – in the area around Lyons, as well as in the region north of the Alps: new focal points appeared, or were reawakened. The south of the Massif Central, however, albeit in a very different framework from that of the preceding months, continued to be the region of major confrontation. One pole of serious disturbance was right at the heart of Ardèche, and this was announced officially by the representative Guyardin following the events of 22 Ventôse. In the district of Coiron, around Saint Michel, Rance and Saint Pierreville, priests had stirred up gatherings and assembled crowds on the pretext of religious freedom. A number of communes rebelled (Saint Pierreville), but the hunt for miscreants carried out by gendarmes and volunteers was fruitless, as the mountains were full of hiding places (although occasionally an unfortunate drunk was arrested who had been overheard to say in too loud a voice that Marat and Chalier were blasted villains). This latent rebellion, which reached right to the borders of Ardèche and Haute-Loire, continued at least until Prairial, and it is almost impossible to say when it subsequently ceased.

But the surrounding regions were by no means quiet: in Haute-Loire, at Puy, Reynaud issued a decree (28 Germinal) on the imprisonment of the 'blessed religious', deferring to the demand previously expressed by the People's Society, which required that 'the feeble-minded pious women, and all other weak and feeble-minded citizenesses, should no longer be allowed to escort guillotined priests, uttering loud sighs and making faces.' On the border of Haute-Loire and Lozère, in Floréal, the woods and mountains were overflowing with bands of rebels controlled by refractory priests, and the same situation applied at the junction of the three departments of Lozère, Gard and Ardèche. In Lozère, the very place where Chateauneuf-Randon had claimed victory far too early, trouble broke out as early as Germinal in the southern districts of Villefort and Langogne. On the other side of the frontier, in the Tanargue district of Ardèche (Largentière) – which was, however, strongly organized by the Jacobins from Joyeuse – similar disturbances erupted almost everywhere. Touching the troubles in Coiron 'there exists always, among the ignorant class of people, a fanaticism which is difficult to eradicate, particularly in the area which lies to the North ... because it is so far away from communication with others and from enlightenment.' But the same might be said of virtually any area. At Vans on the border of Gard, an individual in Momerac 'came forward with a motion for Mass to be said', put up to it secretly by the curate of the place, or so it was said (7 Germinal). In Floréal, there were complaints almost everywhere about the non-celebration of the Tenth Day, while exhaustive searches were made along the border of Lozère – 'completely fanaticized' – for refractory priests.

In the heartland of the central plateau, Aveyron – like Cantal and, further on, Lot – was torn by further disturbances which had started up again. To the north of Aveyron, the fanaticized women of Espalion were denounced in the spring of 1794, as were the newly kindled 'sparks' of fanaticism in the district of Aubin. A burst of agitation in Aurillac at the beginning of Ventôse extended this area of disturbance towards the south of Cantal. The representative Bô, who in a report dated 9 Germinal denounced the movements in Cantal and Lot, which in his view were linked together, saw only one solution: not a single priest should be left on Republican soil. But even so he sensed the way the wind was blowing, and confirmed that he was conducting his military operations 'with the strictest respect for people and for proprieties'.

Meanwhile what was happening on the left bank of the Rhône? In Provence and in Comtat, which were affected much later by the dechristianizing wave, reactions were either less acute (i.e. simply general ill will) or more localized. Even so, there were some distinctive trouble-spots. As an exact reflection, one might say, of the disturbances in the Ardèche district of Privas, and perhaps also because proximity brought about shared confessions, the district of

Valence on the other bank of the Rhône experienced at the start of Ventôse an outburst which affected several villages in the cantons of Chabeuil (Peyrus, Alexan, Barbières). Demands for the re-opening of churches and gathering of crowds provoked a swift response from the revolutionary battalion of Valence, which carried out a high-handed expedition to these places. Further south, in Vaucluse, during the last days of Pluviôse, an assembly of women at Malaucène also necessitated sending in the troops to restore order.

At the end of the period, from Florèal to Prairial, we learn from Maignet and others that the district of Orange, in the north of Vaucluse, was completely fanaticized, that the district of Carpentras was no better, and that on the other side of the border with Drôme the district of Buis was a real hotbed of refractory priests, who were being sought out by the People's Commission of Orange. In Bouches-du-Rhône, movements of 'fanatics' were reported during Ventôse on the lake at Berre, at Istres and at Port Chamas. Nearer to Marseilles, it certainly seemed that a number of refractory priests (like Abbot Reimonet) had already returned and were operating secretly in the remote parts of the mountain range of Nerthe. Representatives, even keen dechristianizers like Maignet, no longer felt that they had complete freedom of scope and openly admitted their doubts, sometimes to the Committee of Public Safety. What was to be done, asked Maignet at about this time, in the case of a commune where there had been no irregular gatherings, but which regularly discussed whether it could practise the Catholic faith? Those representatives who rather more imprudently allowed themselves to be caught up by the influence of local sans-culottes, ran the risk of experiencing the misfortune which the representative Dherbez Latour suffered at Manosque, and which was particularly significant. He arrived there confidently, having covered thoroughly the district of Forcalquier: 'Everywhere I went, Reason seemed to precede me, everywhere the structure of fanaticism was collapsing and churches were being transformed into temples of Reason.' But the ground had been prepared here, according to Dherbez, by two abdicating priests, who were either doubtful about what they had done or were actually repenting it. They had taken steps to ensure that the decree on religious liberty was proclaimed, the public reading of which was demanded of the popular society by a local farmer. On the following day (4 Ventôse), there was a public gathering of the women of the commune, who claimed that the representative had come to destroy religion and remove the plate. The memory of these 'women with handbells' was to be most disagreeable for Dherbez. They were organized by Marianne Laugier, who had remained secretly the mother of the women's league and who, it was believed, was spurred on by one of the priests, himself ostensibly a member of the political club but who in reality had continued to be the rector of the confraternity. The affair concluded satisfactorily for Dherbez. Maignet, in a brotherly gesture, dispatched to

Manosque a battalion to assist his colleague, the arrival of which was accompanied by an *auto-da-fé* of the idols of superstition, precipitating a panic which resulted in the abdication of the priests in that area, and indeed as far away as the district of Apt in Vaucluse. However, the impression remains of a victory which was poorly won.

From Floréal onwards, and particularly from Prairial, it became almost impossible to isolate specific areas and centres of the disturbances. A very lax approach to keeping the Tenth Day, as indeed also to observing other forms of the revolutionary cult, became general to some extent everywhere. Was this to say that religion had regained its previous position? Far from it. It is at this time in particular that in the mountain region we start to encounter prophetic prodigies, usually women, a phenomenon which tells us much about the life of the Christians without a Church in the Year 2. One such incident occurred on 19 Messidor in the district of Barcelonnette, where an inspired prophetess appeared, and a similar case occurred in Aveyron during Thermidor. But in the Pyrenean area too there was one occurrence as early as Germinal, in Ariège, at Vic Dessos, where an old woman 'was claiming to be a prophetess for money'. The affair of Catherine Théot, the 'Mother of God', which was used to ridicule Robespierre, has often been seen as simply a curiosity devoid of historical significance, so we should not pass over these aspects in silence – aspects, incidentally, which people have been very much aware of since then.

To conclude this section of our exposition, incidents such as these lead us to attempt to summarize from the point of view of both sociology and mentality the characteristics illustrated by these hostile reactions to dechristianization, which have been indicated only fleetingly during the course of the story.

Who were the 'fanatics'?

Who were these 'fanatics'? Reading the reports or the accounts that were given, we are struck first of all by the importance of the part played by women. Whether that part was intrinsic, or whether the women were simply pushed to the fore, the fact remains that they were highly visible, as much in Lyonnais, Cantal or Aveyron as at Manosque. Sometimes they were groups of women held together by the secret solidarity of old confraternities (as at Manosque or Puy), sometimes they were simply individuals, like the one who was the spokeswomen at Saint Jean du Gard, or like the prophetesses from the hills. Were there no men backing them up? Indeed there were, and there is little doubt that it was a deliberate strategy on the part of the representatives to try to 'feminize' the movement in order to belittle it and make it look like the foolishness of the 'blessed religious'. But men certainly did appear, even if they frequently hid behind the women. They appeared as early as the first

demonstrations of Frimaire in the departments around Paris; at the paper mill in Courtalain, in Seine-et-Marne, where they made up the mass of the workforce; in the discussions of the popular societies (Manosque, Saint Jean du Gard); and also in the motions put forward by rural municipalities, as well as in the secret gatherings in the woods, where refractory priests and sometimes even conscripts were involved (e.g. the conscripts from Loire, with their crosses in their hats). But even so the part they played in this whole affair remained comparatively discreet, and that was perhaps the reason why the 'new Vendée', so much feared by the representatives on mission, never actually came about. The interrogation of the members of the political club of Charolles regarding the exact part played by women in these movements should not be dismissed lightly, in spite of its apparent naïveté, for it simply reflected the facts.

What was the social background of these rebels? The sources we have stress on more than one occasion that they were recruited from very ordinary backgrounds, although we cannot deduce too much from such fragmentary information. At Saint Jean du Gard, the eight individuals accused of rebellion comprised three stocking makers, two masons, a farmer and a butcher (with an average age of 37), plus a seamstress aged 25. In other words, they were a reasonably faithful reflection of the members of a popular society in the Cévennes in 1794. But even if this is, consciously or unconsciously, an exaggerated interpretation of the facts – as we saw in the case of the attention focused on the part played by women – we cannot but be struck by the frequent references to peasants and to labourers, which often seems to open out into an antagonism of town versus country (as in the districts of Pont de Vaux). Nonetheless, we saw at Courtalain that the 'workers', admittedly rural workers, could be participants. But the demonstrations which Dumont denounced and repressed during Frimaire in Amiens, therefore in an urban environment, remained an isolated example. At Meymac, in Corrèze, the town was surrounded by a coalition of peasants from nearby districts in a way which was clearly reminiscent of the uprisings in the west.

