THE CONFLICT OF MORALITIES

CONFESSION, SIN AND PLEASURE
IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The Petition to the Chamber of Deputies in favour of the villagers who are being stopped from dancing (1820) by P. L. Courier, the anticlerical polemicist, tells the story of a traditional community which suddenly stopped going to church. A zealous new curé refused absolution to girls who would not promise to give up dancing. By the end of the year the number of communicants was reduced by three-quarters.

The young man was in all innocence putting into practice the recommendations of nearly every textbook on moral theology used at the time and taught in the seminaries. In these, dancing was strongly discouraged because it might excite the passions. Most dances as 'ordinarily practised' were definitely dangerous and the 'German dance, vulgarly called the waltz, should never be allowed'. 'Honest dancing', where there was no danger of exciting passions, was permitted, but this seemed to be rare; it should preferably be in broad daylight and the open air. Priests should never partake in any form of dance, unless they danced privately amongst themselves—in which case they sinned, but not mortally.1

A certain Abbé Hulot, between the years 1821 and 1830, produced a series of little books, some of which went into several

1 Even the chaplain to Napoleon III disapproved of dancing: Pensées d'Humbert sur la religion appuyées de faits et d'exemples par l'abbé Mulois, premier chapelan de l'empereur (1855), 154-7.
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editions, devoted to analysing the sins that could be committed in each form of popular entertainment, from singing and dancing to novel-reading and theatre-going. Courrier protests that the clergy are forcing people to opt between their religious duties and 'their dearest affections of this present life'. The old curé in this village had indulgently tolerated dancing, saying it was best that courtship should take place publicly; but his successor was laying himself open to counter-attack. Was it worse, asked Courrier, for girls to dance openly with men who will become their husbands, than for them to have 'secret talks with young men dressed in black', under the pretence of auricular confession?

The confession was one of the most common objects of anti-clerical attack in the nineteenth century. The probing into the private lives of individuals, the restriction of daily pleasures, the interference in sexual relations, married life and personal conduct roused violent resentment. The great public issues—the Church's struggle for political power, its electoral activities, its efforts to control education, were often less important to many people than the pressures exerted by the Church on their everyday behaviour. There is a considerable literature on this subject which has never been studied by historians or sociologists. Through it, one can investigate the growth of one form of hostility to the Church. One can also discover what the clash of Church and state meant in terms of private morality—whether the anticlericals were demanding a more or less liberal code of moral conduct. At the same time one can obtain a wealth of information about those personal aspects of life for which historians can normally use only police records and the testimony of novels.

The best-known attack on the confession as an instrument of clerical domination was made by Michelet in 1845. He objected above all to its use on women, who, he assumed, were the part of the population which principally submitted to it. Through it, he said, the Church obtained control of women, and this was the vital basis of its power. It was the priest, not the husband, who controlled a man's wife. As her confessor, the priest received her in church, alone, at fixed hours. In addition, as her spiritual director, he visited her at her home whenever he pleased. He asked her questions on matters about which she would never dare talk to her husband. As spiritual director he demanded to know not just her sins, but everything about her, and in this role, he was not obliged to keep her secrets. He might postpone absolution to wring information out of her, facts about her husband, the name of her lover. Husbands no longer used fear as an instrument for keeping the love of their wives, but priests did: the priest 'always has the stick of authority in his dealings with the wife, he beats her, submissive and docile, with spiritual rods. There is no seduction comparable to this.' The wife is isolated; her will and personality are destroyed. Families are divided. 'The home becomes uninhabitable.' A man cannot express an opinion without the certainty that his wife (and daughters) will contradict him, and report him to the curé.

Michelet protested on two grounds, in the name of the family and in the name of morality. The family needed to be transformed and the Church stood in the way of this. The husband must be master in his own house, but he must not repress his wife to such an abject role that she sought protection and consolation from the priest. Women should be the associates of their husbands, a condition so far seen only among small shopkeepers. This was Michelet's ideal. Men must learn to explain their work to their wives, instead of priding themselves on their specialized knowledge and taking refuge in technical language. Women should rear their families with the advice of their husbands and family unity—destroyed by disagreement on religion—would be restored. 'May the religion of the home replace religion.' Seen from this point of view the emancipation of women, as a liberal ideal, involved strengthening the rights of men as well as those of women. Likewise, it was not a relaxation of stringent moral laws.
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that Michelet demanded in his protests against priestly rule but, on the contrary, greater puritanism. He wished to protect women from new temptations. Priests had confessors’ manuals filled with lists of sins which no honest woman would think up on her own, and in their questioning they “put terrible ideas into innocent minds”. There was a strange contrast between the education the laity received, which carefully omitted all reference to sex, and that of the priesthood, which involved a full diagnosis and classification of every known sexual practice and perversion. These might have been a problem in previous centuries, ‘horribly corrupt and barbarous’, but from which ‘thanks to God, we are now far’. Worst of all, the casuistry of the Jesuits—for whom Michelet had a special antipathy—had modified the teaching of the Church on the subject of sin, to find increasing excuses for immoral conduct. By their laxity they had increased their influence and popularity. But this was part of a great conspiracy to ‘weaken the will’. The Church indeed needed to be protected against itself—it was polluting the minds of the innocent young men it trained. Michelet was thus on the side of puritanism. He laments the victory of the Jesuits over the rigorous Jansenists, whose, whatever their theological views, were the party of virtue.

There were many attacks on the confession in the name of morality. Comte C. P. de Lasteyrie, in a social history of the sacrament, accused it of inspiring either terror or alternatively a relaxation of morals, because of the assurance of pardon. Its questions enabled priests to excite and seduce oversexed women. It was an obstacle to true religion, to intellectual liberty and the progress of civilization; it had been invented to give power and riches to the Church. Confession, wrote Edgar Monteil, later to be one of Gambetta’s prefects, involves the delation of the most intimate secrets of families and the loss of all chastity and all honour. His novel, Sous le Confratemal, attacked priests on puritan grounds, ‘for their worldly existence, their love of luxury, good living, idleness and all evil passions’. Many women and

most girls are in love with their confessors’, wrote two other authors, who declared themselves to be in favour of Christianity but against the clergy who have spoiled it. The confession ‘by the habit of avowal falsifies the moral sense of women, spoils their innate sentiments of modesty and places them, through fear, under the dependence of the priests’. The anticlericals seized on the dubious but vivid polemic of a temperance-preaching Canadian priest defrocked for immorality, Père Chiniy, who denounced confession as ‘the corner stone of [priests’] stupendous power; it is the secret of their almost irresistible influence. . . .’ A woman’s most happy hours, he admitted, are when she is at the feet of that spiritual physician showing her all the newly made wounds of her soul, explaining all her constant temptations, her bad thoughts, her most intimate secret desires and sins’. But the Church was thus making her speak ‘on questions which even pagan savages would blush to mention among themselves. . . .’ Whole hours are thus passed by the fair penitent in speaking to her Father Confessor with the utmost freedom on matters which would rank her among the most profligate and lost women, if it were only suspected by her friends and relatives.’

