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LOUIS XVI'S CHAPEL AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION (1789-1792)

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Abstract—The close association of Christianity with the late Bourbon monarchy's style of governance has often been interpreted as a burdensome legacy, which impacted greatly on the period preceding the French Revolution. In recent years, historians have referred to the ideological, juridical and intellectual assaults on the religious foundations of the French crown, throughout the eighteenth century, either as a process of 'desacralization' or as the religious origins of the French Revolution. This article, though inspired by this school of thought, takes a different approach by examining the less well-known ceremonial and ritual components of this form of kingship, with particular reference to the king's chapel. Louis XVI's ecclesiastical household was both the centre of royal patronage for the Gallican Church and the chief regulatory authority of the monarch's personal religious devotion. Its actions, transformation and fate during the Revolution are instructive in two ways. First, its survival during the first three years of the revolutionary troubles highlights its fundamental and constraining influence over the French monarchy. Secondly, the gradual, though determined, effort to undermine the pact between throne and altar that it represented exemplifies a lesser known aspect of the national deputies' anticlerical agenda.

In the past two decades, the role played by religious controversies during the period immediately preceding the French Revolution has been the subject of much scholarly analysis.¹ A great deal of attention has been lavished on the *Parlementaire* and *Jansenist* crises during the second half of Louis XV's reign.² They are interpreted as either embryonic or fully fledged offensives aimed at undermining the juridical and religious foundations of the Bourbon monarchy. Michael Walzer has suggested that the trial and execution of Louis XVI was the culmination of an even longer process in the evolution towards modern political society.³ In spite of having examined in detail the legal and ideological

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¹ See the various contributors in K. M. Baker, (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture: The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1987).

² D. K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (London, 1996), Chapters 3 and 4; J. W. Merrick, *The Desacralisation of the French Monarchy in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1990), Chapter 5; R. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (trans., London, 1991), pp. 111-36; J. Swann, *Politics and the Parlement of Paris under Louis XV, 1754-1774* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 34-44.

³ M. Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution; Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 8-34.

underpinnings of the late Bourbon monarchy, few of these studies have examined in depth the ritual elements of monarchical rule.⁴

This article will examine the centre of the cult of 'sacral monarchy'; namely the king's chapel. In terms of historical research, the 'religion of Versailles' is a road already travelled. John McManners' work did much to re-evaluate the subject's importance. However, his treatment of the royal chapel did not deal with the impact of the Revolution.⁵ While it is true that the monarchy takes centre stage in his account, when he is describing the political struggle over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the part played by the ecclesiastical household is only briefly sketched out.⁶ The intention, here, is to reassert the importance of the religious legacy inherited by Louis XVI and those clergymen who administered his devotions. It will be argued that the religious, symbolic and ceremonial configuration of the court of the last Bourbon absolutist monarch limited the dynasty's room for political manoeuvre. This made accommodation with the anticlerical National Assembly extremely difficult, if not impossible.

French kingship had been endowed, from time immemorial, with an important mystical and miraculous element. The royal thaumaturgical powers merely represented the most ostentatious of the regal claims to divine election.⁷ Other factors also contributed to the monarch's special and unparalleled position. The king of France was the lay canon of many churches and, in consequence, filled an intermediate position between congregation and priesthood during the masses he attended in person.⁸ The fact that 'the public', in the second half of the eighteenth century, was unprepared to take these assumptions of 'sacrality' at face value seems to be well established.⁹ Nevertheless, it is equally clear that Louis XVI continued to pursue these religious claims that constituted an important pillar on which the legitimacy of the Bourbon dynasty was built.¹⁰ The religious dimension strengthened the juridical authority of the monarch

⁴ Other historians examining royal ritual and ceremonial rarely venture into the Revolution. For example, R. Giesey, *The Royal Funeral Ceremony in Renaissance France* (Geneva, 1960); S. Hanley, *The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France: Constitutional Ideology in Legend, Ritual and Discourse* (Princeton, 1984).

⁵ For 'The religion of Versailles', see J. McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France: The Clerical Establishment and its Social Ramifications*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998), i. 29–57.

⁶ J. McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (London, 1969), pp. 43–59.

⁷ M. Bloch, *The Royal Touch, Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (trans., London, 1973), pp. 223–8.

⁸ A[rchives] N[ationales] KK 1453 fo. 1. 'Pourquoi le Roi de France porte le violet à certains deuils où sa Majesté en ordonne. Par le droit de Sa Couronne [sic] est le premier chanoine héréditaire des églises de St. Hylaire, et Poitiers, et St. Julien du Mans, et St. Martin et Tours, d'Angers et Zion, et de Châlons'.

⁹ Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, pp. 92–135; A. Farge, *Subversive Words. Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France* (trans., London, 1994), pp. 151–95; Merrick, *The Desacralisation of the French Monarchy*, pp. 27–48; cf. J. Clarke, *Commemorating the Dead in Revolutionary France. Revolution and Remembrance, 1789–1799* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 6–8 and, cited in the previous item, A. Boureau, *Le simple corps du roi, l'impossible sacralité des souverains français XV^e-XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1988), pp. 41, 62, 63.

¹⁰ P. Girault de Coursac, *L'éducation d'un roi: Louis XVI*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1995), pp. 193, 194, 215–43.

and allowed him to press his assertion of undivided sovereignty.¹¹ The deliberate confusion of the representation of power with actual physical authority was an important ingredient in the crown's public image.¹² After all, a monarch who was divinely appointed was certainly endowed with more legitimacy than one who sat on the throne through mere heredity, or worse, brute force.

When it came to writing a constitution, the politicians of the National Assembly sought to reconcile the monarchy with the new values of the regenerated French state.¹³ The redefinition of the separation of powers divested the king of his law-making capacity. This development also necessitated that Louis XVI relinquish the symbolic idea of a heavenly pact. The deputies could not rest easily as long as their reforms could potentially be interpreted as a usurpation of the divinely prescribed order of things. Swept away by the excitement of their transformative vision, they failed to realize that sacrality was an important component of the Bourbon dynasty's religious beliefs and convictions.

The king's chapel epitomizes where this mystical authority was made manifest. In the last ten years, specialists in aulic history and musicology have been re-evaluating the importance of this 'sacred space'.¹⁴ John Adamson goes so far as to see not only the chapel but also the entire early modern court as a 'theatre of piety'.¹⁵ This site, above all else, was where the monarch publicly asserted the dynasty's Catholic orthodoxy. It also provided the most important source of church patronage in the realm. The *aumônerie* controlled several commendatory abbeys, religious houses, charitable foundations, hospitals and a large number of scholarships to Parisian *collèges*.¹⁶ Its fate during the Revolution is instructive for two reasons. Its survival, right up to 10 August 1792, provides an enlightening case study of one of the few traditional royal institutions which existed for the duration of the constitutional monarchy. Similarly, the friction, suspicion and antagonism which surrounded the chapel during the revolutionary era highlighted how old-fashioned royal Catholic ceremonial was extraneous to the aspirations of the newly constituted French Nation. The case of the king's chapel

¹¹ J. Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, ed. J. H. Franklin (Cambridge, 1992), p. 44; cf. Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution*, p. 35.

¹² Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, p. 129.

¹³ T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), pp. 65-74, 263-71; K. M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 281-5; P. Colombo, 'Costituzione, Sovranità e Monarchia. L'immagine dell'Antico Regime nella Riflessione Politica dell'età Rivoluzionaria', in *L'Europa delle Corti alla fine dell'Antico Regime*, eds C. Mozzarelli and G. Venturi (Rome, 1991), pp. 31-45.