Christians without a church

The popular character and mentality of the movement is shown in other ways, some elements of which both the representatives on mission and the local authorities were occasionally all too happy to emphasize. In Drôme, for example, in the district of Buis, 'fanaticism' resulted in the bell being rung on every possible occasion, even to disperse the clouds during a storm. A magical value was attributed to the paraphernalia of worship (the rush for the little crucifixes in Languedoc), or to spells, like the letter written in characters of

gold by the hand of God. This was useful, not only for the peasants of Forez but also as an illustration, used many times by members of the Convention and by public opinion. Under these circumstances we can well imagine the suspicion which greeted those people who either passed on messages, handled religious objects, or exchanged passwords. But if this diffuse and ill-controlled spread of items was feared, the real danger was still crowds gathering together, which was usually a prelude to counter-revolutionary trouble. Gatherings such as these often turned into counter-revolutionary vandalism, taking over the form and the actions of the iconoclasm which had been suffered, and inverting it. This accounts for the uprooting of the trees of Liberty at Thonon (Mont Blanc) and La Colancelle (Nièvre), as well as for the destruction of the statue of Liberty (Corrèze, Loire). Elsewhere the 'gathering' took on the form of a peaceful protest – one might say, anachronistically, a non-violent demonstration. An example of this would be the women of Aveyron, who met together in the deserted churches, where they lit candles. But sometimes also it was within the popular society that the debate took place (St Jean du Gard). The 'panic' pilgrimages to visit the prophetesses or the inspired prodigies, rare though these were, inevitably catch our attention. At Vic Dessos, there was just a reference to the venality of the old woman who was playing the part of a prophetess 'for money'. At Aveyron, however, a much more detailed description shows the supposedly inspired woman as a healer who came to cure 'all illnesses, a new Catherine Théot, whose spells came direct from the old furnaces of priests and kings. She draws big crowds in a number of communities. The prophet Daniel brings them various salves and unguents direct from Heaven.' Finally, at Barcelonnette, we are dealing not with a fortune-teller, nor with a healer, but with a 'fanatic and supposedly inspired woman who inflames spirits'.

Just as new forms of religiosity moved onto the scene under the guise of revolutionary cults, so a type of fringe religiosity, sometimes using a very ancient format, began to take over the place of established religion, even in its own sanctuaries.

The resistance of these 'Christians without a Church' certainly looks impressive. Whatever the activities of the refractory priests (and often of the constitutional priests as well), the people were generally without priests at all, and therefore their accomplishment was perhaps even greater in areas of passive resistance than in the notorious gatherings which we have been describing. Indeed, it was this passive resistance that finally halted the march of a dechristianization which seemed to dissipate what was left in its wake, as the wave itself spread and surged forward. On these grounds we can now reply to Aulard's question – a question well worth asking – and examine the possibilities of success of the dechristianizing movement.

Yet looking at the question another way, we cannot but be surprised that

whole tracts of rural society, amounting to much of the surface area of France, did not become a series of 'new Vendées', faced as people were by acts of aggression incomparably more brutal than those of spring 1793. It was really only in the south of the Massif Central that chronic insecurity became deeply entrenched, and even then it did not evolve into a new focal point for civil war. And from this we may perhaps draw the conclusion that for rural France dechristianization was not entirely an exogenous intrusion, nor an unmitigated shock. The worm was in the bud.

10
Dechristianization revealed

Can we really identify the guilty people? We have tried to do so, and it was worth a try. By posing the apparently naïve question of trying to identify who the dechristianizers were, we have been able to designate the role of the representatives on mission and the revolutionary armies, and also – at the other end of the chain and much more difficult to pin down – administrations, popular societies, and groups like the 'apostles' or the 'persecutors' who bring us into direct contact with the people.

It is this anonymous mass of people that we have to try to bring together as we come to the last stage of our investigation. A difficult task, as the individuals we are seeking tend to reveal themselves only at the more spectacular moments of opposition (the ill will which disappears into clandestine activity being much harder to trace), or, at the other extreme, when participating in a festival or in dechristianizing explosions, our knowledge of which is based entirely on selectively filtered official reports. The accepted image of a people uniformly on the receiving end of aggression, and equally uniformly hostile to dechristianization, cannot, when it comes to a final summing-up, stand up to the evidence we have drawn together. Our wide-ranging and multiple inquiries have shown us a succession of evolving and significantly contrasting maps, revealing some areas where dechristianization was accepted and others where it met with stubborn resistance. Even if it was, in the last analysis, a failure, and an episode that had no apparent future, there were nevertheless different levels of opposition, and from this fact alone we know there is a possibility of opening up these silent worlds.

Following a deliberately simple procedure, therefore, we shall consider successively a series of hypotheses, from the most particular to those which sum up best what was in general represented fundamentally by the huge trauma of the dechristianization of Year 2.

A settling of accounts?

Was this dechristianization, then, seen from below, simply a settling of accounts? This has long been said. In the historical narratives written during the last century, as indeed in more recent studies, it was always other people, people from nearby, who did the damage, spreading panic in peaceful sections of the population.

This is an elementary argument, totally unsatisfactory when we attempt to view the phenomenon on a national scale, as we have done, and yet locally irrefutable at the level of micro-history. In the lower Rhine people have pointed the finger at Euloge Schneider and the 'red priests' who had come from the nearby Rhineland: a hypothesis which the geographical distribution of the abdications does not invalidate. Elsewhere in the Midi there was no lack of claims that it was the revenge of Protestants on Catholics which lay at the root of dechristianization in the villages. Having studied the phenomenon in the most typical areas – Gard, Ardèche, or Lozère and Drôme – we can now assess it. Certainly the specific features of the dechristianizing campaign in a 'test' department such as Gard, where it was particularly lengthy, cannot be understood without reference to the background of religious confrontation. But the Protestant pastors, who almost all abdicated their function – more than fifty from a total of around sixty – have to be included among the victims for the same reason as the Catholic priests. And a detailed study, taken through to the level of districts, or even of cantons, proves here without any doubt that dechristianization was stronger in the homogeneous Catholic sectors of Beaucaire to Pont-Saint-Esprit than in the reformed areas or in those of mixed denomination; and this is a test which we can repeat in Ardèche or in Drôme, with similar results. Other investigators, from Daniel Ligou to Richard Cobb, have already tackled these records, and we do not claim to contribute much that is really new by acquitting the Reformed Church in overall terms of its collective responsibility. In any event, a consideration such as this could only be used to explain a very restricted and clearly defined sector of the country overall.

The denominational split, therefore, does not really explain the different aspects of an event to which it contributed only minor local variations. But maybe we should be turning towards other determining factors, less directly linked to the religious life but which are not more complex for all that. Maybe we should be looking at factors as simple as the role of communications, the distance from Paris, or from the epicentres of the movement, or from possible help, in order to preserve genuine refuges or places of safety.

The main road and the town: sanctuaries and refuges?

Does the map of the successes and failures of dechristianization, with all its contrasts, bring us back finally to the unequal level of its penetration, resulting from natural factors, that is, geographical accessibility and inaccessibility? The answer to this question must inevitably show various shades of difference, and must eventually be open to more than one interpretation. The study of the diffusion of the phenomenon, over six months and sometimes even longer, reaching in Floréal the Alpes Maritimes or the Pyrénées Orientales, shows without any doubt the importance of inaccessibility. Conversely, we can pick out without any difficulty an area strongly influenced by Paris, level country densely criss-crossed with roads, through parts of which we have seen two successive waves pass, in the winter and again in the spring of 1794. Similarly, we cannot ignore the major axis, always present on all the maps, which reaches from Paris to Lyons via Burgundy, continuing down the Rhône corridor to Marseille. In the south-west, from Bordeaux to Toulouse, the Garonne valley is equally evident.

In contrast, the mountainous regions overall were much better protected – the Alps (or at least part of them), the central plateau (albeit attacked on its northern side), and finally the Pyrenees.

We can understand better the combined effect of geographical terrain and the accessibility by road which results from it, if we draw up isochronic lines to measure the time required to establish a dialogue between Paris and the provinces. Among the thousands of addresses which we saw arriving on the desk of the Convention, there are a sufficient number which can be dated, or referred to a specific event, enabling us in this way to appreciate the time necessary for the depths of far-distant France to make its voice heard in Paris. In the south-east axis it was less than a week in the case of Lyons, but between seven and fifteen days for the Rhône valley, three weeks for Ardèche or Var, a month for Haute-Loire and for Haute- and Basses-Alpes. Having verified it, therefore, in one direction – from the provinces to Paris – this inertia can be confirmed in the other direction also. Because Reason did not have the benefit of official impetus on a national scale, it dragged its feet, like children on the way to school, and took more than six months to travel through France. Certain events and movements, however, which flowed back to the Convention, can be measured more accurately, for example, the reactions to a decree issued by the Convention, or the celebrations of the recapture of Toulon, or best of all the cult of the Supreme Being. It took two months for the effects of an initiative from Paris to work their way back from the peripheral areas of the country.

As the means of transporting newspapers, addresses and letters, in addition to welcoming representatives on mission and their emissaries, detachments of volunteers or revolutionary armies, the main roads therefore played an unquestionably vital part. Over and above the massive confirmation of this which our maps show on a departmental basis, the more exact maps we have reproduced showing the early pattern of dechristianizing activities (e.g. the abdications) illustrate in an even more meaningful way the phenomena of the spread of the movement. Thus, in the south-east we are able to visualize not only the major postal route down the Rhône valley but also the Alpine postal route, from Grenoble to Manosque. This geographical exactitude shows up clearly the relaying, or staging, role played by the cities and the large market towns. One example of this was very clear for the important centres of Nancy, Besançon, Lyons, Grenoble or Montpellier. In a more modest way, however, the county towns of the various districts also provided their own illustrations, and around them all we can trace pools of the dechristianization which had been imposed on them. In any event, the tangible proof of the importance of the town in the dechristianizing process is provided as much by the percentage of abdications from the urban priesthood as by the number of addresses issued from these places when compared with those issued from rural areas. Risking an overall assessment based on twenty departments in the south-east of France, we estimated in an earlier study that the number of addresses emanating from the chief towns of the departments and districts came to 30 per cent, or even 44 per cent if we include those sent in by administrations who had their headquarters there. What would be the result if we included also the smaller market towns? The south-east is, of course, a strongly urbanized area: and northern France would undoubtedly produce lower percentages. It is nevertheless clear that at the level of active, proselytising dechristianization the towns unquestionably played an essential part. They were a point of departure for terrorizing expeditions or apostles' missions, as well as the headquarters controlling both the planning and the activities of the network of popular societies in the rural areas generally.

However, having considered these basic truths, or rather this evidence which became apparent only after the event, we have to qualify its significance to some extent. Without indulging ourselves in a stylistic exercise which consists of rebutting the arguments we have just put forward, it is nevertheless true to say that each of these factors has its limitations.