What confessors said to their penitents could be guessed from the manuals published by the Church for the guidance of curés and for the education of seminarists. These were avidly studied by the anticlericals and denounced as immoral. Ecclesiastical treatises on sins against the sixth commandment were particularly condemned as obscene, polluting not only the minds of the clergy and those of penitents but of a large number of salacious readers: it was claimed that the best known of these, by the Bishop of Mans, sold 200,000 copies, even though it was in Latin. Dog-Latin was what all the manuals slipped into when they discussed sex, but it is significant that all but one of the anticlerical critics

1 C. P. de Lasteyrie, Histoire de la Confession sous ses rapports religieux, moraux et politiques chez les peuples anciens et modernes (1846).
2 Edgar Monteil, Sous le Confratemal (1873), 62, 67.
prudishly kept to this language for at least the more intimate details of intercourse and perversions.

It is instructive to see exactly what the critics objected to. Paul Bert, Professor of Physiology at the Sorbonne, and another of Gambetta's lieutenants, minister in 1881-2, published a study of leading manual of moral theology by the Jesuit Gury. He complained that the book lacked general principles, inclined towards the most lenient solutions, found excuses for many crimes and always took the side of the sinner. It showed a profound contempt for women; it did not know what love was, only fornication. 'It is not only the mysteries the bed of young couples that he scrutinizes with an insatiable lubricity, at the bottom of which jealousy quivers; it is the chaste conversations of fiancés that he surveys obliquely, the kisses of sister and brother, of father and daughter, of mother and child, that he condemns with his impure suspicions.... It was a treatise on morals, but it said nothing about virtue—Gury 'does not know what love is, nor even decency; he does not know what delicacy, generosity, devotion, friendship, personal dignity, civic duty or patriotism are. He is so ignorant of these noble things that he does not even know their name. You will not find a single one of these words in the Morale of Gury. All that makes the heart of humanity beat leaves him cold. Do not speak to him of progress, fraternity, science, liberty, hope; he does not understand; in his obscure corner he chops away minutely at erroneous consciences, secret compensations, mental reservations, shameful sins and out of this he tries to compose I know not what kind of concoction to brutify and enslave mankind. For he lowers everything he touches—abolishing conscience, delivering free will into the hands of a director, making delation into a means of governing souls.... Beware husbands... beware fathers....' Paul Bert also published an analysis, partly in Latin and partly in translation, of Soetleer's commentary on the sixth commandment, revised by Rousselot, Professor of Theology at the seminary of Grenoble (1844). He insisted that he was not just concerning himself with the education of priests: the enumeration and explanation of different forms of sexual activity were rapidly communicated by them to children. He claimed to have before him an exercise by a schoolgirl aged fifteen called 'The Empire of Vice'. This was divided into seven provinces, the largest of which was Lust. It had a river running through it, The Filth, its capital was Lewdness, it had nine major towns: Debauchery, Voluptuousness, Immorality, Adultery, Incest, Prostitution, Cynicism, Violation, Impurity; and eleven communes: Seduction, Evil Desires, Lack of Turpitude, Fornication, Depravation, False Pleasures, Orgy, Sensuality, Immodesty and Rape.

An anonymous criticism of Moulet's 'Compendium Theologiae Moralis' (1854), used in the seminary of Strasbourg, likewise complained of its relaxed moral standards. If a girl, for example, was pursued by a man having evil intentions, she commits a sin unless she tries to flee or cry for help. But, says Moulet, if by her flight or by her cries she is exposed to having her life endangered, or to losing her reputation, she is not required either to flee or to cry out. If an innkeeper sells wine to men who are half drunk, with the probability that they will be made completely drunk, he commits a grave sin, 'except however if by refusing to give wine, he exposes himself to injury or to notable unpleasantness'. If a man commits improper acts with a married woman, not because she is married but because she is beautiful and putting completely aside the fact that she is married, these relations 'according to certain authors do not constitute the sin of adultery, but simple impurity'. If a man swears an oath, but without the intention of swearing, and only using the formula of an oath, he is not fully bound by his word. If a man kills a thief in order to preserve property necessary to his life, he is in effect saving his life as well as his property, and the killing is not sinful. But what if the goods threatened are not necessary to life? The probable answer is that it would be lawful to kill the thief in such a case, 'because charity does not require that one should undergo a notable loss of temporal goods to save the life of another'.

Moulet's book is denounced as a justification of vice.

1 Paul Bert, La Morale des Jésuites (1880), preface xxxiv, and 323n.
2 [F. Bussière], Découvertes d'un bibliophile ou lectures sur différents points de morale enseignés dans quelques séminaires de France (Strasbourg, 2nd ed., 1843).
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Though these anticlericals are prudes, they are not opposed to sex in marriage; indeed, they object to the Church's hostility to it. Another anonymous author, "Le Curé X," attacking Bishop Bouvier's treatise on the sixth commandment, complains of the interference in the rights of husbands. The message of the bishop's book, he claims, is that "to be agreeable to God the conjugal duty must be performed weeping and praying; a truly chaste husband must neither lift his hand into his wife's blouse in the daytime, nor lift her nightgown in bed." They must resign themselves to living like brother and sister if one or the other is impotent. A woman must, even at the price of her life, refuse the conjugal act if her husband does not carry it out according to the rules. But she is herself threatened, because Bouvier's book concludes with a treatise on Caesarian operations, to enable priests to cut her open, so as to baptize her child.  

The accusation that these divines were hypocritically peddling pornography is immediately shown to be false if one examines their works. Bouvier, Bishop of Mans, has not the slightest trace of salaciousness. His book, given its premises against carnal pleasure, is a very logical, straightforward work, which reads like a legal or medical textbook, with precise and careful definitions. He makes sex sound very grim. Moreover, he warns confessors to be extremely careful in the questions they pose, lest they put bad ideas into innocent heads. If a child has not reached puberty, he warns the confessor, he is unlikely to masturbate; so do not ask about this. When you do ask, enquire in a roundabout way, to avoid making suggestions, for example, "Have you felt movements in the body, agreeable delirium in the private parts, followed by calm?" It is true there were cases of priests who were prosecuted for pointing out to children those parts of the body which they must not touch, and for posing questions, as one commented, of "an undoubtedly licentious character ... likely to overexcite the imagination of very young children and of developing unhealthy ideas in their minds." But they were defying the warnings frequently given to priests by their teachers. Abbé Gaume's popular manual for confessors urged them to take special precautions with women; not to call them 'My dear daughter,' to be modest with married women, asking them only whether they have obeyed their husbands, and remaining silent about the details, unless questioned. They should take care not to teach them sins they did not know; they should be brief about 'impure matters,' to show the horror they felt for these and also to protect themselves against temptation. But that there was some justification in the complaints about the use to which confession, and these guides to it, could be put, is seen in Bishop Pusey's preface to his translation of Gaume's Manual. His translation was purposely incomplete, leaving out Gaume's sample questions to be posed to penitents, which he considered improper. "The English clergy," wrote Pusey, "are gentlemen and I do not believe that they could ask such questions." He urged even greater care than his French colleagues, especially in dealing with women who confessed. "Details of domestic life which have not a right or a wrong; the clergyman's aim, he said, should be to strengthen the sense of personal responsibility in those who consult him.