¹⁴ M. Schaich, (ed.), *Monarchy and Religion: The Transformation of Royal Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 2007); J. Carreras, B. García García and T. Knighton, (eds.), *The Royal Chapel in the Time of the Habsburgs*; J. Mongrédien and Y. Ferraton, (eds.), *Le grand motet français (1663-1792), Actes du colloque international de musicologie* (Paris, 1984).

¹⁵ J. Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics and Culture under the Ancien Régime 1500-1750* (New York, 1999), p. 41.

¹⁶ J.-N. Guyot and P.-A. Merlin, *Traité des droits, fonctions, franchises, exemptions, prérogatives et privilèges annexés en France à chaque dignité, à chaque office, à chaque état, soit civil, soit militaire, soit ecclésiastique*, 4 vols (Paris, 1786), i. 435-40.

thus allows us to achieve a better understanding of both the nature of the monarchy headed by Louis XVI and the challenge posed by the Revolution.

I

The historiography of the *chapelle royale* has often been neglected. From the mid-nineteenth century, right up to the late twentieth century, little academic work was produced on the chapel as an institution. For the generations of historians interested in theories of 'state-building', and for their successors, preoccupied by the 'social and economic structures' of history, Louis XVI's chapel provided little inspiration.¹⁷ Such scholars had considered the eighteenth century as a period when court and government became separate entities, and also as a time of increasing 'secularization'.¹⁸ The growth of the 'bureaucratic' state seemed to have consigned the royal chapel to oblivion.

Such had not been the case during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it had been a relatively fashionable subject of historical research.¹⁹ The last narrative account, written before the Revolution, was composed by the abbé Oroux de Fontaine-le-Comte in 1776. As a royal chaplain, he was ideally situated to write this history.²⁰ He not only had privileged access to the *registres de la grande aumônerie*, but his finished work was granted the honour of being published by the *imprimerie royale*. The author's main purpose was 'to put before his readers' eyes a series of astounding acts of piety, singular virtues, edifying deaths, majestic ceremonies etc.'²¹ The work was a catalogue of merits intended to lead readers to one irrefutable conclusion. The abbé Oroux was certain that France's prosperity was inextricably bound to the exercise of the 'one true faith'. History provided an unbroken chain of evidence that the monarchy was the divinely appointed guardian of a compact that had brought countless blessings. In an age when both religion and monarchy were under siege, the abbé Oroux felt the *philosophes* needed intellectual chastisement and the populace a reminder of higher truths.²²

Sixty years later, when Castil-Blaise published another history of the *chapelle-musique*, the agenda had mutated considerably. Two years after the July Revolution, this musicologist saw the purpose of the royal chapel not in

¹⁷ Elias mentions the chapel only once. N. Elias, *La société de cour* (Paris, 1985), p. 67 and Roland Mousnier also omits the royal chapel from his discussion of the French Church. R. Mousnier, *Les institutions de France sous la monarchie absolue* (1598-1789), 2 vols (Paris, 1974), i. 281-316.

¹⁸ Schaich, (ed.), *Monarchy and Religion*, p. 4.

¹⁹ G. du Peyrat, *Histoire ecclésiastique de la cour, ou antiquités et recherches de la chapelle et oratoire des Rois de France, depuis Clovis Ier jusqu'à notre temps* (Paris, 1645) and L. Archon (chaplain de Louis XIV), *Histoire Ecclésiastique de la Chapelle des Rois de France, sous les trois races de nos Rois*, 2 vols (Paris, 1704-11).

²⁰ E. Oroux, *Histoire ecclésiastique de la Cour de France, où l'on trouve tout ce qui concerne l'histoire de la chapelle et des principaux officiers ecclésiastiques de nos Rois*, 2 vols (Paris, 1776-77).

²¹ *Ibid.*, i. x.

²² *Ibid.*, i. ix.

furnishing an apology of sacral monarchy, but rather in the provision of subsidies for church music. His text was an urgent appeal for funding: 'the dissolution of the chapel has injured the empire of harmony'.²³

It was not until the late 1980s that the chapel, as an institution and liturgical venue, returned to the fore.²⁴ In spite of some initial hesitation, especially in the opening sentence—'this essay deals with a superficial theme'—McManners proceeded to prove the importance of Louis XV's ecclesiastical household. He did so first by focusing on the size—over 400 clerics and musicians—and finally by elucidating the liturgical obligations imposed on the king and the courtly elite. The chapel was a place where disputes regarding hierarchy were resolved and where the sovereign proved his Christian credentials. However, in spite of this renewed interest, the chapel continued to be a little-known and rarely studied institution.

One can hardly blame researchers for shying away. The surviving archival source material is both fragmentary and equivocal. The Archives nationales possess only one carton that deals directly with the *aumônerie*.²⁵ The whereabouts of the original registers and financial documents outlining the day to day running of this department are unknown. The civil list accounts of the royal household do record religious expenditure, but there is no unified calculation for the administrative cost of running the *aumônerie*.

Chaplaincy expenses appear under a myriad of headings and in the inventories of a host of different departments of the royal household, from *aumônes*, *domaines*, *dépenses imprévues*, etc. to *menus plaisirs*.²⁶ To complicate matters further, there was a separate accounting department named the *trésorerie général des offrandes et aumônes*, headed by Jacques-Joseph Lenoir, which kept its own separate list of accounts. Very little has survived from this bureaucratic office.²⁷ The *musique du Roi*, which was officially part of the *aumônerie*, was also paid separately, to the tune of 250,000 *livres* per year.²⁸ Whatever the costs of the religion of Versailles, they must have constituted a sizeable portion of the entire budget of *la maison du Roi*.

Even McManners admits that his own estimate (which he made in the interest of simplification) of over 200 clergymen engaged at Versailles is a significant underestimation.²⁹ Military chaplains for over 6,000 troops stationed at Court, the seventeen independent *aumôneries* serving the other 'princes du sang', the

²³ F. H. J. Castil-Blaze, *Chapelle-musique des rois de France* (Paris, 1832), pp. 256–8.

²⁴ J. McManners, 'The religious observances of Versailles under Louis XV', in *Enlightenment Essays in Honour of Robert Shackleton*, eds G. Barber and C. Courtney (Oxford, 1988), pp. 175–88. Later revised in McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, i. 29–57. The ground-breaking work of Philip Mansel on the secular side of the king's household is of the utmost importance: P. Mansel, 'The Court of France 1814–1830', PhD thesis (University College London, 1978), pp. 59–64 and idem, *The Court of France 1789–1830* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 11, 26.

²⁵ AN O1 750, Papiers du grand aumônier.

²⁶ AN O1 3084, Deuxième état, 1789.

²⁷ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss Fr. 6803, fo. 395, 396, 401.

²⁸ AN O1 842, Musique du Roi.

²⁹ McManners, 'The religious observances of Versailles', p. 176.

Table 1 Personnel of the Chapelle du Roi in 1789

Aumônerie	
1	Grand Aumônier de France
1	Premier Aumônier du Roi
1	Aumônier Ordinaire du Roi
1	Maître de l'Oratoire
1	Confesseur
1	Prédicateur Ordinaire
8	Aumôniers (2 servant par quartier)
Chapelle Oratoire	
1	Chapelain Ordinaire
8	Chapelains (2 servant par quartier)
1	Clerc de Chapelle Ordinaire
8	Clercs de Chapelle (2 servant par quartier)
1	Sacristain de la grande Chapelle
1	Sommier Ordinaire
2	Sommiers (1 servant par semestre)
Grande Chapelle	
1	Sous-Maître
8	Chapelains (4 servant par semestre)
1	Clerc ordinaire
4	Clercs de la Grande Chapelle (2 servant par semestre)
10	Clercs par commission
1	Bibliothécaire
1	Imprimeur
1	Noteur
Total: 63 Clergymen (38 present each quarter)	

Sources: AN O¹ 750 and the Almanach Royal of 1789.

chaplains ministering to the servants of the *grand commun*, the Lazarist community of Versailles and the chaplains of chaplains inevitably inflate this figure.³⁰ All that can be said with certainty is that the king granted sixty-three *brevets* to those clergymen ministering to him directly (see Table 1). It must be noted that the *aumônerie* was one of the more dynamic and streamlined departments of the *maison du Roi*. None of its offices were automatically venal in nature though for two important positions very valuable *brevets de retenue* were issued.³¹ So the crown, in most cases, had great freedom to appoint and remove whomsoever it wished, something it could hardly afford to do in other areas of the household.³²

It is true that ordinary salaries were relatively low for ecclesiastics working for the king. The reason was straightforward: all of clergymen serving the king

³⁰ Château de Vincennes, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre Ya 146 For Cardinal Montmorncy's own household: AN T 146/7, papiers privés.