The map of the successes and of the failures of dechristianization is not a straightforward reflection of a France which either spoke out or remained silent in Year 2. Within the context of a study of the geopolitics of the French Revolution, we discounted – at least for a number of chronological events, such as the crisis of Ventôse, or the normalization of Floréal and Prairial – all of the addresses and correspondence which flowed towards Paris,

without restricting ourselves simply to those documents directly concerning dechristianization, which in fact totalled around a thousand per decade during this period. The political consequences, in geographical terms, of this method show up a number of very clear convergences with the maps of dechristianization (e.g. the importance of the service link with Paris, and of the Paris-Lyons-Marseilles axis). But the extent of this convergence is far from complete; and a number of regions who wrote in at length on some subjects – I am thinking particularly of the south-west – are much less wordy on the theme of dechristianization.

Similarly, we cannot explain everything by the mere fact of proximity or accessibility. There is little merit in opening up disputes here. The west and the north-east, which were both the same distance from Paris, remained very quiet, while the centre of France was sending in copious amounts of testimony. The dechristianizing wave followed the postal route as far as Marseilles, but why did it not reach Bordeaux in the same way? Distance does not explain everything, and Montpellier or Nîmes lived through a dechristianization process which was more intensive than Troyes or Epinal. The contrast between the lowlands and the mountainous regions also seems to be too simplified an explanation if we take the analysis further; there were Jacobin areas in the mountains, in Isère and Drôme, for example, just as there were lowland areas of resistance.

History is not as simple as that, and can never be reduced to a question of greater or lesser influences, as a function either of natural conditions or of human activity. The shock of dechristianization was experienced at different levels of intensity. And because of this it leads to a much more varied and finely tuned perception of the deepest feelings of the people involved.

A test of religious attitudes

We were anxious to produce, as it were, a balance sheet of the phenomenon overall, and we have therefore assessed each individual department and set against it a value rating for each significant test in turn – the cult of Reason, the abdications or the marriage of priests. This gives us an index of the level of intensity of dechristianization experienced or applied; and it results in a relatively simple split, into four categories, of those departments which were either the most affected or the least disturbed by it. The map which synthesises these results, sticking together both accidental elements and also those which are unduly specific, gives us a remarkably clear picture. (See figure 19.) The contrasts, already noted for each of the departments which we have used as signposts, are highlighted in bold relief, and there is no ambiguity regarding physical or geographical differentiation between the regions.

It is a familiar geography which shows up conspicuously the heart of the Paris Basin, reaching right up to the borders in the north, but joining up also without interruption the area of central France, from Poitou to Lyonnais via Burgundy. Then there is a sudden drop towards the south-east, via the northern part of the Alps and the Rhône valley right down to the Mediterranean. In the south-west, Lot-et-Garonne and Haute Garonne stand out like an island in the midst of an area which was for the most part stubbornly unaffected. For this map too – that of the areas of resistance – is very clearly delineated: a large area of the west encompassing the Armorican borders and the Atlantic coastline, part of the north-east which was similarly set in its ways, the heart of the Massif Central, the greater part of the south-west, and lastly the central area south of the Alps reaching as far as eastern Provence.

In order fully to appreciate this definitive assessment, we need to compare it with the map illustrating the extent of the constitutional oath of 1791 (see figure 20). This has been forcibly brought out by the recent work of Timothy Tackett (*La Révolution, l'Eglise, la France*), and it is a comparison we really must make. We cannot but be struck by the very great similarity between the two maps – the large areas which accord with each other, the same poles of support, and in the main the same poles of dissent. There are, of course, some discrepancies, sometimes quite minor ones, particularly in frontier areas, sometimes more noticeable and hence more interesting ones. The progress, or the furthest outposts, of the supporters of the revolutionary camp (if we may use this description to simplify matters) reached the borders of the north and Normandy. Conversely, part of the south-east defected, from Var to Hautes-Alpes, and the area of dissent increased in the north-east.

Developments of this type, as we look at them now in 1989, can be explained. They bring us back to the method of classifying regional attitudes which was put forward by Tackett, i.e. that they were a function of different conditioning and a different inheritance. Thus, for example, the author stresses that in the Alpine area there were specific conditions which resulted in priests taking the oath with such an overwhelming level of support, and this was in an area where proper allowances were made for the clergy, and where the union movement among the clergy of the Old Regime had been very active. But the collective 'referendum' of 1791 – to use the author's somewhat daring expression – did not therefore mean that we were dealing with an area where the people were in some way quite separate. The map of 1794 helps us to rectify the overall view of the country in a situation which follows on logically and in which the collective stakes are in some ways clearer, freed now from the *conjunctural* aspects of the situation in 1790, when the legacy of those people in dispute with the *ancien régime* sometimes weighed heavily on the attitude of the local clergy.

Overall strands of continuity, therefore, coupled with occasional but explic-

able incongruities, turn the map of France at grips with dechristianization into a snapshot of collective temperaments, which is just as precious and sometimes even more exact, not only in the religious but also in the political sphere. The situation of confrontation in Year 2, no longer stifled but now in the open, makes this test even more meaningful. The overall continuity with 1791 confirms and validates attitudes which are sometimes forgotten in the immediate pressure of circumstances at the time.

In the same way that we risked showing the state of France as revealed in the light of the oath of 1791, so in these circumstances now we are able to risk a more daring comparison with the maps of contemporary religious practice in the twentieth century, such as those drawn up under the direction of Le Bras and Canon Boulard, which set out the main features for rural France (1945–66). (See figure 21.) It has already been said, and indeed restated recently (by Langlois in his commentary at the end of Tackett's work), that there is a strong link between the picture in 1791 and the picture reflected by contemporary religious sociology, at least in its broad lines. There is of course a dichotomy between the diagonal of dechristianized France, which drops on a north-east/south-west axis from the Paris Basin to Bordeaux, running through the central area of the Loire and through Limousin, and the diagonal which existed between 1791 and 1794, starting at the same point but dropping via Lyonnais towards the Alps. Allowances and adjustments were written in subsequently, indicating the work of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, retouching on successive occasions the picture illustrated in 1794 – which was the real attraction – by certain features that were closer to the definitive stereotype.

The outcome of this comparison is that the real importance of the dechristianizing episode of Year 2, both in the short and the long term, now becomes clear. It was the confirmation and at the same time the mature development of a situation brought to light as early as 1791, which itself was a legacy from the distant past; and it was also a break effected while the iron was hot by the 'formative event' (to use Tackett's expression) which was the crisis of religious schism. The positions taken set out, therefore, both at the time and indeed for some time to come, a scene which was set to last, and which at this moment of convulsive and strongly marked crisis betrayed secrets of conscience without compunction.

The force of things, or the expression of a moment

The crisis of Year 2 could no more escape *conjunctural* pressure than could the episode immediately prior to 1791, as it occurred at the very heart of a period

of intense confrontation, when tensions which had been building up since the beginning of the Revolution burst out convulsively.

While it was a reflection of religious attitudes, the crisis of winter and spring 1794 reflected also in the short term one moment in the political development of the country. Alphonse Aulard, who saw in it the reflection of a defensive patriotism, interpreted the phenomenon in a way that was undoubtedly impoverished and that was itself historically dated, but he was aware of this transition to a political plane of what had been a purely religious problem, and which had laid down – by way of the cult of Reason and then of the Supreme Being – the stakes of a complete cultural revolution.

By virtue of this, therefore, we can well understand that above and beyond the spectacular aspects of the attack on religion and on the Church as an institution, beyond men and events, this test of the truth enables us to appreciate a specific time and condition in the political development of the country, in its most basic and structural aspects. Our analysis of those people issuing addresses enables us to discover the three faces of France: the south, where the popular societies were the spokesmen; the north-east and part of the west, where the initiative reverted to the administrative authorities (departmental and district), undoubtedly because there was insufficient impetus from below; and the Paris Basin and the north-west, where the municipalities handled the part which elsewhere had reverted to the clubs. And now we can therefore appreciate the formation of a general opinion which was in the process of becoming politicized, although in different ways and with varying results.

In the course of this formation during the six months in which the crisis reached its climax, we begin to appreciate the apparent anomalies of our own maps. The cult of Reason, a web of concepts and practices which had been devised gradually and formed into a system, expressed itself differently depending on both the place and the time. The most aggressive, even savage, expressions of it were to be found on more than one occasion in the most distant border areas, where this attempt at total subversion met the strongest opposition: in the west, for example, from the Armorican borders through Brittany, which was totally opposed to it and yet at the same time was subjugated by naked force based on the towns and the axes where it had penetrated; and also in part of central France and the south-west. As much as a true state of collective and deep-rooted attitudes, which were both inherited and yet at the same time newly created, our maps show up areas of paroxysmic confrontation, places where the forced marriages of priests equal or surpass the number of abdications, or where bell-towers were destroyed because fugitive or refugee priests could not themselves be attacked, and where the whole tenor of speeches conceals a desperate attempt to change men.

Behind the clinical facts of opinion samples, the crisis of Year 2 revealed a deep split, a frontal attack: it did much more than merely apply corrective

touches to the varied landscape which the religious schism of 1791 had uncovered. It was in fact the very moment when collective options were firmly set on a lasting basis, and which heralded, as an extension of this war of movements, a long and multi-secular war of changing positions.

The great break

As a religious break, or a political break, the dechristianization of Year 2 appears to be one of the major events of the revolutionary adventure which was lived through by the greatest number of people.

It cast a heavy shadow on the future. In the religious sphere, that clearly goes without saying. The schism of 1791 split the ecclesiastical body, the clerical population, into two. By dealing the Church – essentially the constitutional Church – a mortal blow, it has been said that it contributed in those areas most affected (i.e. those where the majority had taken the constitutional oath) to a lowering of esteem for religion which lasted well into the nineteenth century, and which was at the root of that other, longer-term dechristianization which has been in progress since that time.

But over and above the attacks on established religion, and the lasting effects of these, it created within the people themselves, whether opponents or supporters, an ineradicable break in mentality, which was at the root of the major collective options that were still to come. A 'Jacobin' France then began to take shape, in a spatial framework that was destined to have a long future, and similarly a France that was both clerical and counter-revolutionary at the same time, entrenched in its options by the sheer intensity of the persecution to which it had been subjected. These were long-term prisons, the survival of which can be clearly measured. We may be surprised, for example, in a south-east whose resistance to the revolutionary events of 1852 was to demonstrate its left-wing bias for a long time to come, to find areas of 1848-style Jacobinism which are directly linked to those of the dechristianizing Jacobinism of Year 2.