It is clear that different methods were employed by confessors. It is possible that in England, and in Italy, for example, questioning was far less severe than it was in certain regions of France. In Spain there is a tradition in some areas for people to confess not to their own parish priest but to go to the neighbouring town—which must reduce tensions and clerical power considerably. In Colombia, many priests in this century have been trained in France and have brought back a severity in their methods which contrasts notably with that country's laxer Spanish traditions, and this has inevitably had repercussions in the form of increased anticlericalism. A comparative study of the intimate relations of priest and penitent has never been undertaken. These generalizations are very tentatively offered as possible hypotheses. If there

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1 J. J. Gaume, Manuels des Confesseurs (1st edition 1837, 9th edition 1861)

2 E. B. Pusey, Advice for Those who Exercise the Ministry of Reconciliation through Confession and Absolution (London, 1878), preface.
is truth in them, some explanation of the different amount of anticlericalism found in various countries might be sought in this personal, rather than the traditional, political context.

In France there were two attitudes to confession which at their extremes were pretty different. One school of theologians urged laxity and gentleness towards sinners. They drew their inspiration from Italy, and particularly from St Alphonse of Liguori. Gaume’s Manual, which based itself on him, urged confessors to avoid imposing excessive penances, particularly on new converts, and penances should not be public. Excessive penances, he insists, are not carried out and the penitent simply returns to sin. The best one is therefore the frequentation of the sacraments. If in doubt, incline towards leniency. Do not forbid a drunkard to drink altogether, but only limit the amount he must not exceed. Do not show anger at sin. Do not refuse absolution except in very exceptional circumstances: if you defer it because you doubt the penitent’s contrition, defer it say for fifteen or thirty minutes, at most for a week.

The extent to which laxity could go is seen in a guide written by an appropriately named Abbé Léger, director of the seminary of Nîmes (1864). It carried the approval of his bishop and it shows what some provincial priests were being taught. Léger was opposed to severity. ‘It is better to allow the penance for a sin to be completed in purgatory than to expose the sinner to damnation by setting a penance he will not carry out.’ He firmly says that serious sins deserve heavy penances, but the worst he can think of are the recitation of a few prayers, psalms or the rosary, the reading of one or two chapters of the Imitation, or a long period of kneeling. Fasting should not be required of

[1] As well as on various other authors, for example St Francis of Sales, St Francis Xavier, and St Charles (Archbishop of Milan); with the last named, Gaume says his reputation for severity is due to faulty translation, which he remedies.


[3] See J.-B. Bouvier, Traité dogmatique et pratique des indulgences des confessions et du jubilé, à l’usage des ecclésiastiques (1846, 10th edition 1851), 10, on the stern penances imposed in the Middle Ages: ‘but, so as not to discourage sinners, the church allows them to be treated nowadays with greater leniency’. These who are delicate or working. No long penances, for six months or a year, should be set; they were rarely fulfilled. Abbé Léger believed in the most discreet questioning at confession. Ask only, he says, if peace reigns in the home, if there are children and if they are being raised in the Christian way. Has the penitent anything to reproach himself for on the subject of conjugal duty or the sanctity of marriage? It is better in this matter to ask less than too much. . . . It is best to leave them in good faith than to instruct them, with the danger that they might sin formally, be scandalized and that their idea of the priest’s holiness should be weakened. In fact, many people do not reveal certain acts, because they fear they would scandalize the priest. The confessor must therefore demand only what is strictly necessary and forbid every explanation which would be improper.

The abbé took a very practical view of sin. Do not refuse absolution to all who dance, he says. Discover first what kind of dance was involved, the reason for participating in it, and if the dance actually caused a sin. ‘If you do otherwise, you will force people to abandon the sacraments which were their only chance of salvation and they will fall into all sorts of trouble.’ Dishonourable dances, like the waltz, must not be tolerated, because even if the penitent commits no sin, he may have caused another to sin. But people who have to dance because of their social position, or to please a husband, may be absolved, provided no sin was committed and that the woman was not too indecently clothed. The theatre, as all authorities acknowledged, was morally dangerous, and ‘you should as far as possible turn everybody away from it, but not under pain of total refusal of absolution’. Bullfighting, again, was a popular sport in Nîmes. Pius V had forbidden it on pain of excommunication. Clement VIII had suspended this prohibition in Spain only. What were the people of Nîmes to do? ‘In France, this excommunication is generally unknown, and as people often do not think they are doing wrong by watching bullfights, the confessor must not bother those who say nothing to him about it; but if they express doubts to him, he must tell them to keep away from this sport, when there is danger of death or scandal, and this on pain of refusal of
absolution.' If the toreadors were good, and there is no danger of their being killed, people may watch; 'if someone was killed or wounded, it would be an accident and one is not required to foresee an accident. But fights held in the country, where everybody goes into the arena and where it is rare for someone not to be wounded or killed, one may not attend, because one may not contribute without reason to the death or injury of anyone, even if this contribution is distant.'

Another serious local problem was the avoidance of tax. Léger found the authority of an archbishop to encourage him to leniency. Generally in France, says this Mgr Gousset, people do not think themselves obliged to pay excise duties, state and local taxes, except in so far as they are unable to avoid the vigilance of those who are charged to collect them. They reassure themselves that, despite these frauds, the state always gets its money, either because it is careful to increase taxes in proportion to the frauds it foresees, or because it compensates itself by fines on those whom it catches red-handed. On this reasoning, those who act in this way in good faith in tax matters, either because they do not consider taxes to be obligatory, or because they think they have contributed enough to the expenses of the state, in keeping with their means, through other taxes, must not be disturbed in their good faith nor bothered. If they ask the confessor's advice, they should be urged to pay, but not on pain of refusal of absolution 'because it is not certain that all tax laws are rigorously obligatory on the conscience'. Now if a smuggler, for example, listens to the exhortations of his confessor to make restitution for his crimes, he should be urged to make this to charity rather than to the government, 'because the government does not suffer from his fraud, it is society which suffers through the taxes which are ingested because of the fraud'. Smugglers who, despite their breaking of the law, have difficulty in earning a living, should be urged to change their profession, but they need make no restitution, because natural law comes before human law, that is, 'that one must get a living from one's work and even a certain comfort'. As for those who cheat the state by declaring a sale or an inheritance to be less than it really is, they should be left alone, because one is only required to execute a law in the manner in which it is customarily executed, and the general usage is that one does not declare the exact price of a sale or the real value of an inheritance. For this reason, confessors should not bother either notaries, buyers or sellers, or heirs.4