³¹ AN C 189, no. 21, Mémoire sent in 1791 by the bishop of Senlis to Louis concerning the office of *premier aumônier du Roi* worth 250,000 livres. The *charge* of *maître de l'Oratoire* was valued at 120,000 livres: Guyot and Merlin, *Traité des droits*, i. 446.

³² Oroux, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, ii. 602 and L. Horowski, "Such a great advantage for my son": office-holding and career mechanisms at the court of France, 1661-1789', *Court Hist*, 8 (2003), 167-9.

at court were deemed to be resident in their benefices; thus were exempt from penalties for absenteeism. Therefore, they could hold multiple benefices and church appointments without fear of prosecution. Indeed, all officials in the *aumônerie* held 'abbeys in commendam'.³³ Court prelates could match, and at times exceed, the status and authority of lay courtiers.

Far from being moribund, the king's chapel was one of the more vibrant and influential institutions in the kingdom of France. In 1788 it even resisted a proposal for amalgamation with the queen's chapel, which would have led to the suppression of twenty ecclesiastical offices.³⁴ The chapel exerted significant influence over the patronage of benefices and there was a notable overlap between its membership and that of the *conseil de conscience*.³⁵ However, its most important function was the choreography of the king's routine. It scheduled and organized the king's daily devotions and the most important annual celebrations (see Table 2). It was the central medium through which the 'king's sacrality' was communicated. Unsurprisingly, it was one of the institutions with which the Revolution almost immediately crossed swords.

II

A 'war of ceremony' was how Georges Lefebvre described the opening shots fired in the clash between third estate and crown in May 1789.³⁶ It is important

Table 2 Days of the Grande Chapelle

New Year's Day*
Second of January*
Feast of the Purification*
Palm Sunday
Holy Thursday
Good Friday
Easter
Pentecost*
Assumption of the Virgin Mary
All Saints
Christmas

* denotes a celebration associated with the Ordre du Saint-Esprit.

Source: Oroux, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, ii. 638.

³³ D. Beales, *Prosperity and Plunder. European Catholic Monasteries in the Age of Revolution, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 84-6 and McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, i. 95-140, 472-504.

³⁴ AN O1 750, no. 39. Memoirists and historians insist the queen played a determining role in the selection of Cardinal-Prince Rohan's successor, Louis-Joseph de Montmorency, bishop of Metz: N. Aston, *The End of an Elite: The French Bishops and the Coming of the Revolution 1786-1790* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 49, 102. According to the archbishop of Aix, 'Elle [Marie-Antoinette] a rejeté le cardinal de la Rochefoucauld comme un imbécile': A. Cans, 'Lettres de M. de Boisgelin, archevêque d'Aix, à la comtesse de Gramont', *Rev Hist*, 79 (1902), 322, 323.

³⁵ McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, i. 49-50, 55.

³⁶ G. Lefebvre, *The French Revolution* (trans., London, 2001), p. 106.

to note that most of the ceremonial in question was religious at heart. Proceedings had been initiated by a spectacular Christian procession. It included delegates from the three orders and officers of the royal household, who set off at a slow pace from the parish of Notre-Dame de Versailles to the parish of Saint-Louis.³⁷ The occasion was reminiscent of Corpus Christi celebrations. The king, dressed in full regalia and marching under a canopy sprinkled with *fleurs de lys*, was followed by the monstrance displaying the Blessed Sacrament.³⁸ The entire occasion was intended to remind all of the proximity of the two mystical bodies, which had so strongly influenced traditional religious and political thought.³⁹ Christ's body stood in lieu of the 'heavenly kingdom' and Louis XVI's body was the incarnation of the 'French state'.⁴⁰ The *aumôniers*, chaplains and other ecclesiastics, marching ahead of the monstrance, also portrayed the essential role played by the chapel in staging this spectacle. At the end of the procession, both deputies and the court attended a mass celebrated by the archbishop of Paris, followed by a sermon preached by the bishop of Nancy.⁴¹

As the crown and the third estate became locked in a struggle over the location of sovereignty, courtly and religious ritual was the immediate victim of this *mêlée*. Deputies of the third estate complained vociferously that Versailles' ceremonial apparatus impeded the nation's progress.⁴² Overnight, the young and inexperienced marquis de Dreux-Brézé, *grand maître des cérémonies*, became the walking embodiment of despotism. His role, as intermediary between the 'commons' and the king, caused a crescendo of resentment.⁴³

Initially, most deputies made some effort to accommodate the religious requirements imposed by Versailles. On 9 May 1789 they attended, in large numbers, the anniversary mass celebrated in memory of Louis XV.⁴⁴ Yet by 18 June the feast of Corpus Christi and the day after the third estate declared itself to be the National Assembly, the *Mercure* guardedly noted that only 'some deputies' attended the procession. The enthusiasm for royal rites and rituals had started to evaporate.⁴⁵ The mood for the confrontation that would occur in five days, at the infamous *séance royale*, had been set. Matters were not helped by the death of the *dauphin* on 4 June 1789.⁴⁶ The mandatory two-month mourning period served to alienate the deputies.⁴⁷ Not only did the king become more withdrawn and out of touch with the realities of politics but also the deputies

³⁷ E. H. Lemay, *La vie quotidienne des députés aux Etats généraux 1789* (Paris, 1987), p. 18.

³⁸ AN K 1719, no. 41, *Cérémonial and M[ercure] de France*, 16 May 1789, p. 123.

³⁹ E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ, 1957), pp. 193-232.

⁴⁰ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (trans., Cambridge, 1992), p. 7.

⁴¹ Lemay, *La vie quotidienne des députés*, pp. 19, 20.

⁴² M. de Dreux-Brézé, *Les Dreux-Brézé* (Paris, 1994), pp. 317-19, 339.

⁴³ L.-M. de La Révellière-Lépeaux, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1895), p. 67.

⁴⁴ *M. de France*, 6 June 1789, p. 27 and *J[ournal] de Paris*, 1789, no. 140, p. 363.

⁴⁵ *M. de France*, 4 July 1789, p. 23.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 June 1789, pp. 76, 77.

⁴⁷ AN O1 1044, nos. 296-338, Obsèques du dauphin Louis-Xavier; J. Hardman, *Louis XVI* (London, 1994), pp. 147-9; Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, p. 143.

were further inconvenienced by religious court prescriptions at a politically sensitive moment.