In order to understand how deep these memories are, and the obstinacy and tenacity of these options, it might be appropriate to follow the process by which this learning took place, the way in which the imprint was fixed of something that was much more than just a momentary squall, or a traumatic period of aggression. It was also a gigantic scene of theatrical perspective, the creative instrument of images, allegories, and dreams. And it is on these grounds that the dechristianization of Year 2 takes its place among the ranks of fundamental events in the evolution of society.

We embarked on an investigation of dechristianization in the short term, comparing it to a wave which passed through France, in six months, from

Brumaire to Germinal. Has it yielded all its secrets? At least we have a better understanding of its mechanics and procedures. We know, too, that it was not an extraneous Machiavellian plot, imposed by force on a country totally opposed to it. Nor was it the spontaneous flowering of a popular movement. It is perhaps even more interesting by virtue of its ambiguity. It enables us to rediscover in the longer term its underlying tendencies, its very membranes, and to find there another form of dechristianization smouldering beneath the embers, which in some cases had lain there for a very long time, and of which it was the instantaneous catalyst. In this sense, it was the precursor of long-lasting attitudes and behavioural features, the legacy of which is still with us. Is that to say that the only real value of what might almost be described as this flash photograph is revelatory? Such a view would be to forget the creativity of the time and the very language invented, even though it might indeed have had no tomorrow. It would be to forget also the depth of the wound inflicted on religion, and the flagrant outrages, some of which were irreparable. It is for this reason, in a dialectical movement which hastened on much longer-lasting developments, that the dechristianization of Year 2 appears to be one of the major turning-points in the collective sensibility of France at the end of the century of Enlightenment.

Appendices

Chronology

1793 – YEAR 2

2 October	The Convention decrees that the body of Descartes be transferred to the Panthéon. Dechristianization already under way in some departments (Allier, Nièvre).
5 October	The Convention adopts the new Republican calendar.
7 October 16 Vendémiaire	In Rheims the representative Rühl breaks the Holy Phial.
24 October 3 Brumaire	Report of Fabre d'Eglantine on the names of the months in the Republican calendar (subsequently adopted on 4 Frimaire).
27 october 6 Brumaire	The Committee of Public Safety censures the representative André Dumont for his anti-Christian measures in the Somme.
28 October 7 Brumaire	The Convention decrees that no ecclesiastic or religious (male or female) may be appointed as a teacher.
5 November 15 Brumaire	The Convention votes to print the statement of M.J. Chénier proposing that Catholicism be replaced by the religion of patriotism. It decides that the bust of Marat should be placed in the debating chamber.
6 November 16 Brumaire	In response to the communes of the district of Corbeil (Ris, Mennecy ...), the Convention allows the communes the right to renounce the Catholic religion. A delegation (Proli, Pereira,

	Cloots, Bourdon) invites the Bishop of Paris, Gobel, to renounce his priesthood.
7 November 17 Brumaire	Solemn ceremony of renunciation by Gobel before the Convention, the example of which was followed by most of the ecclesiatics in the Assembly.
10 November 20 Brumaire	Festival of Liberty and of Reason at Notre-Dame.
16 November 26 Brumaire	The Convention makes a gift of all presbyteries to schools and to the poor.
20 November 30 Brumaire	Anti-religious masquerade by the Section of Unity, in the Convention.
21 November 1 Frimaire	Robespierre addresses the Jacobins on the freedom of religion: 'Fanaticism is an animal that is both ferocious and capricious. It was fleeing from Reason, so pursue it shouting, or it will return ... Atheism is aristocratic. The idea of an All-powerful Being, who watches out for the oppression of the innocent and who punishes insolent wrongdoing, is very popular.'
22 November 2 Frimaire	In the Convention Danton speaks out against anti-religious masquerades. In Strasbourg churches and temples are closed and changed into temples of Reason.
23 November 3 Frimaire	In Paris, Chaumette makes the Commune close all religious buildings, except for temples of Reason.
24 November 4 Frimaire	Formal adoption of the Republican calendar.
26 November 6 Frimaire	A further speech by Danton to the Convention: 'It was not our intention to destroy the reign of superstition in order to establish the reign of atheism.'
28 November 8 Frimaire	Retreat by Chaumette in the religious area: he admits that private persons are hiring houses in order to hold religious services there.
30 Novermber 10 Frimaire	Festival of Reason in Paris at the Church of Saint Roch. The Convention sends a delegation.
6 December 16 Frimaire	Decree forbidding 'all violent acts and measures contrary to the freedom of religious beliefs'.
9 December 18 Frimaire	the Convention stipulates that the decrees of those representatives who had closed churches should remain in force.

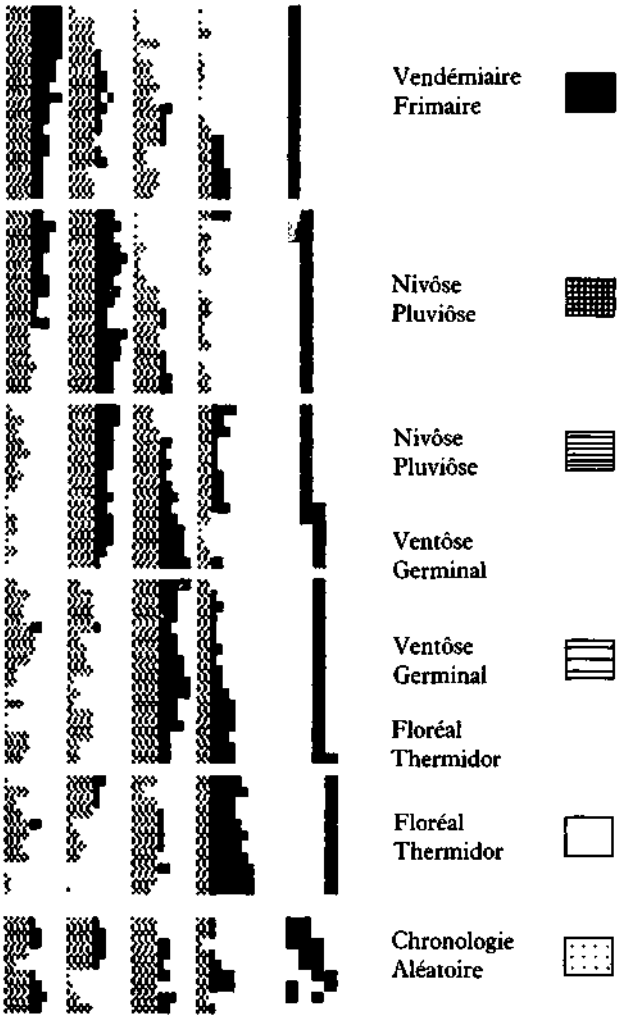
12 December 22 Frimaire	Anarchis Cloots barred from the Jacobin Club on the grounds of being rich, foreign ... and an atheist.
17 December 27 Frimaire	The Catholics of Rouen succeed in obtaining the re-opening of their churches.
25 December 5 Nivôse	Report by Robespierre on the principles of revolutionary government: 'The fanatic covered in scapulars and the fanatic who preaches atheism have much in common.'
27 December 7 Nivôse	Decree facilitating divorce.
28 December 8 Nivôse	Robespierre arranges for the honours of the Panthéon to be bestowed on Bara.

1794

11 January 22 Nivôse	Lamourette, constitutional Bishop of Lyon, guillotined. In the Convention, Grégoire denounces the vandalism of the destruction of works of art, and demands respect for their artistic patrimony.
4 March 13 Ventôse	The Cordeliers (club founded by Danton, Marat and C. Desmoulins, which met in premises formerly occupied by the Franciscans (Cordeliers).) call for a new popular rising, but get no support.
24 March 4 Germinal	Condemnation of the Hébertists.
5 April 16 Germinal	Condemnation of the Dantonists and the Indulgents.
14 April 25 Germinal	Robespierre moves the decree to transfer the body of J.-J. Rousseau to the Panthéon.
7 May 18 Floréal	Speech by Robespierre to the Convention on the principles of political morality to be used as guide-lines by the Convention for the internal administration of the Republic: 'The Idea of the Supreme Being and the Immortality of the soul is a permanent reminder of justice. It is therefore both socialistic and republican.' The Convention decrees that 'the French people recognize the existence of the Supreme Being and of the immortality of the soul.' It institutes a series of Festivals, the first of which is to be dedicated to the Supreme Being.

22 May 3 Floréal	Abortive attack by Amirat against Robespierre and Collot d'Herbois.
23 May 4 Floréal	Attempted assassination of Robespierre by Cécile Renault. Wave of emotion in the country.
8 June 20 Prairial	Festival of the Supreme Being in Paris and in the provinces.
25 June 27 Prairial	Affair of Catherine Théot, 'the Mother of God', prophetess and admirer of Robespierre, used against the Incorruptible by the Committee of General Security.
27 June 9 Messidor	Letter from Payan, national agent of Paris, giving an account to Robespierre of public feeling and pleading with him to take a stance against 'all clericalism and all mysticism'.
27 July 9 Thermidor	Fall of Robespierre.
28 July 10 Thermidor	Execution of Robespierre and of his friends.

Figures



On the left: graphic treatment of known information. Each line represents a department. The first four columns correspond to the four periods under consideration. For each department the lengths are proportional to the number of addresses, where the weighting is shown in black if it is above the average. The four other columns indicate, in black, the predominant periods.