This was a religion which almost allowed people to do more or less what they pleased. It was one way of modernizing religion. The archbishop whom Léger quotes freely, Gousset of Reims, played an important part in giving widespread currency to this lax attitude. He published a treatise on moral theology in French—one of the few not in Latin—and this was much appreciated by priests whose Latin was weak. But the seminaries could not adopt it as a textbook, because it was not in Latin. It was to meet this need for a modern text that the Jesuit Gury—whom Paul Bert dissected—produced his manual, to revive that 'consoling doctrine which our ancestors had and which had too long been banished from our schools by the influence of the Jansenists'. His book, published in 1870, sold about five or six thousand copies a year and in 1866 on his death reached its seventeenth edition. He based himself on St Alphonse of Liguori and used all the skill of casuistry for which his order was famous, but he tried to bring his sources up to date. However, it was leniency rather than an understanding of modern thought that inspired him, for his biographer states that 'a stranger to the politics of this world, he did not read newspapers, or if sometimes after recreation, sitting by the hearth, it happened that he opened one, he did not delay to fall asleep'.

The relaxation of the Church's moral requirements had begun a couple of centuries before, under the leadership of the Jesuits, whom Michelet attacked for this very reason. The effects of

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1 Abbé D. Léger, Le Guide du jeune prêtre au tribunal de la pénitence, ou devoirs du confesseur (1863).
2 Mgr T. M. J. Gousset, Théologie morale à l'usage des curés et des confesseurs (3rd edition 1843), 2, 333.
original sin were minimized, a more optimistic view of man was adopted, that he was not radically corrupt and that conformity to the commandments was enough to save him. The Jesuit ideal was the honnête homme and no longer the saint. There was hope for man, and individual merit counted for something. Against this the Jansenists revived the doctrine of the basic corruption of man, who was capable of salvation only through grace, and only if he has this (which means God’s choosing him in preference to others) can he, by the practice of severe asceticism, accomplish the will of God. Conversion therefore implied the total transformation of an individual. Only the most holy were worthy of approaching the altar; frequent communion was discouraged; severe penances expected for sins; and repeated deferment of absolution was urged, to make sure that the penitent was in every way fit to receive communion. 

Arnauld’s *De la Fréquente Communion* (1643) argued that if a man sinned, he should not simply be forgiven and allowed to take communion, but should be kept away until the habit of sin was destroyed—against the orthodox view that communion was a principal method of destroying sin. The penance must be accomplished before the priest gives absolution, and the penitent must appear at least twice before his confessor. These ‘melancholy sectaries’, as Joseph de Maistre called them, got the reputation of making religion rebarbative and difficult. Moral rigorism was by no means the most essential part of the Jansenist doctrine. Jansenism had many interesting varieties, which make it an ancestor for example of decentralization and individualism in France. It formed alliances with other creeds, such as Richerism—advocating equality between priests and Bishops—which increased the appeal of the heresy to the lower clergy. Jansenism survived longer than is usually realized. There were still periodicals defending it under Louis Philippe and Napoleon III, and the


2 *La Revue Ecclésiastique* (1838-48) and *L’Observateur Catholique* (1855-64).

3 Theologia dogmatica et moralis ad usum seminarium auctore Ludovico Bailly (new edition, Lyon, 1804), 4: 283-4.

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Jansenist order of the Brothers of St Antoine at St Mandé did not collapse till 1888.1

The really important instrument of the survival of Jansenist rigorism, however, was Louis Bailly’s treatise on dogmatic and moral theology, first published in 1789 and reprinted, in various editions, twenty times between 1804 and 1852. This book was used as a standard text in nearly all the seminaries of France during the first half of the century; it was considered the main obstacle to the resurrection of the doctrines of Liguori; it was to replace it that Gouset and Gury wrote their works. The strength of the objection to it can be seen in the fact that in 1852 it was placed on the Index. This is a date that ought to be added to the histories of the Jansenist controversy, which is normally assumed to have lost its importance by the end of the eighteenth century.2 In contrast to the lax manuals urging moderation and leniency, he has long lists of cases in which absolution should be deferred, and he insists on sufficient proof of reform before it is granted. In contrast to their feeble penances, he would impose three years of penance for fornication, between five and ten years for adultery and penance for life for fornication with a nun. Dancing in front of the church should get three years too, and talking in church ten days of bread and water. The cursing of parents received forty days of bread and water. ‘If any woman bedaubed herself with white lead or any other pigment so as to please other men’, she should undergo three years of penance.3

This book had considerable influence in continuing Jansenist or rigorist practices among many parish priests, particularly in areas in which the heresy had been most firmly implanted. In the diocese of Nevers for example, the curse of Alluy was in the


2 Chanonise Gouset, *Le Cardinal Gouset* (Besançon, 1903), 464-73; Abbé Le Noir and Bergier, *Dictionnaire de Théologie* (1873), 2: 53. For Jansenist opinion of Gouset see *L’Observateur Catholique*, vol. 6, 142.

3 Theologia dogmatica et moralis ad usum seminarium auctore Ludovico Bailly (new edition, Lyon, 1804), 4: 283-4.
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1860s still refusing communion and absenting himself from his parish for a fortnight before Easter, so as to avoid hearing confessions, saying his flock was sacrilegious. The way these rigorists heard confession is told in the case of the curé of Saint Médard en Forez, who died in 1835. He demanded a complete change of behaviour before he granted absolution. He listened silently without interrupting the confession, but then took up each point and discussed it ‘with the most pathetic gestures’. The confession would take at least one hour and the penitent emerged ‘very moved by the eloquent union of his exhortations’. He demanded as penance reading of the Bible, prayer morning and evening, and a period of contrition lasting six to eight weeks, after which he would tell the sinner how much farther he had to go in his progress towards humility and self-knowledge. Only if the penitent showed he had followed his instructions and had not relapsed would he be granted absolution.¹

The reasoning behind this attitude can be seen in a work published in 1865 and reprinted in 1872, by the abbé Laurichesse, professor at the petit séminaire of Pléaux (Cantal). There are those who claim, he says, that people are stopping to go to church because its doctrines are too opposed to human passions and that they are therefore no longer in harmony with the needs of modern civilization. The priest, the representatives of laxness have argued, must keep quiet on subjects on which he formerly preached. But what good has this done? Laxness has not strengthened the Church. The right method therefore is to preach the word of God fearlessly. ‘The world does not wish to believe; let us tell the world that there is no salvation except in the most abhorred dogmas, in the free submission to beliefs which are most formidable and best made to dominate and to check human thought. Then the world will believe, and the world will be saved’, the day it admits that the majority of things it pursues with ardour are satanic, and that divine, on the contrary, are the majority of things it overwhells with its contempt.’ The modern man, besotted by sensualism, does not confess, but society needs rules and restraints against impure passions. Discipline must be restored.

¹ Léon Séché, Les Derniers Jansénistes 1710-1870 (1891), 72.