Court regulations, concerning the death of the crown prince, required that three different sets of embellishments be added to clothing. These additions were to convey, symbolically, the three distinct stages that expressed the intensity of the mourning period.⁴⁸ For the first month, all those present at court were required to wear black *habits* (which suited the third-estate deputies well as this was already their basic uniform) with the addition of goats' skin shoes, sleeve cuffs of batiste and bronze belt-buckles and swords.⁴⁹ Subsequently, they were to exchange their bronze accoutrements for silver ones and sleeve cuffs made of muslin were added to the black suits. Finally, at the end of the *deuil*, etiquette demanded that gentlemen wear doubled and finely cut sleeve cuffs.⁵⁰

The procedure for putting to rest the earthly remains of the *dauphin* was equally elaborate. Tradition prescribed that the young prince's body was to lie in state for three days. His heart was to be embalmed and translated to the convent of Val de Grâce. At the conclusion of these nine days of ritual, Louis XVI headed for the tranquillity of the palace of Marly, where he escaped the regimentation of Versailles. This move increased his isolation from the centre of political events.⁵¹ By the time a delegation of the third estate paid its last respects to the *dauphin* on 6 June 1789, the breach between crown and national representation was sealed.⁵² After the storming of the Bastille, the deputies would no longer defer to the king's religious sensibilities. In future, they might commission patriotic *te deums* and special blessings, but the 'sacral aura' of monarchy was something the Assembly refused to recognize.⁵³

On 27 July 1789 the comte de Clermont-Tonnerre (the head of the committee synthesizing the 40,000 *cabiers de doléances*) admitted that the *cabiers* were equivocal on the issue of whether a French constitution existed already or had to be created *ex novo*.⁵⁴ He felt, nonetheless, that there was sufficient support for the Assembly's decision to frame a written constitution.⁵⁵ Mounier's proposals regarding the 'fundamental law of the land' appeared to be largely written in the language of the old order.⁵⁶ The king's person was still sacred and, at this early stage, church patronage still was an inseparable component of

⁴⁸ AN KK 1453 fo. 1, Registre des deuils.

⁴⁹ H.-E. marquis de Dreux-Brézé, *Costume de cérémonie de MM. les députés des trois ordres aux Etats généraux* (Paris, 1789).

⁵⁰ P. Mansel, *Dressed to Rule, Royals and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (London, 2005), pp. 16, 17, 72.

⁵¹ F. Furet and D. Richet, *La Révolution française* (Paris, 1973), pp. 77, 78.

⁵² *M. de France*, 27 June 1789, pp. 158–160.

⁵³ L. Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics 1787–1799* (New York, 1996), p. 44.

⁵⁴ Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, pp. 261, 262.

⁵⁵ A[rchives]P[arlementaires]. *Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des Chambres françaises*. Première série (1867–), viii. 283–5.

⁵⁶ Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, pp. 254–8.

the crown's prerogatives.⁵⁷ Article thirty even proclaimed: 'the king never dies'.⁵⁸ However, while the appearance of monarchical sacrality had been preserved, the reality was quite different. These ancient juridical maxims were no longer couched in a language, which derived its ultimate legitimacy from a divinely appointed order. On the contrary, the natural order had become more material and intelligible, through the exercise of human reason. This was exemplified by the same article thirty:

According to law, the king never dies. That is to say that, by the sole force of law, royal authority is transmitted immediately after the death of the monarch to the person who holds the right to succeed him.

The Catholic faith finds little accommodation in this realignment. It is the smooth functioning of a juridical mechanism that regulates monarchical succession. The recognition that the early revolutionary reformers borrowed from France's past, in order to move beyond the *ancien régime*, was especially significant. It was hoped that, by shedding the religious mantle, a violent breach between past and present could be avoided. As will be documented, the deprivation of the religious aura was to make Louis XVI unable to function even as a constitutional monarch.

A mere five days after the taking of the Bastille, in a clear statement of where his priorities lay, the king presided over what proved to be the last great religious ceremony of Versailles. After an extremely long process of negotiation and ceremonial delays, the last *grand aumônier* of the *ancien régime*, Louis-Joseph de Laval-Montmorency, bishop of Metz, received his long-awaited crimson robes.⁵⁹ The final act in the investiture of a new cardinal involved the bestowal of the crimson biretta.⁶⁰ On the morning 19 July 1789 the papal legate, Montmorency's nephew in this case, was charged with presenting the biretta to the king. In the salon d'Hercule, the legate read Pius VI's bull confirming Montmorency's elevation. Louis then raised the cardinal's biretta and placed it on the head of his grand almoner.⁶¹ Soon such a ceremonious display, where royal chaplaincy, monarchy and papacy celebrated their monopoly over church appointments, became unthinkable as the political atmosphere became more radical.⁶²

In early October the women of Paris, followed by the National Guard, forced the king to give his assent to the constitutional decrees promulgated by the Assembly throughout August and September. They also took the king and National Assembly captive back to Paris. It was hoped that an enforced

⁵⁷ *AP*, viii. 285-7; *Almanch royale* (Paris, 1792), p. 94. Cf. Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution*, pp. 35-46.

⁵⁸ *AP*, viii. 287.

⁵⁹ *M de France*, 27 June 1789, pp. 158-160

⁶⁰ AN F19 1906, dossier 11, Cultes, cérémonie des Barettes.

⁶¹ *M. de France*, 8 Aug. 1789, p. 58.

⁶² The last Gallican church appointment by Louis XVI happened in 1790. The bishopric of Boulogne fell vacant and was given to a commoner: McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, i. 214.

confinement, and the threat of popular pressure, would make it impossible for Louis XVI to climb down from his concessions.⁶³ The subsequent life of the royal family in the Tuileries was not particularly felicitous. Louis, naturally prone to melancholy, sought solace in the comfort of regular and assiduous Christian practice. During his enforced sojourn in the French capital, Louis continued to record day-to-day events in his diary. His previous obsession with hunting gave way to a scrupulous auditing of his religious devotions. From October 1789 to July 1792 he registered no fewer than 468 entries, varying from masses to vespers to special feast days.⁶⁴ The promulgation of the Constitution was the only diary entry which recorded the National Assembly's legislative work. The rest bore testament to a traditional sovereign's day-to-day routine divided between religious rituals and official ceremonies.

Unsurprisingly, once it became clear that the duration of his stay in Paris was indeterminate, the reorganization of the royal chapel was among the top priorities of Louis XVI. The nearby Feuillant monastery on the rue Saint-Honoré was to provide the solution. This well-to-do monastic institution, which could trace its origins to a royal endowment, proved well suited to the task of ministering to the court.⁶⁵ Once the Assembly freed 'citizens' from monastic vows (13 February 1790), the survival of the Feuillant community was dependent on the fate of the monarchy. An agreement was reached with the Assembly's ecclesiastical committee that allowed these Cistercian monks to continue residing in their convent. The monks were required to sign a joint declaration stating that they did not dwell together as a religious community and that their main aim was to facilitate the king's devotions.⁶⁶ In spite of the mutual convenience of this arrangement, the crown proved less than appreciative. In February 1791 the hard-pressed Feuillants complained to the grand almoner that they had not yet received any remuneration.⁶⁷ This potentially embarrassing situation was rectified by Louis XVI on 28 July, when he paid 10,000 *livres* of arrears.⁶⁸ The monks also grumbled that, although the entire community helped to run the Tuileries chaplaincy, only a dozen of their brethren appeared on the official payrolls. In spite of such vexations, these members of the regular clergy clung steadfastly to the foot of the throne, right up to the last days of the monarchy. It is not unreasonable to suppose that one of these Cistercians was the last to minister to the king on the night of 9 August 1792.⁶⁹

The monarchy's first year in Paris was to be disrupted far more by logistics than by popular agitation. The ecclesiastical household remained essentially the same

⁶³ M. Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy: Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette and the Baron de Breteuil* (London, 2002), pp. 107, 108.

⁶⁴ AN C 221, no. 151, Journal de Louis XVI.

⁶⁵ AN S 4166, Inventaire des biens des Feuillants de la rue Saint-Honoré.

⁶⁶ AN O1 750, no. 55, Mémoire présenté par les Feuillants.