Figure 1 Chronology of dechristianizing addresses: typology

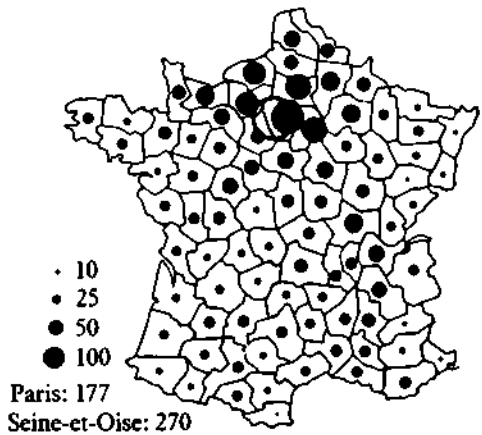


Figure 2 Overall distribution of dechristianizing addresses

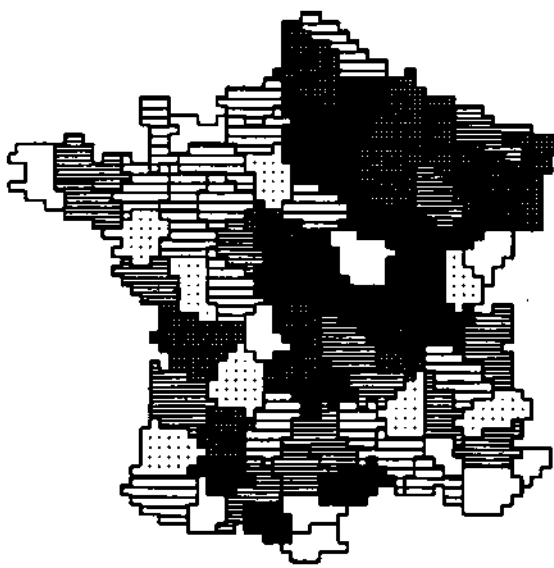


Figure 3 The six groups obtained (plates 1 and 3) based on the graphic treatment are visualized above in a way which positions the chronological stages of the receipt of dechristianizing addresses by the Convention

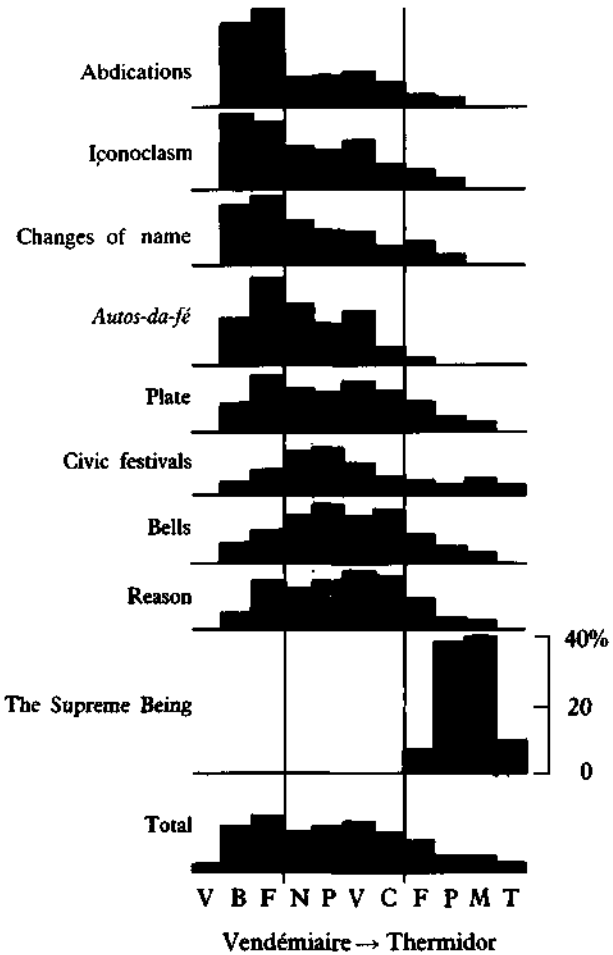


Figure 4 Chronology of dechristianizing addresses by theme: distribution by month, for every hundred addresses on each theme

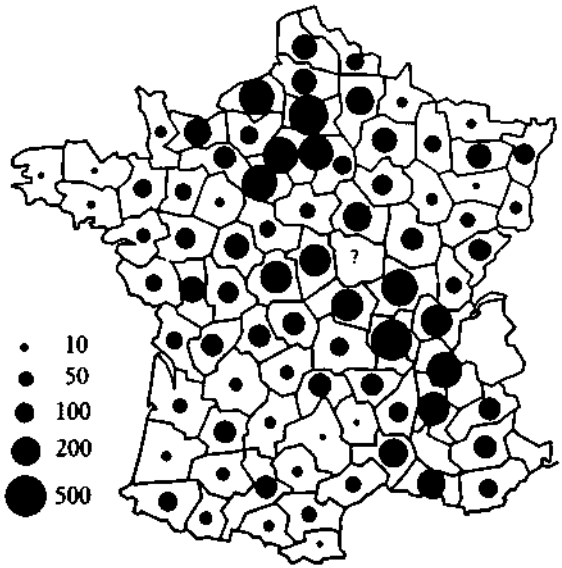


Figure 5 Abdicating priests (numbers)

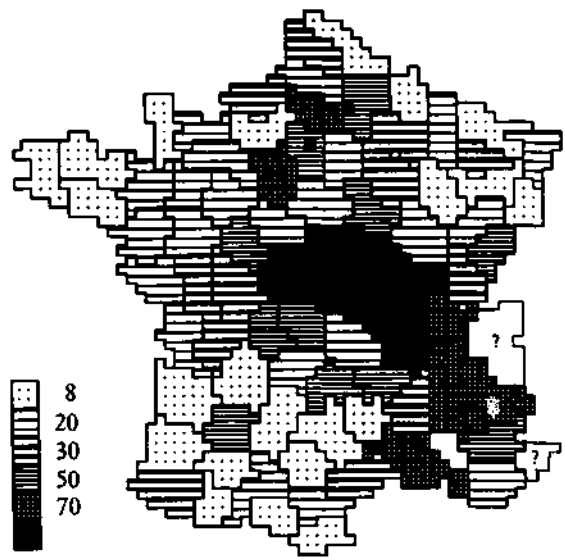


Figure 6 Abdicating priests, in relation to the total numbers of clergy bound by the constitutional oath (in %)

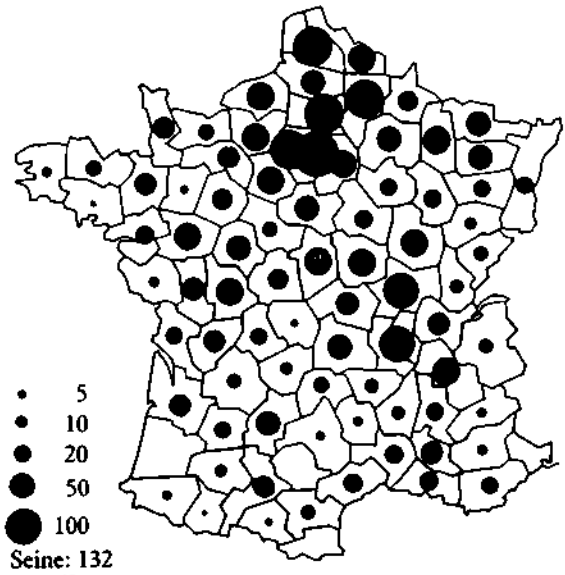


Figure 7 Married priests (numbers)

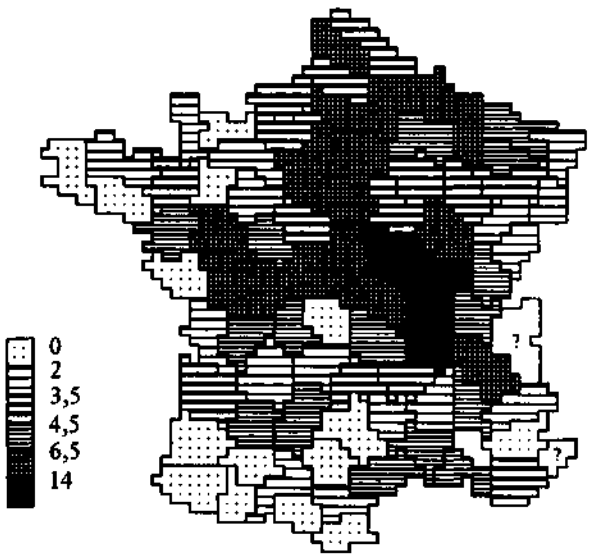


Figure 8 Married priests, in relation to the total numbers of clergy bound by the constitutional oath (in %)