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‘Now Christianity is law, rule, restraint. Confession is in Christianity the severest form of repressive force. Through it, Christianity captures man and dominates him...’ Pleasure and beauty, the joys of friendship all pass. ‘Pain alone does not pass; it lives in everything mortal. Pain is the sole reality of this world.’ As a result, the priest must inevitably have control over ‘the magnificent empire of souls... Without pain, there would be no church.’ The source of all pain is sensualism, the greatest illness man suffers from. Confession is the only way chastity can be preserved. Marriage is holy and must be protected from gross sensualism. ‘The secret of love is in the act of self restraint.’ Marriages fail and produce such sad and bitter homes, with hate and servitude, because they are too often based on the egoistic satisfaction of sexual desire. Only the priest can cure this evil. He can set limits to it. ‘The priest is the law, prohibition, forbiddance.’ Far from destroying the family, the confessor saves it. ‘Do you know how much effort your wife needs not to hate you, and to recover from the wounds you inflict? ’But for the confession, you might lose your wife’, for the priest stresses duty. In confessing, the woman cures herself of unhappiness, escapes from the servitude of the flesh and regains her personality. The inner life she acquires in this way allows her to bear the daily chores. Women are not enslaved by confession, but given entire possession of themselves as independent souls. Christianity gives women an internal asylum against all the oppression they receive from outside. Confession, he concludes, is thus essential for the individual, for the family and for society. Society can only punish crimes—priests can prevent them. ‘The best of all governments would be a theocracy in which confession is established as the tribunal.’

The effect of such doctrines, and of the denial or deferment of absolution, was frequently to cause people to give up going to confession and to church. The curé Millet of St.Amaïd en Puisset (Nièvre) wrote in his parish register in 1855 that the hostility of his parishioners was a result of Jansenism, and this must indeed

¹ Abbé A. M. Laurichesse, Études philosophiques et morales sur la confession (1865, overprinted 1864).
be considered an important cause of anticlericalism. It is no
accident that the diocese of Auxerre, where the Jansenist Caylus
was bishop from 1705 to 1714, became an area of strong anti-
clericalism.\footnote{Abbé J. Chartier, Histoire du Jansenisme dans la diocèse de Nevers (1930),
140.} If a map could be drawn of the spread of Jansenist
influence in the eighteenth century and another of anticlericalism
in the nineteenth, there might well be some concordances
between them. It is no accident, again, that Voltaire, one of the
leading intellectual founders of anticlericalism, should have been
the son of a Jansenist family, so that his hate of the Church was
initiated not so much as an attack on Christianity, but as a
rebellion against the fanaticism of his Jansenist father and elder
brother.\footnote{Pierre Ordion, La Survivance des idées gallicanes et jansénistes en
Auxerrois de 1760 à nos Jours (Auxerre, 1933).} It is no accident that the eighteenth-century writer on
libertinage, Restif de la Bretonne, should have come from one of the
most Jansenist areas of France of a very rigorist family, that his
half-brother should have been a modèle Jansenist curé, and that
he should have had a grandfather nicknamed ‘The Severe’ and
a father called ‘Honnête Homme’.*

In the Second Empire there was still a party among the clergy—
it only size can be guessed—in favour of using confession as a
severe instrument of repression.\footnote{R. P. Huguet, Des Délassements permis aux personnes pétées appelées à
vivre dans le monde (Lyon, new edition, 1857), 21, 62-3, 108.} Mgr de Ségur—a best selling
popularizer, some of whose works ran into seventy-five editions—
used a telling phrase in defending it: ‘Let yourself be taken by
the good God’s police; they will take you not to prison but to
paradise’. To those who complained that they did not like priests
to meddle in their affairs, he stated that ‘the priest has not only
the right but the rigorous duty to teach you in general and in
detail what you ought to do and what you ought to avoid’.

A work recommended by Bishop Pie of Poitiers insisted on the
importance of confession as ‘the most powerful duty opposed to
\footnote{i J. Gaume, Manuel des Confesseurs (5th edition 1853), 205.6.}
\footnote{R. P. Huguet, Des Délassements permis aux personnes pétées appelées à
vivre dans le monde (Lyon, new edition, 1857), 21, 62-3, 108.}
\footnote{1 Abbé J. Chartier, Histoire du Jansenisme dans la diocèse de Nevers (1930),
140.}
\footnote{Pierre Ordion, La Survivance des idées gallicanes et jansénistes en
Auxerrois de 1760 à nos Jours (Auxerre, 1933).}
\footnote{R. P. Huguet, Des Délassements permis aux personnes pétées appelées à
vivre dans le monde (Lyon, new edition, 1857), 21, 62-3, 108.}
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certainly likely to ask the same question of others, reply that God has arranged it so because it seemed right to His wisdom. Let him think you have told him everything... So many children naively ask questions on which any answer satisfies them; therefore it is unnecessary to say more... A prudent mother used invariably to reply to the embarrassing questions of an extremely inquisitive child: You will know when you get to the upper sixth form (the philosophy class); and this child, satisfied, patiently awaited this happy hour.' The author somewhat contradicts himself when he goes on to describe, on the basis of his experiences in the slums of Marseille, the sexual licence of children he knows, the mistresses they have at fourteen, their experimental visits even earlier to brothels, full of secondary schoolboys on the journées de sortie (holidays), the widespread homosexuality, which he regards as a major problem and to which he devotes over twenty pages. Not just obscene books should be avoided, but also 'indecent pictures and sculptures' and 'evil newspapers, that is to say, newspapers hostile to the Church, to the Pope, to priests, to monks and those which do not hesitate to publish serial stories contrary to good morals'.

Greek, the desire for riches, for the goods of this world, for honour and esteem were all of the same kind. Women's clothes were a constant source of danger. Married ones who dressed to please their husbands, or girls who dressed in order to win husbands should be given some concessions, but not if they sought to please others apart from their husband, or if their aim was not to get married. Those who leave their arms or shoulders naked or only lightly covered were, if they were following the fashion, not guilty, but those who invented these fashions were guilty of mortal sin.