⁶⁷ AN O1 750, no. 53, Prieur des Feuillants de la rue Saint-Honoré to Cardinal Montmorency, 3 Feb. 1791.

⁶⁸ AN O1 750, no. 52, Chapelle des Tuileries, décision.

⁶⁹ F. de la Rochefoucault, *Souvenirs du 10 août 1792 et de l'armée de Bourbon* (Paris, 1929), p. 3.

and continued to be headed by Cardinal Montmorency who, in 1790, hosted a banquet for the *Fête de la Fédération* in order to please the Parisian municipal authorities. It was somewhat ironic, considering that exactly the year before he had interpreted the taking of the Bastille as the visible manifestation of divine retribution.⁷⁰ The Parisian populace, in 1790, did not impact negatively on the king's private religious practices and even participated in the great religious events at court, though their participation is barely mentioned. The Russian traveller Karamzin describes those who filled the chapel and corridors of the Tuileries in 1790 as moved by curiosity rather than malice.⁷¹ This was a situation which 1791 and the debate over the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was to completely overturn.

The greatest problem for the *aumônerie* lay in the size of the Tuileries chapel, which was miniscule in comparison to the cathedral-like dimensions of that in Versailles.⁷² This space was not only small but also was situated on the first floor and awkward to access. It was located precisely above quarters of the duc de Brissac, *capitaine des Cent-Suisses*, and the royal family entered their private box by using the terrace to the right of the *salle des Cent-Suisses*. This balcony possessed a limited seating capacity and could only accommodate members of the royal family and their immediate retinue. Furthermore, the interior *décor* was modest, and only the altar could boast noticeable embellishment. Again this made for poor comparison with the *chapelle* in Versailles.

As a direct result of these environmental factors, the royal family's piety was significantly transformed. Gone were the daily public spectacles of Versailles. In Paris, private worship was much more sedate and in many ways invisible to the masses. A wooden gallery was erected on the terrace facing the gardens and a screen shielded the Bourbons within the tribune from the public's curious gaze.⁷³ Louis XVI also decided to dispense with the rule of etiquette, which had indicated that each member of his family attend religious services separately. The move was applauded by the press, which interpreted it as both a wise economy and an inspiring display of family solidarity.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ L. J. de Montmorency-Laval, *Instruction Pastorale de son Eminence Monseigneur le Cardinal de Montmorency Evêque de Metz (sur les troubles qui désolent le royaume. Donné à Versailles le 19 septembre 1789)* (Metz, 1789) and Aston, *The End of an Elite*, p. 102.

⁷¹ N. M. Karamzin, *Voyage en France, 1789–1790* (Paris, 1885), pp. 146, 147.

⁷² The Tuileries chapel was roughly 200 square metres: Mansel, *The Court of France*, p. 20. The Sun King's chapel at Versailles was over 900 square metres: M. M. Stumberg-Edmunds, *Piety and Politics: Imaging Divine Kingship in Louis XIV's Chapel at Versailles* (London, 2002), p. 32.

⁷³ AN O1 1682, no. 556, *Intendance des bâtiments*.

⁷⁴ *Journal Général de la Cour*, no. XIV, 14 Jan. 1790, pp. 107, 108. Marie-Antoinette's stance and thoughts on religion are difficult to fathom with precision. Her education was certainly influenced by political theology. The empress Maria-Theresa admonished her daughter to gain a thorough grounding in the work of Bossuet. Among the queen's circle at court there was a significant contingent of abbés and clergymen. This, however, was not so much the evidence of a deep sense of piety, which had moved her predecessor Marie Leszczyńska, but rather it was more a reflection of those elements which composed the *beau-monde* of late eighteenth-century Paris. It seems possible, although there is no incontrovertible evidence, that the adversity of the Revolution awakened in the queen a greater need for religious solace: E. Lever, ed., *Marie-Antoinette correspondance (1770–1793)* (Paris, 2005), pp. 60–2 and J. Félix, *Louis XVI et Marie-Antoinette: un couple en politique* (Paris, 2006), pp. 157–63.

The king, after the morning *lever*, seems to have continued to attend midday mass everyday in 1790.⁷⁵ The chapel of the palaces of the Tuileries and Saint-Cloud provided the main venues for the religious rites of the royal family. On days, which were not special feasts, the king and his family were seated in the tribune. On more special occasions an armchair covered by a canopy was placed on the right-hand side of the altar. Here the king continued, as in the past, to assert his intermediate state between priesthood and laity. During the 'liturgy of the word', he was presented with the gospels to kiss and before the consecration, after the altar had been sprinkled, he received incense.

More usually, however, the ordinary court mass during the Revolution was a very calm affair. The king passively listened and prayed in exactly the same manner as the rest of the congregation. It was only following the flight to Varennes that daily worship was disrupted dramatically. After he was placed under house arrest, the king was no longer allowed to hear mass in the palace chapel.⁷⁶ A temporary altar was set up in the *galerie de Diane* where the royal family alone, with a few loyal servants, listened to midday mass.⁷⁷ The permission to return to worship in the Tuileries chapel coincided directly with Louis XVI's acceptance of the 1791 Constitution. The occasion was celebrated by a special religious service.⁷⁸

The exile of the principal officers of the *aumônerie*, in May 1791, greatly disheartened the king. There seems to be little evidence illuminating how the religious life of the court developed between October 1791 and the fall of the monarchy in the following year. Only Madame Campan's account of the Sunday services preceding 10 August, which witnessed major disturbances within the royal chapel, sheds some light on the issue. The king suffered the indignity of being insulted on his way to mass by national guardsmen.⁷⁹ At Vespers that evening, while singing the *Magnificat*, radical spectators deliberately emphasized and repeated the verse: 'he has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble'.⁸⁰ At this critical juncture, the royal family was no longer capable of performing its ritual duties in a dignified manner.⁸¹

Although daily worship had become less ostentatious, special religious occasions and monarchical feast days were still celebrated with all the traditional pomp and ceremony. Further evidence of the court's conservative adherence to orthodox Catholic practices can be observed in the ceremonies of Holy Week. These served as potential flashpoints in the troubled relationship between royal

⁷⁵ Comte d'Hézeccques, *Page à la cour de Louis XVI. Souvenirs du comte d'Hézeccques* (Paris, 1987), pp. 43, 155.

⁷⁶ M. Couty, *La vie aux Tuileries pendant la Révolution* (Paris, 1988), p. 124.

⁷⁷ L. Cröy-Havré, *Mémoires de la duchesse de Tourzel, gouvernante des enfants de France 1789-1795* (Paris, 1986), p. 295.

⁷⁸ Archivio di Stato di Parma, Carteggio Borbonico Estero, Serie Francia 82, Paris 11 Sept. 1791.

⁷⁹ J. Campan, *Mémoires de Madame Campan, première femme de chambre de Marie-Antoinette* (Paris, 1988), p. 414.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Price, *The Fall of the French Monarchy*, pp. 233-5.

tradition and revolutionary radicalism. Palm Sunday was the starting point of Easter week. However, it was only on Maundy Thursday that proceedings properly got under way with the ritual of the *pedilavium*.⁸² Here the royal family re-enacted the episode from Saint John's Gospel when Christ, prior to the Last Supper, in an act of exemplary humility, washed the feet of the twelve apostles. Thirteen children, or elderly paupers, shared the honour of having their feet rinsed by the king. On the same evening, the public dining ceremony of the *grand couvert* was inverted. Before a large audience of onlookers, the princes of the blood processed to and from the kitchens bearing dishes and plates filled with food. They then assisted the king in serving thirteen paupers at table. This week-long rigorous ceremonial purification demonstrated that Catholic orthodox observance was an irrenunciabile element of Bourbon regal piety.