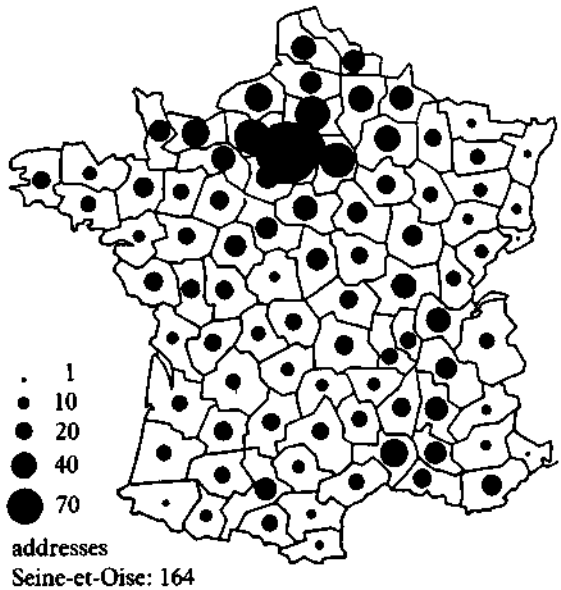


Figure 9 Addresses relating to the removal of plate from churches

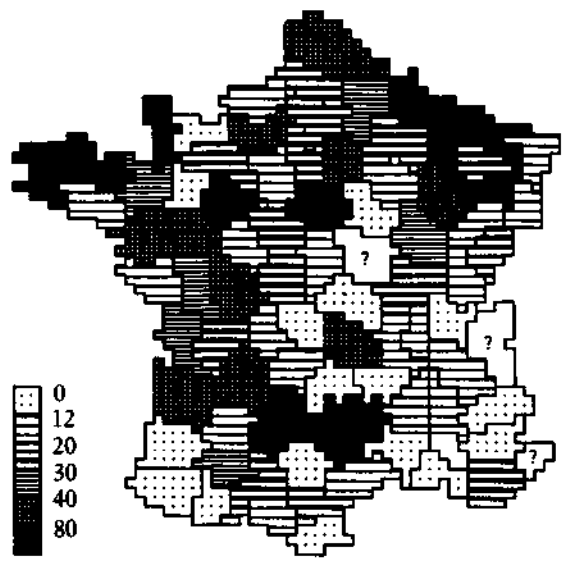


Figure 10 Married priests, for every hundred abdicating priests

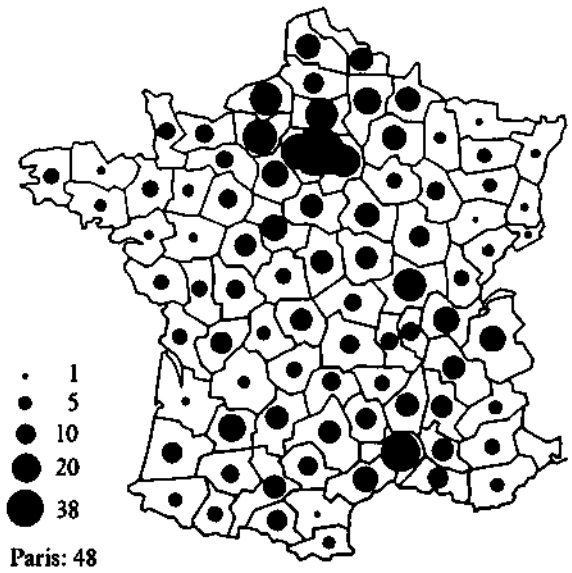


Figure 11 Addresses relating to the cult of Reason

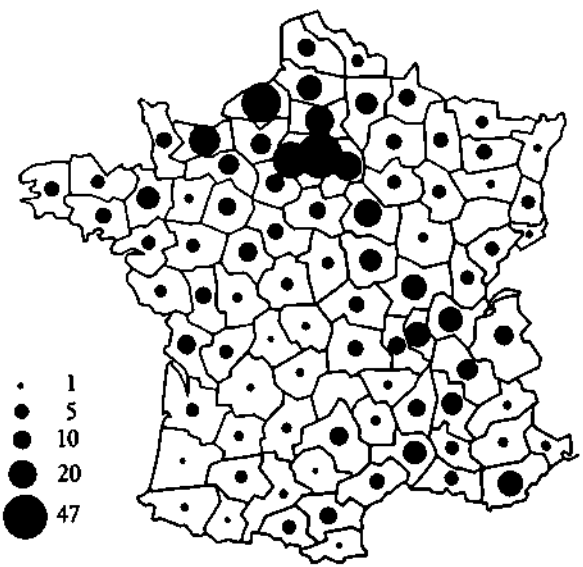


Figure 12 Addresses relating to civic festivals

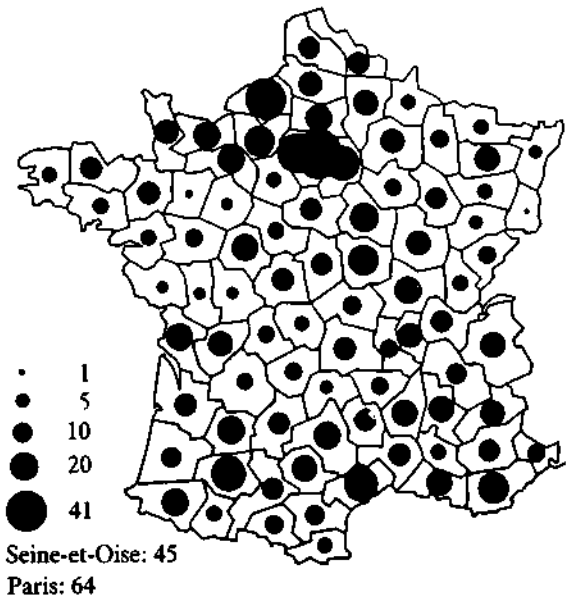


Figure 13 Addresses relating to the Supreme Being

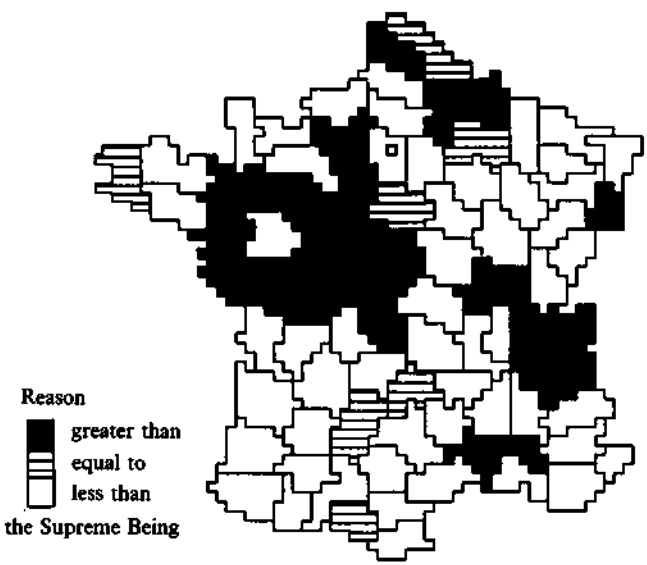


Figure 14 Addresses on the cult of the Supreme Being in relation to the cult of Reason

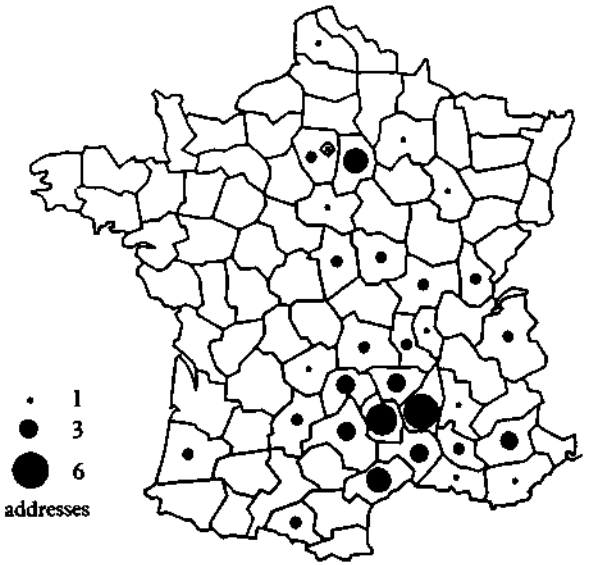


Figure 15 Resistance to dechristianization

THE ORIGINATORS OF DECHRISTIANIZING ADDRESSES (PLATES 16 TO 18)

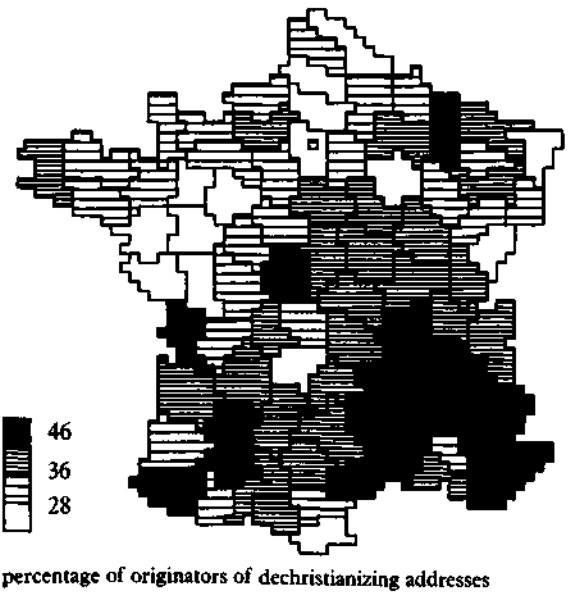


Figure 16 Popular societies

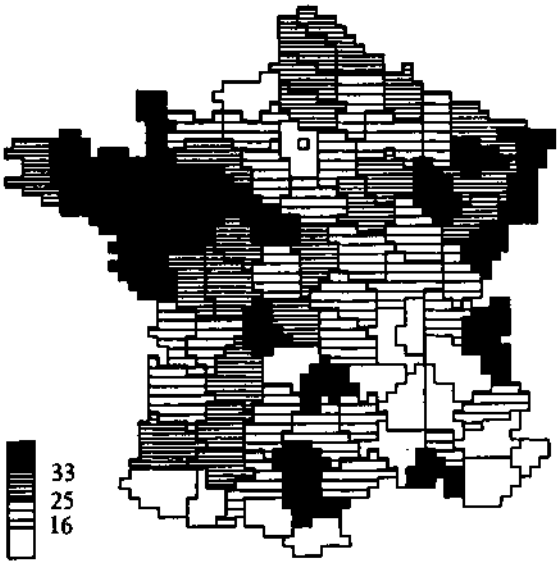


Figure 17 Administrations (departments, districts)

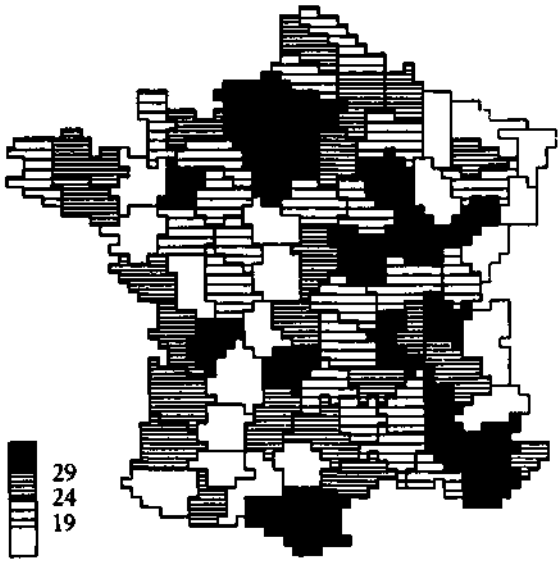


Figure 18 Municipalities

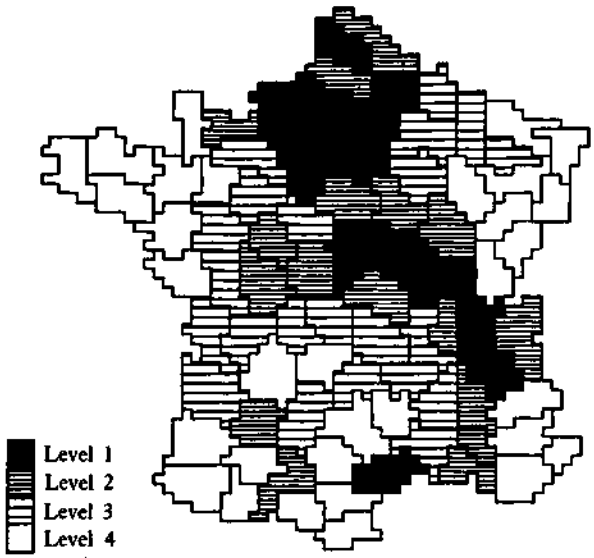


Figure 19 The intensity of dechristianization

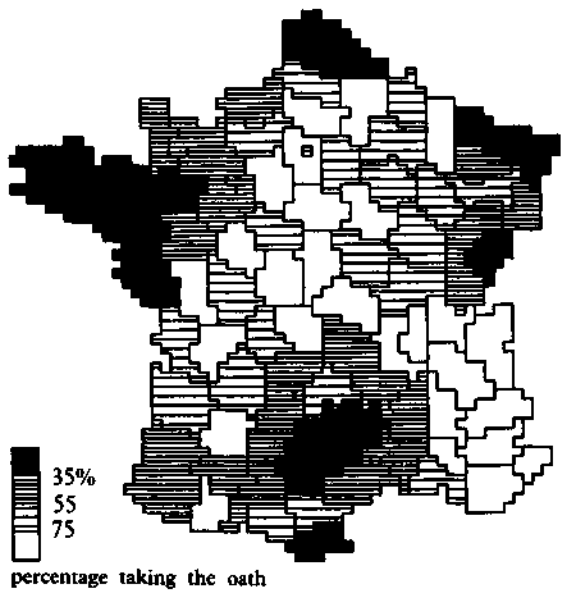


Figure 20 Priests taking the oath of fidelity to the civil constitution of the clergy: 1791