There were formulae in the manuals for the investigation of the most intimate details of sexual relations. There were questions about the exact postures adopted in intercourse, because only one

was approved, as being the most likely to produce conception. The procreation of children should be the aim: married people who had intercourse for pleasure committed a sin, though a venial one. The authorities were divided on whether intercourse to avoid incontinence was permissible. 'A woman was not required to fulfill her conjugal duty to a husband who demanded it too often, for example several times in the same night, because this is contrary to reason and because it could become very dangerous. The wife must however, as far as it is in her power, lend herself to the libidinous needs of her husband when he suffers violent desires of the flesh; for charity obliges her to save him as far as possible from the danger of incontinence.' She may not refuse her duty for fear of too many children: she ought to confide herself to God. But some authors thought that if they could not afford more children, she could refuse, provided there was no danger to the husband of incontinence—but there always was. This problem of birth control worried the Church. 'Nothing is more frequent among young couples today,' wrote Bishop Bouvier, 'than the detestable practice of onanism.' He accordingly sent a petition to the Pope. 'One can hardly find any young couples who wish to have too numerous a family,' he wrote, 'and yet they cannot reasonably abstain from the conjugal act. They normally feel very offended when their confessors interrogate them on the manner in which they use their matrimonial rights; they cannot be got by warnings to moderate their exercise of the conjugal act, and they cannot decide to increase the number of their children too much. To the murmurs of their confessors, they reply by abandoning the sacraments of penitence and Eucharist, thus giving bad examples to their children, their servants and other Christians: religion suffers considerable prejudice from this. The number of people who come to confession diminishes from year to year in many places and it is above all for this reason, according to a large number of curés who are distinguished by their piety, their learning and their experience. How did confessors conduct themselves in former times, many

1 Abbé Timon-David, Traité de la confession des enfants et des jeunes gens (1869, 14th edition 1924) 2. 180-182.
2 See Mgr de Ségur, Aux Enfants: Conseils pratiques sur les tentations et le péché (1865), 25.
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people ask? Marriages did not generally produce more children than today. Spouses were not more chaste and yet they did not miss the obligation of Easter confession.

The Sacred Congregation replied in 1842 that the confessor was not normally required to speak about sins that spouses commit regarding their conjugal duty and it was improper for him to pose questions in this regard, unless to the wife, who should be asked as moderately as possible whether she had fulfilled her duty. He should keep silence on everything else, unless he is questioned. This was the reply of the moderate party, but it is clear from Bouvier’s letter that many curés did seek to control the sexual behaviour of their flocks and that many people broke with the Church for this reason. The curés they offered for the reduction of sexual urges—sobriety, abstinence from hot foods and spirits, little sleep, hard beds, cold baths, meditation on the dangers of sexual licence, on the prospect of death, divine judgement and hell, frequent prayer and the reading of works on The Dangers of Onanism—do not seem to have provided satisfactory alternatives.

Michelet’s fury against confession was unleashed not by theoretical considerations but by personal experience. He wrote his book on it soon after the death of his mistress, Mme Dumesnil, of cancer. During her illness she had resorted to a confessor, the Abbé Cœur, later bishop of Troyes. He won a great ascendancy over her and stimulated bitter jealousy in Michelet, who was often refusal admission to her sick bed. The autobiography of George Sand shows how much rested on the tact of the confessor in seeing how far he could go. She had an idyllic relationship with a sympathetic Jesuit confessor at her convent school, to whom she was quite devoted; but when she went home the local curé, whom she barely knew, “thought I was

\[1\] Bouvier, op cit., 172-3. The recommended works on onanism are by Tissot and Doussin-Dubreuil. For a non-religious study of this subject see Dr A. Meyer, Des Devoirs Conjugeaux (1874).

\[2\] Jean Frommier, Les Idées de Michelet et de Renan sur la confession en 1845, in Journal de Psychologie normale et pathologique (15 July to 15 October 1835), 120-2.

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falling in love with someone and he asked me (in confession) whether this was true. It was not, I replied, I have not even thought about it. Nevertheless, he insisted, people assert... I rose in the confessional without listening any more and was seized by an irresistible indignation. All the purity in my being revolted against a question which was indiscreet, impudent and in my view irrelevant to religion... If I had some chaste confidence to make, I saw no reason why I should address myself to him, who was not my director and spiritual father. I considered he had confused his curiosity as a man with his function as a priest. He was so unlike her Jesuit, who 'scrupulous guardian of the holy ignorance of girls, once said to me: One should not ask questions; I never do.'

All this evidence suggests that conflicts about morality were a significant element in the growth of anticlericalism. However, these conflicts were not simple, and neither side had a monopoly of any one set of principles. On the one hand, anticlericalism was stimulated by the excessive severity of some priests in enforcing unpopular moral standards through the confession. But the use of the confession as a means of interfering in private conduct was itself possibly an equal source of resentment. For, on the other hand, the anticlericals also protested against the laxness of the moral standards of other priests. There’s the paradox that the Jesuits were singled out as the object of the most vigorous criticism by the enemies of the Church; but the Jesuits were leaders of the movement for the modernization and humanization of Catholic moral doctrines. It is too subtle to suggest that the anticlericals feared them most because they were most likely to save the Church. It is more probable that they did not see the issues clearly.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a wide variety of practice and teaching coexisted in the Church in France. Anticlericals in different regions and with different personal experience were attacking different things. The Church was itself far from static, and not untouched by the intellectual and scientific developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but not all the

\[1\] G. Sand, Histoire de ma vie (1904), 3. 192 ff., 327.
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clergy were equally affected. The Church had its progressives, who appeared excessively radical to many republicans. It should not be forgotten that some clergymen in the eighteenth century had anticipated Rousseau's idea of the natural goodness of man. There were Jesuits who argued that human nature should be cultivated rather than denied, that man was not irrevocably fallen, that rational, as opposed to saintly, living was a commendable ideal. Such men should not be simply classified with those who tried to prove the literal truth of every fact in the Bible (as for example a certain Abbé Calmet did, in twenty-two volumes), but they clearly often were. In the nineteenth century some ecclesiastical teachers were giving a considerably larger part to reason in religious education, without discarding revealed truths, but rather adding rational proof of these. They reacted to the romantic movement by adding appeals to the heart and the emotions, though this was largely dropped after 1830, when the emphasis on reason was revived. The popularity of science led to the greater use of arguments based on the marvels of nature; in reply to the enlightenment's hostility to dogma, a considerably larger place was given to the teaching of Christian morals. This does not mean that the clash of reason and revelation, liberty and authority, progress and original sin, was unreal, but it was not as clear-cut as the polemists lead one to believe.

To a certain extent the battle between Church and anticlericals was blown out of all proportion simply by anger. The need to be in either one party or the other concealed the fact that many people in both parties had a lot in common, particularly if abstract principles were put aside and their actual practical conduct was compared. This can be seen by examining the question of just how different the morality of the anticlericals was from that of the Church. Did the republicans, who were so firmly determined to found an independent state lay system of moral education, in fact wish to give the individual greater freedom in his personal conduct? How puritan or how liberal were the republicans?