In 1790 these ceremonies were carried out to the letter. As the abolition of the nobility had yet to take place, the hierarchical dimension was fully preserved. The king was the first to communicate, on 5 April 1790, at the parish church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. He received the host from Cardinal Montmorency. The comte de Provence and the *premier aumônier*, the bishop of Senlis, were given the honour of holding the altar cloth during this ritual.⁸³ The next day, the queen also performed her Easter duty and Madame Elisabeth had the honour of holding the altar cloth. During the next seven days, *Mesdames Tantes*, Madame Elisabeth, the comte and comtesse de Provence all followed the royal example.⁸⁴

It was also during this time that Marie-Thérèse de France, Madame Royale, made her first communion (7 April 1790). Like the king, she received the sacrament from Cardinal Montmorency at the parish church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. When the service ended, she and her fellow first communicants processed to the Châtelet.⁸⁵ Here, in this notorious prison, they personally released fifteen prisoners detained for bad debt. Once released, the king's daughter bestowed 100 *livres* on each former inmate to enable them to make a fresh start. She also donated 1300 *livres*, from the day's offertory collection, for the care of the prison's sick.⁸⁶

While the life of the 'living' Bourbon dynasty was continuing, more or less as normal, political events in the city of Paris came to disturb the rest of both Louis XIII and Louis XIV. The hearts of these two monarchs had been preserved, in large urns supported by silver angels, in the former Jesuit church of Sainte-Catherine.⁸⁷ It was decided in October 1790, by the *administration des biens nationaux du département de Paris*, to sell the silver angels.⁸⁸ There is no

⁸² Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles. The Courts of Europe's Major Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 139-40.

⁸³ *G[azette] de France*, 1790, no. 30, p. 146.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1790, no. 28, pp. 137, 138; no. 29, p. 142 and no. 30, pp. 145, 146.

⁸⁵ *Révolutions de Paris*, 1790, no. 40, p. 132.

⁸⁶ *J de Paris*, 1790, no. 102, p. 410 and *G de France*, 1790, no. 31.

⁸⁷ AN D XIX 44, no. 702, Comité ecclésiastique de l'Assemblée Nationale.

⁸⁸ AN D XIX 69, no. 456, Comité ecclésiastique de l'Assemblée Nationale.

source material which relates how Louis XVI received the news that the hearts of his predecessors were to be evicted from their resting place. The expenditure accounts of the *menus plaisirs*, which organized the translation of the hearts from the church of Sainte-Catherine to the convent of Val de Grâce, have survived.⁸⁹ They allow for a brief reconstruction of the manner in which these royal relics were transferred. A procession was organized on 29 November 1790 to carry the hearts through Paris. It must have been a relatively impressive spectacle considering that the royal master of ceremonies, the marquis de Dreux-Brézé, was personally asked to direct proceedings. The entire ceremony cost well in excess of 3,000 *livres*.⁹⁰ This episode allows one to better contextualize the attack on the royal necropolis of Saint-Denis in 1793. As early as 1790 the remains of deceased kings were no longer regarded as sacrosanct and unmovable in their final resting place.⁹¹ Organizational and economic considerations came to override the final wishes of deceased rulers. This may be considered a sign of the change in mentality towards the traditional royal cult. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1791 was to place monarchical worship and the new ideas surrounding the organization of the church in profound conflict.⁹²

Louis XVI's grave crisis of conscience surrounding this controversial piece of constitutional legislation is well documented.⁹³ By early 1791 indications from Rome made it clear that the Papacy was unwilling to acquiesce in the National Assembly's church reforms. The non-juring bishops put sustained pressure on the king to prevent the looming schism. Court prelates, like the archbishop of Narbonne, accused the Assembly of introducing Protestantism through the backdoor.⁹⁴ At exactly the same time, the archbishop of Paris, using more allegorical expressions, denounced the 'ravaging wolves seeking to devour the Lord's flock'.⁹⁵

Court preachers were among the most vociferous and successful counter-revolutionary deputies of this time. The most famous of all was the abbé Maury, who had made his début in 1773 and preached sermons at court an impressive total of seven times.⁹⁶ In early May 1790 the abbé Rousseau, another successful court preacher, had protested to the monarch against the Assembly's decision to put church property at the disposal of the Nation.⁹⁷ It is important to realize that to

⁸⁹ AN O1 3090, Sixième état des dépenses imprévues, chapitre trois.

⁹⁰ AN O1 3090, Sixième état des dépenses imprévues, chapitre trois.

⁹¹ C. M. Greene, 'Alexandre Lenoir and the Musée des monuments français during the French Revolution', *Fr Hist Stud*, 12 (1981), 200–22.

⁹² T. Tackett, *Religion, Revolution and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), p. 6; W. Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2002), p. 147; Hardman, *Louis XVI*, p. 18.

⁹³ McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church*, p. 39.

⁹⁴ AN C 183, no. 2, Archbishop of Narbonne to Louis XVI, 22 Sept. 1790.

⁹⁵ AN C 183, no. 11, Archbishop of Paris to Louis XVI, undated.

⁹⁶ AN 223, no. 431, fos. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, Noms des prélats qui ont officié à la Chapelle du Roi, des prédicateurs qui y ont presché [sic] et des dames qui ont fait la quête depuis 1766.

⁹⁷ AN 183, no. 4, Déclaration de l'abbé Rousseau, 3 May 1790.

have served as a *prédicateur du Roi*, prior to 1789, did not automatically determine an individual's political alignment. The abbé Fauchet, who had been curé of the parish of Saint-Roch in Paris and had been frequently invited to preach at court in the 1780s, took an extremely progressive stance towards revolutionary politics.⁹⁸ He was a founder of a radical club, the Cercle social, and approved wholeheartedly of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. In May 1791 he was consecrated constitutional bishop of the department of the Calvados. Fauchet's career, however, cannot be viewed as characteristic of the experience of most *prédicateurs du Roi*. On the whole, they constituted a group that was opposed to the Civil Constitution and put great pressure on Louis XVI's already fragile conscience.⁹⁹

In 1791 the religious ceremonies of the court of the Tuileries were transformed into situations fraught with the potential for embarrassment. It was normal procedure, during the ancien régime, that newly appointed bishops were presented to the king at his *lever* by the *grand aumônier*. When, in February, the first two constitutionally elected bishops sought this honour, Cardinal Montmorency boycotted the event.¹⁰⁰ The *grand aumônier* had already offended the Assembly the previous year during the controversy surrounding the publication of the *livre rouge* of royal pensions. He had refused to reveal the recipients of royal alms on the scriptural grounds 'the right hand ignores gifts from the left'.¹⁰¹ The absence of the senior chaplain of the court left these two constitutional clergymen with nothing to do but appear at court in the informal *robe courte*, rather than the typical pontifical robes, as they had not received papal confirmation. The first gentleman of the bedchamber, the duc de Villequier, was left with the embarrassing task of introducing these clerics to a frosty Louis XVI.¹⁰²

The Assembly was incensed at the rebuff suffered by the constitutional clergy at the hands of the king's ecclesiastical household. On 27 February 1791 a denunciatory petition from the *section des Quatre-Nations* was presented at the bar of the *salle du Manège*.¹⁰³ It demanded that Cardinal Montmorency either take the constitutional oath or be expelled from the royal court. The abbé Gouttes thought the motion did not go far enough. He demanded that the office of *grand aumônier* be abolished in perpetuity. The moderate politician Bouche pre-empted further debate by asking that the issue be referred to the Assembly's ecclesiastical committee. This motion was easily carried. Thus the swallowing of this very bitter pill was deferred for the time being. However, the disturbing aspect of this case, for Louis XVI, was the rediscovery that ceremonial matters internal to the royal court could have a direct impact on national politics.