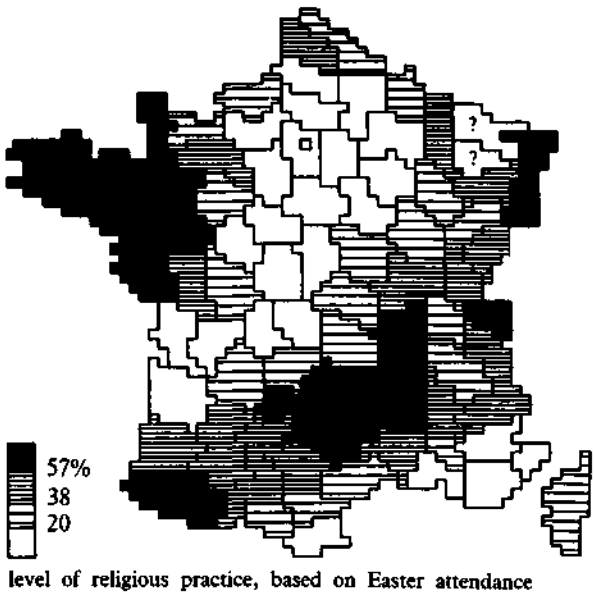


Figure 21 Religious practice, 1945–66

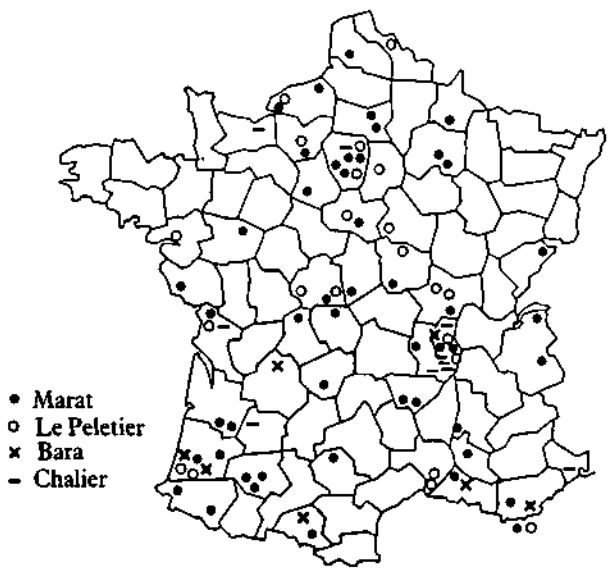
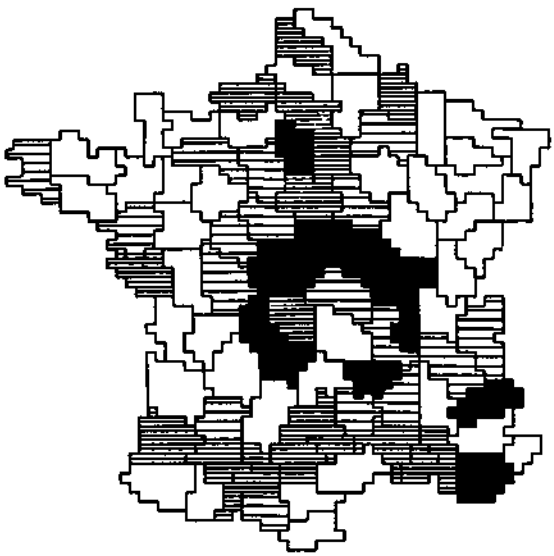
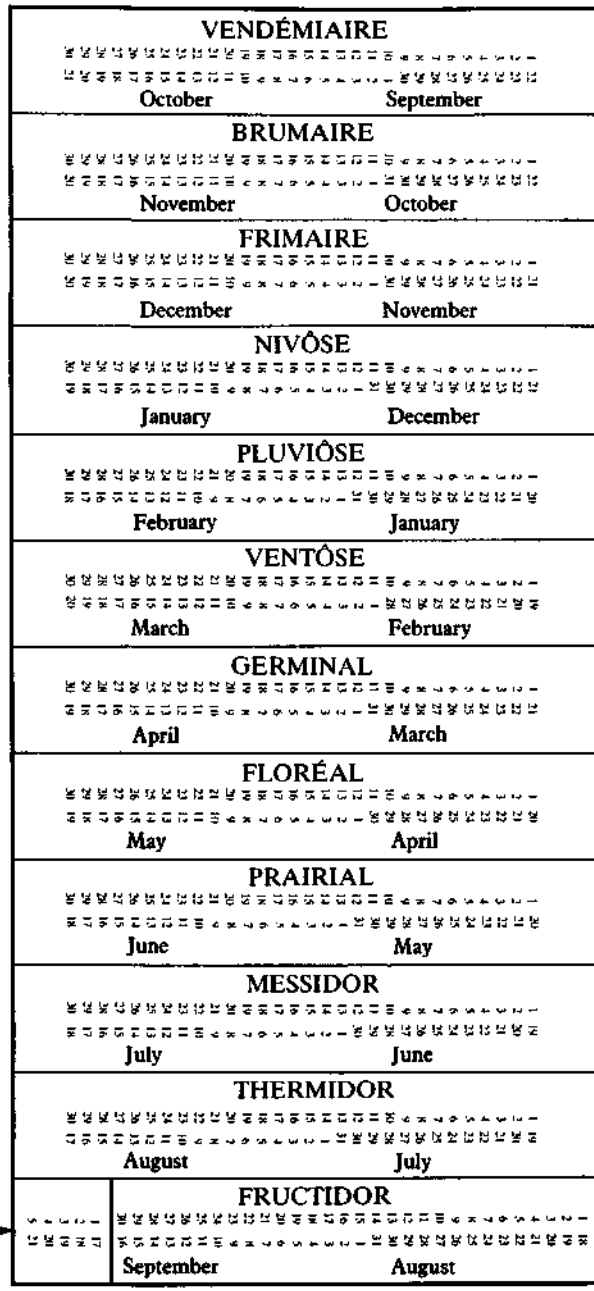


Figure 22 The cult of the martyrs of Liberty, following revolutionary toponymy



The shading is weighted as a function of the percentage of significant changes of name.

Figure 23 The revolutionary toponymy



Source: table adapted by G. Fradet D.R.

Figure 24 Concordance of the Gregorian and Republican calendars (Year 2)

Bibliographical notes

This research is based on the careful study of manuscript sources as well as extensive use of printed sources in the major documentary series.

The author has been working in this field for more than quarter of a century, and published in 1976 a first work in progress on the subject, limited to the south-east quarter of France and published by Hachette under the title *Religion et Révolution: la déchristianisation de l'an 2*. He is most grateful to those students for both masters' degrees and doctorates who have agreed to be associated with this collective research, at both the University of Provence and the University of Paris 1. These studies are quoted in this present bibliography.

The bibliography in no way claims to be exhaustive, for the field of study is so enormous, and for more than a century has generated comment in both general and specialized works as well as numerous monographs. As far as these latter items in particular are concerned, we have limited ourselves to a few suggestions, as a form of introduction to this sequence of events.

MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

These are indicated here only in a general way. Three principal series have been investigated in the Archives Nationales corresponding to the three main themes in which the information is featured:

For abdicating priests

Tables and descriptions submitted by departments, districts or municipalities: F 19.872 to F 19.893. The information obtained here is incomplete and does not dispense us from the need to refer to sources at departmental level.

For married priests

Essentially the records of the correspondence of Cardinal Caprara, comprising forty-six boxes from the store of material held by the office of the Secretary of State. From these

boxes we have investigated mainly articles AF IV 1895–1916 (the correspondence with married priests).

Removal of plate from the churches

The boxes numbered F7 4390 and F19–612 A provide only a discontinuous series of records, but nevertheless these have been utilized. Similarly, many deposits of Departmental Archives have been consulted, notably in the south-east, where the series L (revolutionary) of twelve departments were inspected: Ain, Bouches-du-Rhône, Basses-Alpes, Hautes-Alpes, Ardèche, Drôme, Isère, Loire, Rhône, Savoie, Vaucluse, Var. Other departmental soundings were taken in the context of the work referred to above.

PRINTED SOURCES

Information has been taken from the following sries: the *Archives Parlemntaires* from 1787 to 1860, the complete collection of legislative and political debates from French parliaments, first series, published by Mavidal and Laurent (up to vol. LXXII), second series published by Reinhard and Bouloiseau, (from vol. LXXIII to XC). This work was directed by A. Soboul and M. Vovelle and undertaken by Misses Brunel and Alquié, from vol. LXXVI (4 to 18 October 1793) to vol. XCV (26 Thermidor to 9 Fructidor Year 2–13 August 1794). The work was completed by an assessment of the activities of the representatives on mission undertaken under the direction of A. Aulard and published as *Recueil des Actes du Comité de Salut Public*, including the official correspondence of the representatives on mission and the Register of the Provisional Executive Council (28 vols., Paris, 1933–51): volumes 8–13 were consulted.

Bibliography

GENERAL WORKS ON THE RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE REVOLUTION

Aulard, Alphonse, *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française*. Paris, 1925.

——*Christianity and the Revolution*. Translated by Lady Frazer. London, 1927.

Guérin, Daniel. *Bourgeois et bras-nus, 1793–1795*. Paris, 1973.

Latreille, André. *L'Eglise catholique et la Révolution française*. Two volumes. Paris, 1946–50.

Leflon, Jean. *La Crise révolutionnaire 1789–1846*. (Histoire de l'Eglise, tome XX) Paris, 1949.

Mathiez, Albert. *Contribution à l'histoire religieuse de la Révolution française*. Paris, 1907.

——*La Révolution et l'Eglise*. Paris, 1910.