Edgar Quinet, one of the first advocates of lay education, lamented that 'there is no popular book in which the people can, without danger, receive their first moral education'. This always remained true, and no single moral code was ever evolved by the republicans, who were even more disunited than the Catholics. The vast majority were not interested in producing new rules of conduct. Jules Ferry said that his lay schools had the duty 'to teach only one morality, that is to say the good old morality of our fathers'. Buisson, his director of primary education, likewise insisted on the traditional character of the ethics schoolmasters should instill. 'The only elements of morality that a society should transmit to the young generations are those which it has itself received from a long past, which constitutes the heritage of the centuries and the patrimony of humanity.' He defined lay morals in fact as that body of 'rules of normal conduct ... on which all men of the same age and the same country cannot differ, any more than they can dispute the four laws [of arithmetic] or argue about geographical facts'. The aim of this great consensus was to produce unity and harmony in France. Quinet had written in 1852 that there were several religions fighting each other, but beneath them lay a single morality and it was the function of the state to reveal this. In 1914 Gustave Belot, who rose to be Inspector-General of Public Instruction, was still saying the same thing. All religions merely consecrate rules of conduct established by tradition: the only difference between lay and religious morality is therefore in motivation. Belot conceded that 'lay morality, as it is too often presented, is nothing but religious morality without the religion', and he was honest enough to admit that nothing had come of all the proposals to change this situation. The desirable changes 'not only still needed to be carried out, they had

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4 F. Buisson, in G. Belot et al., Questions de morale (1900), 313.
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yet to be discovered'. This shows the bankruptcy of lay morality and explains why it was inevitably conservative.

The majority of republicans were far from advocating pleasure as the main purpose of life. The people who got nearest this were the St Simonians and the Fourierists. They were of course small sects but some of their adherents were influential, and some of their ideas gained popular currency. The philosopher Renouvier was probably as much responsible for their diffusion among the republican masses as any man, for he was patronized by Carnot in 1848 and by many leaders of the Third Republic. He wrote popular moral manuals, which can be compared to those of the Catholic confessors, though it is clear that his ideas were not as uniformly reproduced by the 'instituteurs' as the hierarchy's doctrines were by the curés. His main interest is that he illustrates what intelligent and advanced anticlericals were thinking. 'Religion,' he wrote in 1848, 'teaches you how to conduct yourself in this world in order to render yourself worthy of eternal felicity. I speak in the name of the republic, in which we are going to live, and of that morality which every man feels at the bottom of his heart. I wish to instruct you on the way to be happy on earth, and the first thing I would say is this: improve yourself. You will only become truly happy by becoming better.' This is the doctrine of the republic of professors. Realize your full capacities, help others to realize theirs, be just, fraternal, tolerant, and in this way the world will gradually become better. Love God is the first commandment, love your neighbour is the second. 'The Republic of 1792 established the morality of Jesus Christ in society.' The disagreements with the Church which had arisen since then should be ended; and France will then become the Promised Land.¹

Twenty years later in his Science of Morality (1869) he was still repeating that reason approves of religion, and that religious indifference was undesirable; religion's only fault is intolerance,

¹ G. Belot, L’Efficacité pratique de la morale laïque, in R. Allier et al., Morale religieuse et morale laïque (1914), 51, 95.
² C. Renouvier, Manuel républicain de l’homme et du citoyen, publié sous les auspices du ministère provisoire de l’instruction publique (1848).

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its claim to absolute knowledge. In this work he gives more details of his view of pleasure. Pure pleasure is not to be condemned, he says, provided it is limited and ruled by reason, so that it does not lead to the forgetting of duty or to laziness. Sexual pleasures are aesthetic and there is nothing immoral about them, nor is there any need to restrict intercourse to the needs of procreation. Marriage is desirable but it is difficult to work because equality between the sexes has not been established. Adultery should not necessarily involve the dissolution of marriage. The education of children of both sexes should be reorganized to avoid the inculcation of shame and secrecy. Obedience is incompatible with the moral law. Parents must not abuse their authority, they must respect their children, bring them up as rational people, free to reject or accept their teachings.²

Now this latter part of Renouvier's doctrine was very advanced for any party in France at this date, and it was pushed into the background by most of his readers. He owed these ideas partly to Fourier but partly also to his own experience, for this respected pundit of morality, in his obscure retreat from which he wrote thirty-two volumes and articles enough to fill another eighteen, lived unmarried with two women in a somewhat phalangerian way and produced an illegitimate son by his cook. This explains, to a certain extent, his attack on Catholic doctrines on marriage. Otherwise he was a Christian, and after breaking with Catholicism he became a Protestant, as did quite a few intellectuals who wanted to reconcile religion and freedom of thought. He approved of Combes, but he always kept a Bible on his table. In his later years when his son came to live with him he was converted to the idea of the creation, and rediscovered God as the 'paternal creator'. In 1894 he wrote: 'Everybody seems to believe in progress, despite everything. I no longer do. At our age, one should try to believe in a better world than this.' Renouvier, the son of a Rousseauist father and a Jansenist mother, a romantic and St Simonian in his youth, ended up a Christian heretic. His tormented life shows the difficulties anticlericals had in breaking

¹ C. Renouvier, Science de la morale (1869), 1, 436, 147, 578, 584, 607.
away from their past. Renouvier wrote of a Utopia, but at bottom he was a pessimist.\footnote{Ch. Bellet, \textit{Le Manuel du M. Paul Bert, ses erreurs et ses falsifications historiques}, suivi d'un examen de la morale laïque de M. Jules Ferry (Tours, 1884), approved by the vicar-general of Valence.}

Pessimism indeed continued to permeate much republican thinking, so that in this respect there was no sharp break with Catholic teaching. This was due partly to the long-surviving influence of eclecticism and Kantism among the philosophers and so in the schools in which they taught, and partly to the conscious desire to produce a new morality which was all-embracing and therefore containing elements of Christianity in it. The philosophy master at the Lycée Condorcet, who produced an anthology of moralists in 1897, on the one hand praised Comte as one of the greatest philosophers of the century, Rousseau as having had an influence almost equal to that of a religious reformer, and Voltaire as the apostle of all liberties, but he also recommended Bossuet, as the representative of the Christian tradition ("so full of truths and reason, that even outside Catholicism, he has great moral and philosophic interest"), Bourdaloue ("having none of the laxity with which the Jesuits are often reproached"), Charles Rollin, the Jesuit educator whose \textit{Traité des études} he calls a masterpiece of pure reason, St Francis de Sales ("author of gently and elegantly mystic works"), and Malebranche ("who makes conformity to the universal order the essential rule of conduct"). He even includes Chateaubriand, Veuillot ("a great writer") and de Maistre ("theoretician of absolutism who pushes to ... brilliant and revolting paradox all the arguments he supports"). He condemns not the Christians but Helveticus, "advocate of the grossest sensualism"). He finds room for a large middle of the road eclectics like Cousin, Caro, Jouffroy, Jules Simon and Bersot, whose influence in the nineteenth century he rightly stresses. The republicans did not break with the past.\footnote{Compare his criticism with that in Abbé Migne, \textit{Dictionnaire des heresies} (vol. 1 of the first series of the Encyclopédie théologique) (1847), 1:43.} The Catholics who attacked Paul Bert's manual of civic education found fault with his politics and the accuracy of his historical facts, but they did not accuse him of immorality. It shows how the Catholics for their part belonged to the same classical tradition, that the first two chapters of one