⁹⁸ AN 223, no. 431, fos. 4, 5 and 6, Noms des prélats.

⁹⁹ A. Thenier, (ed.), *Documents inédits relatifs aux affaires religieuses de la France 1790-1800, extrait des archives secrètes du Vatican*, 2 vols (Paris, 1857), i. 336-8.

¹⁰⁰ A. Mousset, (ed.), *Un témoin ignoré de la Révolution: le comte de Fernan Nuñez ambassadeur d'Espagne à Paris 1787-1791* (Paris, 1924), pp. 123, 124 and M. Crook, 'Citizen bishops: episcopal elections during the French Revolution', *Hist J*, 43 (2000), 955-76.

¹⁰¹ *AP*, xiii. 296.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *AP*, xxii. 551.

Montmorency, after this event, proceeded with more caution in order to steer clear of renewed political controversy. There is an undated note from this period, among the *armoire de fer* papers, in which the cardinal announced his intention to resign his bishopric of Metz in order to remain grand almoner. One can easily suppose that he took this course of action in order to stave off conflict with a potential constitutional successor in his diocese and to defuse any accusation of pluralism.¹⁰⁴ Regardless of which choice was made, it was difficult for members of the ecclesiastical household to weather the storm at this critical political juncture. Famously, when the abbé Poupard, Louis XVI's confessor for some fifteen years, took the constitutional oath he was discreetly dismissed. His replacement was the abbé l'Enfant, head of the Eudiste monastic community. He had been a court preacher since 1774 and significantly he was the last ecclesiastical official nominated to conduct the royal Lenten homily series for 1791.¹⁰⁵ Apart from these facts, he has left virtually no trace of his activities during this time. I have only found an undated report warning that this cleric was soon to be denounced at his section for suspicious activities.¹⁰⁶

The crisis reached its immediate climax during Easter week 1791. A letter from the bishop of Clermont advising the king to abstain from receiving communion from constitutional priests had disastrous consequences.¹⁰⁷ Its immediate effect was that a large crowd surrounded the Tuileries and physically prevented the king from journeying to Saint-Cloud, where it was suspected he would take communion from a non-juring priest.¹⁰⁸

The damage to the public image of the crown was considerable. The link between piety and monarchy was portrayed in a critical and derisory fashion. Prudhomme went so far as to accuse the court of inventing secret, quasi-satanic, rituals. According to this radical journalist, hosts consecrated by constitutional priests were defiled by courtiers and officers of the royal household within the precincts of the Tuileries.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the fact that the king only employed refractory clergy in his household made him a traitor to the Revolution.¹¹⁰

Documents subsequently discovered in the *armoire de fer* revealed that officials close to Louis XVI had sought the advice of Talleyrand (at this time bishop of Autun and one of seven ancien régime bishops who took the oath).¹¹¹ Although Talleyrand, from his London exile in 1792, officially denied proffering such advice, it seems interesting that no subsequent disowning of these papers was made in his memoirs. In spite of protestations of loyalism and orthodoxy, Talleyrand did not immediately follow his episcopal brethren in their

¹⁰⁴ AN C 189, no. 16, Cardinal Montmorency to Louis XVI, undated.

¹⁰⁵ AN C 223, no. 431, fos. 4 and 8, Noms des prélats.

¹⁰⁶ AN C 183, no. 10, La communauté des Eudistes.

¹⁰⁷ AN C 183, nos. 12 and 13, Letters from Louis XVI and the Bishop of Clermont, Mar. 1791.

¹⁰⁸ Hardman, *Louis XVI*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁹ *Révolutions de Paris*, 1791, no. 94, pp. 106, 107.

¹¹⁰ AN C 223, no. 431, fo. 9, Noms des prélats.

¹¹¹ AN C 184, no. 203, Report on Talleyrand, 3 May 1791.

uncompromising stance. He chose the opposite route, going so far as to consecrate the first constitutional bishops.¹¹² It is impossible to state with absolute certainty that the advice, contained in these papers concerning the religious situation of 1791, was the direct result of secret contacts between Talleyrand and officials of the royal household. However, its content is characteristic of his pragmatic personality. One document states that Talleyrand was to make an appeal to the Assembly that those clergymen refusing to take the civil oath be allowed to continue to worship as before. He suggested that the Nation should recognize orthodox Catholics as a new religious group, and taking inspiration from across the Channel, he named them *non-conformistes*.¹¹³ He assured the king that, once the political situation had quietened down, he could as easily choose to be a *non-conformiste* as he could chose to convert to Calvinism.¹¹⁴ Such a proposal could not have reassured a monarch who prided himself on holding the title of *filis ainé de l'Eglise* and who, at his coronation, had insisted on taking the oath to extirpate heresy.

The letters in *armoire de fer* also allege that Talleyrand proposed that the abbé Poupart, curé of Saint-Eustache and former royal confessor, be appointed grand almoner. The prospect of replacing the loyal, high-born and orthodox Cardinal Montmorency with a popular and constitutional priest was bordering on the impertinent. The matter was nullified by the cardinal's forced emigration and the crown's decision to leave the position vacant.¹¹⁵

The death of the *dauphin* Louis-Xavier, in June 1789, had highlighted the negative impact that the excessive religiosity of the court could have on political events. The next three years reiterated that Louis XVI had not understood the lesson in ceremonial flexibility, which the events of 1789 had urged on him. In response to the growing radicalization of the Revolution, the royal household devised ways of expressing its dissatisfaction with the status quo. The mandatory international mourning period for the death of foreign sovereigns presented courtiers with an excellent means of implicitly voicing discontent. From October 1789 to May 1792 some observed that the court had become increasingly scrupulous in the observance of the *deuil* or official mourning. The comte de Saint Priest, early in 1790, had drawn the king's attention to the extravagant costs of the each *deuil*. The royal clothing alone for each individual time of mourning cost over 800 *livres*.¹¹⁶ In the opinion of this moderate minister, this form of courtly piety provided radicals with excellent ammunition in their campaign to discredit the monarchy. For the three and a quarter years during which the monarchy and the Revolution coexisted, the court was in official mourning for a total of 374 days (see Figure 1).

¹¹² C.-M. Talleyrand-Périgord, *Mémoires du prince de Talleyrand 1754-1808*, ed. Duc de Broglie, 2 vols (Paris, 1891), i. 28, 132-6 and R. Harris, *Talleyrand, Betrayal and Saviour of France* (London, 2007), pp. x, xi, 53-5, 72, 73.

¹¹³ Talleyrand did in fact, on 7 May 1791, present a report on the issue of religious freedom but its content was more moderate than that in the documents in the *armoire de fer*: AP, xxv. 643-6.

¹¹⁴ AN C 184, no. 204, Report on Talleyrand, undated.

¹¹⁵ AN C 223, no. 388, Cardinal Montmorency to Louis XVI, Apr. 1791.

¹¹⁶ AN C 184, no. 172, Observations sur les deuils du Roi.