——*Robespierre et le culte de l'Etre suprême*. Le Puyt, 1910.

——*La Question religieuse sous la Révolution française*. Paris, 1929.

Plongeron, Bernard. *Conscience religieuse en Révolution*. Paris, 1969.

THE *ANCIEN RÉGIME* AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE REVOLUTION

Langlois, Claude, and Tackett, Timothy, 'Ecclesiastical structures and clerical geography on the eve of the French Revolution,' *French Historical Studies*, 1980, XI, 352–70.

Sagnac, P. 'Le Serment constitutionnel,' *Revue d'Histoire moderne*, 1960,

Sciout, Philippe. *Histoire de la constitution civile du clergé*. Paris, 1872.

Tackett, Timothy. *La Révolution, l'Eglise, la France*. Paris, 1986.

Vovelle, Michel. *Piété baroque et déchristianisations. Les attitudes devant la mort en Provence au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris, 1871. New edition, 1976.

DECHRISTIANIZATION: GENERAL STUDIES AND MONOGRAPHS

Cobb, Richard. 'Les débuts de la déchristianisation à Dieppe,' *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 1956, 28, 191–209.

Dommanget, Maurice. *La Déchristianisation à Beauvais et dans l'Oise*. Paris, 1918.

Plongeron, Bernard. 'Autopsie d'une église constitutionnelle: Tours de 1794 à 1802,' *Actes du 93ème congrès national des sociétés savantes*, Tours, 1968 (Paris, 1971), II, 147–201.

Rémond, René. 'The problem of dechristianization: the present position and some recent French studies,' *Concilium*, 1965, 7, 77–80.

Vovelle, Michel. 'Déchristianisation spontanée et déchristianisation provoquée dans le Sud-Est,' *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire moderne*, 4 octobre 1964,

——'Essai de cartographie de la déchristianisation sous la Révolution française,' *Annales du Midi*, 1964, LXXVI, 529–42.

——*Religion et Révolution: la déchristianisation de l'an II dans le Sud-Est*. Paris, 1976.

ABDICATING PRIESTS AND MARRIED PRIESTS

Charon-Bordas, J. *Inventaire des archives de la légation en France du cardinal Caprara*. Paris, 1975.

Greer, Donald. *The Incidence of Emigration during the French Revolution*. (Harvard Historical Monographs no. 24) Cambridge, Mass., 1951.

Langlois, Claude, and Le Goff, Jacques. 'Pour une sociologie des prêtres mariés,' in *Voies nouvelles pour l'histoire de la Révolution française* (Actes du Colloque Mathiez-Lefebvre de 1974) Paris, 1978, pp.

Mathiez, Albert. 'Les prêtres révolutionnaires devant le Cardinal Caprara,' *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, 1926, 3, 1–15.

Reinhard, Marcel, editor. *Les Prêtres révolutionnaires pendant la Révolution française*. (Commission d'histoire économique et sociale de la Révolution française) Paris, 1965.

FORMS OF DECHRISTIANIZATION: TOPONYMY, CHURCH PLATE

Aulard, Alphonse. 'Les noms révolutionnaires de communes de France,' *Revue de Paris*, 1926,

Figuères, R. de. *Les Noms révolutionnaires des communes de France*. Paris, 1901.

Mathiez, Albert, 'L'argenterie des Eglises en l'An II,' *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, 1925, 2, 576–82.

REVOLUTIONARY CREEDS

Aulard, Alphonse. *Le Culte de la Raison et le culte de l'Etre Suprême*. Paris, 1892.

Mathiez, Albert. *La Théophilanthropie et le culte décadaire*. Paris, 1904.

——*Les Origines des cultes révolutionnaires*. Paris, 1904.
Ozouf, Mona. *La Fête révolutionnaire*. Paris, 1976.
Sicard, Augustin. *A la recherche d'une religion civile*. Paris, 1976.
Soboul, Albert. 'Sentiment religieux et cultes populaires pendant la Révolution: saintes, patriotes et martyrs de la Liberté,' *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, 1957, 29, 193–213.
——'Observation sur le culte de Marat,' *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, 1958 (3), 92–3.
Vovelle, Michel. *Les Métamorphoses de la fête en Provence, (1750–1820)*. Paris, 1976.

SOME CLASSIC MONOGRAPHS

Bauzon, Louis, Muguet, Paul, and Chaumont, Louis. *Recherches historiques sur la persécution religieuse dans le département de Saône-et-Loire pendant la Révolution*. Four volumes. Chalons-sur-Saône, 1889–1903.
Chauvin, J. *Histoire religieuse du département de la Nièvre pendant la Révolution*. Two volumes. Paris, 1926.
Chevalier, Jules. *L'Eglise constitutionnelle et la persécution religieuse dans le département de la Drôme pendant la Révolution*. Valence, 1919.
Dommanget, Maurice. *La Déchristianisation à Beauvais et dans l'Oise*. Besançon, 1918.
Fenster, Kenneth R. 'The clergy of the department of the Gironde and the dechristianization of the year II,' *Proceedings of the 10th Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History, 14–16 October 1982* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1984) p. 298 (abstract).
Gallerand, J. *Les Cultes sous la Terreur en Loir-et-Cher, 1792–1795*. Blois, 1928.
Godel, Jean. *La Reconstruction concordataire du diocèse de Grenoble après la Révolution*. Grenoble, 1968.
Jolivet, Charles. *La Révolution en Ardèche*. Largentière, 1930.
Laugier, F. *Le Schisme constitutionnel et la persécution dans le Var*. Draguignan, 1897.
Lebrun, François, editor. *Histoire des catholiques en France*. Toulouse, 1980.
Lefebvre, George. *La grande peur de 1789*. Paris, 1932. New edition, 1970.
——*The Great Fear of 1789*. Translated by Joan White. London, 1973.
Lemonnié, P. *Le Clergé de la Charente Inférieure pendant la Révolution*. La Rochelle, 1905.
Ligou, Daniel, *Montauban à la fin de l'ancien régime et aux débuts de la Révolution*. Paris, 1958.
Meyer, J.-C. *La Vie religieuse en Haute-Garonne sous la Révolution, 1789–1801*. Toulouse, 1982.
Paillard, Yvon-Georges. 'Fanatiques et patriotes dans le Puy-de-Dôme: histoire religieuse d'un département 1792 á Thermidor,' *Annales Historiques de la Révolution française*, 1970, 42, 294–328.
Pisani, Paul. *L'Eglise de Paris et la Révolution*. Four volumes. Paris, 1908–11.
Reuss, R. *La Constitution civile du clergé et la crise religieuse en Alsace, 1790–1795*. Two volumes. Strasbourg, 1922.

Saurel, F. *Histoire religieuse du département de l'Hérault pendant la Révolution française.* Four volumes. Paris, 1894–96.

Sevestre, E. *Le Personnel de l'Eglise constitutionnelle en Normandie – 1791–1795.* Paris, 1925.

UNPUBLISHED STUDIES

(Masters' dissertations and duplicated doctoral theses. Unless otherwise indicated, these studies were prepared under the supervision of Michel Vovelle.)

Bande, A. *Déchristianisation et résistance populaire en Alsace pendant l'An II.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris, I. 1986.

Bianchi, S. *La Déchristianisation le district de Corbeil.* Thèse de Doctorat, Paris, I, 1976 (A. Soboul).

Bossut, N. *La Déchristianisation dans le district de Corbigny.* DEA, Paris, 1984.

Bourdon, J.-F. *Les Pasteurs réformés et la déchristianisation de l'An II.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1985.

Cler, C. *La Déchristianisation de l'An II dans le quart sud-est de la France: l'idéologie dans les libelles, pétitions et adresses à la Convention Nationale.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Aix-en-Provence, 1971.

D'hollander, P. *Religion et Révolution en Haute Vienne (1791–1802).* Thèse de Doctorat, Paris, IV, 1984 (J.M. Mayeur).

Dreux, Y. *Religion et Révolution en Picardie et dans le district de Saint Quentin.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris, I, 1985.

Dufour, J. *La Vie religieuse et la déchristianisation dans le district de Saint Germain en Laye pendant le Révolution française.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris, I, 1984.

Ghirardi, O. *Le Culte de l'Etre Suprême à travers les adresses de la Convention.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1983 (D. Roche).

Laudet, A. *La Déchristianisation dans le sud-ouest de la France.* Mémoire de Maîtrise. Paris I, 1986.

Lecocq, M.-C. and Veyret, A. *La Déchristianisation dans le Nord-Ouest de la France.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1986.

Manier, A. *Religion et Révolution en Eure-et-Loir (1789 – an II).* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1985.

Marechaux, X. *La Déchristianisation de l'An II dans le Nord-Est de la France.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1986.

Planchon, O. *La Rechristianisation post-thermidorienne dans le département du Cher (1794–1799).* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Paris I, 1985.

Sardella, L.P. *La Déchristianisation de l'An II dans le quart sud-est de la France: essai de cartographie historique.* Mémoire de Maîtrise, Aix-en-Provence, 1971.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Cobb, Richard. *The People's Armies.* London and New Haven, 1987.

Le Bras, H. *Les trois France.* Paris, 1986.

Todd, E. and Le Bras, H. *L'Invention de la France.* Paris, 1981.

Index

Note: Geographical references are to broad general areas (e.g. north-east, west), *départements* and main towns. References to figures are in *italics*.

Michel Vovelle is Professor of History at the University of Paris I.

Jacket illustration: Engraving, *Fête at the Cathedrale Notre Dame*, 10 November 1793 (Roger-Violet, Paris)

Jacket design: Miller Craig and Cocking Design Partnership

Books of Related Interest

Zwickau in Transition, 1500–1547

The Reformation as an Agent of Change

Susan C. Karant-Nunn

Written from an ethnographic perspective, *Zwickau in Transition* reveals the interaction between religious ideology and the social, economic, and political aspirations of groups in conflict. It analyzes the setting within which Thomas Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets formulated their radical views and explains how the city councillors exploited Lutheranism to benefit their class.

Anne of Austria

Queen of France, 1601–1666

Ruth Kleinman

Ruth Kleinman provides the first biography based on available documents of the period of Anne of Austria, daughter of Philip III of Spain, wife of Louis XIII, mother of Louis XIV, and regent for her son during his youth. She presents Anne as she was; a woman who had the strength to survive difficult circumstances, to go beyond what she had been taught, and to adopt a new allegiance.

Ohio State University Press
Columbus

ISBN 0–8142–0577–1