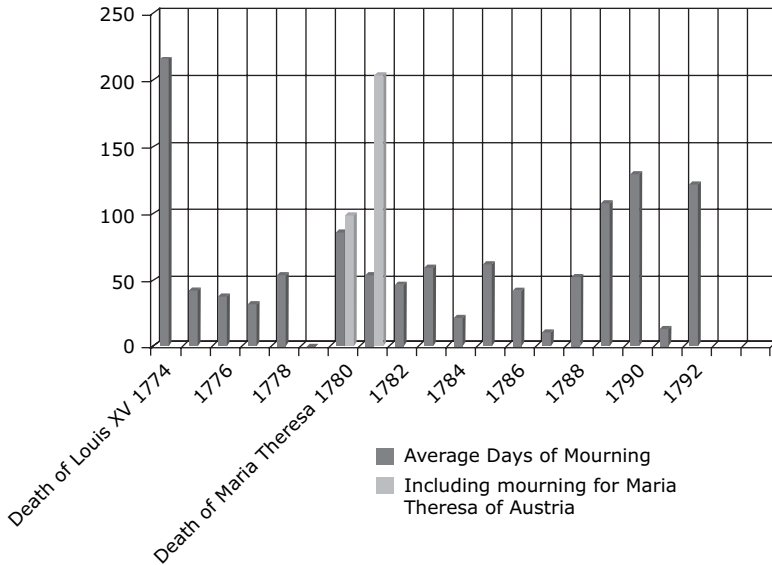


Figure 1 'Average Number of Days of Court Mourning during the Reign of Louis XVI.' Source: newspaper reports and official court bulletins.

This represented an average of 108 days per year. Mourning was very much a public spectacle as it was visually expressed. Important courtiers were required to dress in black and the king, because of his status as a cathedral canon, wore violet (if the deceased individual in question was a reigning monarch).¹¹⁷ The average of all the *deuils* during the Revolution was equivalent to nearly three times the typical mourning period during the greater portion of Louis XVI's reign. It was hardly surprising that the Russian traveller Karamzin, who visited the Tuileries at this time, thought that the French court's reputation for vestimentary splendour was unwarranted.¹¹⁸ Equally, the sombre atmosphere at court did not go unnoticed in the radical press. Camille Desmoulins was infuriated by the manner in which royalist newspapers reported the court openly mourning 'foreign despots'.¹¹⁹ The decision to lament Leopold II and his Neapolitan wife, the empress Marie Louisa (1 March and 15 May 1792), proved particularly controversial, especially considering that, by April 1792, France was at war with their son, Francis I of Hungary and Bohemia.¹²⁰

By June the situation had worsened considerably. Louis XVI did not even participate in the Corpus Christi procession. His decision was, in all probability, connected to the events in the previous year. The National Assembly, unaware

¹¹⁷ AN KK 1453, *Deuils*.

¹¹⁸ Karamzin, *Voyage en France*, pp. 101, 102 and V. de Donnissan, *Mémoires de la marquise de la Rochejaquelein 1772-1857* (Paris, 1984), p. 102.

¹¹⁹ *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, no. 3, pp. 97, 98.

¹²⁰ *G de France*, no. 61, 28 May 1792, p. 253 and V. de Richemont, *Correspondance secrète de l'abbé de Salamon chargé des affaires du Saint-Siège pendant la Révolution avec le Cardinal Zelada 1791-1792* (Paris, 1898), p. 352.

of the plans to escape, had voted unanimously, on 20 June 1791, to accompany the king to the Corpus Christi procession.¹²¹ By the time of the feast itself (23 June 1791) Louis XVI had fled and had been stopped at Varennes.¹²² The revolutionaries' willingness to tolerate the religion of the court had come to an end. In 1792 the Legislative Assembly voted not to attend and the Paris municipality discouraged citizens from taking part in the procession.¹²³

The music of the royal chapel was another area ripe for confrontations. *La musique du Roi* had a reputation for conservatism.¹²⁴ It could hardly have been otherwise, considering that the official court composer was François Giroust.¹²⁵ He had been kept on by Louis XVI deliberately because his music did not conform to contemporary tastes. Though an admirer of Haydn, Giroust had made his name by composing over ninety *grands motets*, and the 1775 coronation mass.¹²⁶ In spite of his fascination for musicologists, who see this artist as the embodiment of a dying musical genre, the last court composer was conservative.¹²⁷ Proof of his traditionalist stance was evident in Giroust's stuffy penchant for setting 'domine salvum fac regem' to music. Prudhomme made the public suggestion that the king's official composer substitute the word *regem* with *gentem*.¹²⁸ Remarkably, Prudhomme was surprised and angered that his advice went unheeded. So, in retaliation, he proceeded to advise the proscription of Latin in constitutional churches.¹²⁹ He considered that this redundant tongue was too susceptible of being disfigured into a secret royalist code. Again, the king's inflexible support of a reactionary composer, rather than replacing him with more elastic artists such as Grétry or Gossec to head his chapel, confirmed royal opposition to any alteration which might diminish its religious authority. The *grand motet*, in the end, shared the same fate as the absolute monarchy it sustained.¹³⁰

III

The tale of the execution of the French monarch in 1793 has received numerous interpretations. Some, like the political theorist Walzer, see the beheading of Louis XVI as a symbolically charged event, a ritual even, which marked the climax of a long political and historical process. The king's trial and execution provided the tombstone beneath which the mystical power of the kings of

¹²¹ AP, xxvii, 351.

¹²² T. Tackett, *When the King Took Flight* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 105-7.

¹²³ *Révolutions de Paris*, 1792, no. 152, pp. 456-8.

¹²⁴ C. Massip, 'The Chapelle Royale in the time of Louis XIV', in *The Royal Chapel in the Time of the Habsburgs*, eds Carreras, García García and Knighton, p. 61.

¹²⁵ AN O1 842, Musique du Roi.

¹²⁶ J. D. Eby, 'Giroust et la fin du grand motet: un épigone?', in *Le grand motet français*, ed. Mongrédien, p. 291.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹²⁸ *Révolutions de Paris*, 1791, no. 101, p. 494.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1791, no. 89, pp. 567-70.

¹³⁰ J. Mongrédien, 'Le grand motet français (1663-1792)', in *idem* (ed.), *Le grand motet français*, pp. 4, 5.

France was buried.¹³¹ By transforming the deposed king into a simple citizen, accountable to the laws and penalties imposed by the 'general will', the deputies of the National Convention broke the spell that had bound sovereignty to religion. The Revolution finally demystified government and founded the legitimacy of popular representation on reason rather than 'magical authority'.

Others have not been quite so sure that the end point was so exact, nor the ritual so convincing. The abbé Georgel, in his account of a trip to Russia, tells how Louis XVIII in exile continued the enchanted existence of a *Rex Christianissimus*, while staying at Mittau in Lithuania. The greatest symbol of continuity was the presence of Cardinal Montmorency at court as *grand aumônier de France*. In a land thousands of miles away from the birthplace of Saint Louis the religious ceremonial of Versailles continued.¹³²

While neither of these conclusions is mistaken, neither one alone is sufficiently convincing. If one turns to the actual context of the 1790s, the picture is more complex. As this article has demonstrated the demise of sacrality was not the intended outcome of the Revolution but rather arose from a failed attempt to reconcile past and present. Each time Louis XVI was confronted with religious innovation, his ability to respond effectively was handicapped by the institution he headed. Louis' first public appearance as a French prince in 1761 took place in the chapel at Versailles, where he stood in for Charles III of Spain as godfather to the comte d'Artois.¹³³ The last absolutist king of France had been educated in a world that not only commended the external expression of one's religiosity as laudable behaviour but also viewed it as an intrinsic part of the dynasty's heritage. It is little wonder that once this spectacle was evicted from its natural setting of Versailles, and when most of the participants went into exile in 1791, the monarchy was left with an unworkable mechanism of royal representation. The *chapelle royale* at the Tuileries was the mere simulacrum of a cult of royalty that dated back to the reign of Louis XIV.

¹³¹ Walzer, *Regicide and Revolution*, pp. 88, 89.

¹³² J.-F. Georgel, *Voyage à Saint-Petersbourg en 1799-1800 fait avec l'ambassade des Chevaliers de l'ordre de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem, allant offrir à l'Empereur Paul premier la grande maîtrise de l'Ordre* (Paris, 1818), pp. 147-9.

¹³³ Girault de Coursac, *L'éducation d'un roi*, p. 62.