\footnote{R. Thamin, \textit{Extrait du moralistes} (1897).}
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Paul Janet, professor at the Sorbonne from 1864 to 1899, has a similar inspiration though he quotes from an even wider assortment of Christian thinkers. He also believed in the rule of conscience: men should seek neither pleasure nor the useful but what was 'honest', preferring what is best in us, the noble affections over egoism, human dignity over animal passion. This could be called justice when applied to our attitude to others, and piety when applied to God—giving God his due. The superior sanction of religion was needed, because not all merit was equally rewarded in this world, and above all because hope in a supreme being was necessary to console man for his sins and suffering. 'We seem to be masters of the universe,' he wrote, 'but experience proves on the contrary how weak we are. . . . Life, despite the great side of it and despite some exquisite and sublime joys, is bad; all ends badly. . . . Deliver us from evil, that is the cry of every religion. God is the liberator and consoled.' Resignation to the will of Providence was the ultimate rule, but this did not mean fatalism. To love God is to love men. It is important to remember that God, as opposed to Catholicism, was not expelled from the lay schools. On a more mundane level, Janet counsels moderation in all things. Work is a pleasure and the cultivation of the faculties necessary to human dignity. Thrift is a virtue. Workers should not 'systematically feel hate, envy, covetousness or revolt against their employers. The division of labour requires that some direct while others are directed.' Workers have a right to equal respect, but they must make themselves worthy of respect by 'educating themselves and their children, occupying their leisure with family life, reading, innocent and elevating recreations (music, theatre, gardening if it is possible'). They must not hope for equal salaries, however, because 'nothing is more contrary to the modern spirit which wants every man to be treated according to his achievements . . . otherwise there would be a premium on carelessness and idleness'. Bersot, 'one of the most fashionable moralists of the Second Empire, perhaps summarized this philosophy best when he said, 'Man is not born to be happy, but he is born to be a man at his own risk and peril'.

There were lay moralists who were more 'advanced' than these men, but their radicalism concerned only their attitude to God, whom they sometimes left out altogether from their books: their aim was only to make morals entirely independent of religion. None of them advocated pleasure, or even utility, as the criterion of conduct. They wished to make men act rationally, but they did not expect this use of reason to produce wildly different results in different individuals. Marion, Professor of Education at the Sorbonne, warned against allowing reason to get out of hand. In a lecture to schoolteachers on the moral education syllabus, he insisted that the new lay system involved the training of the intelligence, to enable it to make moral decisions, as opposed to the Catholic catechism, which relied on the memorizing of rules. However, children must not be turned into 'little reasoners who will grow up into sophists . . . '. 'Great circumspection should be used in the choice of occasions which will be given to the child to use his judgement.' He must not get into the habit of judging his schoolmates, nor must he be allowed to lose his feelings of shame or honour. 'What would one do when the child avows his mistakes without blushing?' It would be improper to ask him to judge directly his parents, neighbours and people to whom he owes respect. 'It is better to transport him at once to another sphere and give him very elevated thoughts, so that he does not, as it were, see the faults and ugliness in the middle of which he lives; but so that, when he does come to see them, he will judge them implicitly and from above, without discussing them. Inspire in him by example such a great respect for the law, that when in his turn he is tempted to become a poacher or to defraud the tax collector, as is so often done in the countryside, the majesty of the law will rise before him, so to speak, and restrain him.' Science was no way to inculcate such ideas into him. It teaches the struggle for existence and the brutal

1 Paul Janet, *Eléments de morale pratique* (1889).


3 Emile Boutroux, *Les Récents manuels de morale et d'instruction civique, Revue pédagogique* (15 April 1883), 322.
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triumph of force. Much better therefore to rely on the old syllabus of literary culture générale to instil morality.1

Madame Gréville, whose republican textbook on morals for girls (1822) was immediately condemned by the Church, did indeed leave God out, but otherwise she advised behaviour of a pretty traditional kind. She talked of the development of equality between the sexes and lamented that much still needed to be done to improve the lot of women, but meanwhile women’s function was to please men. ‘Men demand of women, first of all, that they should have the virtues and appearance of women.’ So women should not be too masculine. They should guard their virtue, for faults considered insignificant in men are catastrophic for women. ‘Their delicate sentiments will disappear in proportion as they show a little more of their necks and their arms’: it is undesirable that they should cease to be ashamed and to blush when people look at them. To keep themselves virtuous, Madame Gréville recommends that they should examine their consciences every time they wash their hands. Their place was in the home; if they got bored and wandered in the streets, they would encounter temptations which would lead them to far worse evils. Those who were not interested by housework ‘could not long remain honourable women’. It was their fault if they did not make their homes attractive enough to keep their husbands there. Even though they did not have the vote, they should have an opinion on politics, but if this differed from that of their husbands, they should keep it to themselves, to avoid discord. Women unfortunately had the not undeserved reputation of being chatterboxes; so they should get into the habit of speaking only when they had something worth saying.2

Maria Deraismes, editor of Le Républicain de Seine-et-Oise

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(1881–9) and organizer of anticlerical congresses in 1881 and 1882, inveighed against novel-reading with almost as much wrath as the clergy, though with more discrimination. In a lecture to the Freemasons’ Grand Orient, she deplored the immoral influence of novels, with their contemptible heroes, their exploitation of scandal and their destruction of ‘principles and sentiments’. Almost like a rigorist preacher, she attacked the age for devoting itself to the unthinking pursuit of pleasure, neglecting the superior pleasures of ‘the intelligence and the heart’ for the inferior satisfaction of the senses, idle amusements and temporary distractions. ‘The phalanx of bastards and foundlings are the innocent victims of this pleasure.’ Pleasure, she insisted, must be enjoyed within the limits of duty, or the family would be destroyed. The feminists were nearly all republicans, but for them the winning of women’s rights went hand in hand with the suppression of vice.3

The Church told people what to do when they were married. The republican state, even when it took over the teaching of morality, was too prudish to do so. The hints it gave suggested that it was legitimate to enjoy sex in moderation but that it was best not to talk about it. Janet wrote: ‘The honourable man enjoys his pleasures with simplicity and without thinking about them’.4

A best-selling guide to the Hygiene and Physiology of Marriage, by a retired army medical officer, which between 1848 and 1883 went through 172 editions, is as near as one can get to enlightened lay opinion on this matter. The author dispels the myth that women do not enjoy intercourse, and his book is designed to show how both sexes can derive pleasure from it and maintain their enjoyment into old age. He urges women to satisfy their husbands, if they want to keep them; but he advises husbands to win their wives by affection and caresses, rather than by force or command. But he too counsels moderation. (Copulation more frequent than two to four times a week for those under 30, twice a week between 30 and 40, once a week till 50, will destroy the freshness of women’s charm and possibly give them cancer of the

1 H. Marion, L’Enseignement moral, Revue pédagogique (July-December 1882), 5–21. That the books on morals discussed here were widely available may be seen, for example, from Ministère de l’Instruction publique, Exposition universelle de 1889 à Paris, Trois types de bibliothèques populaires (1889), which gives three interesting catalogues.
2 Madame Henry Gréville, Instruction morale et civique des jeunes filles (1882), 139–77.
3 Janet, 250n.
4 Maria Deraismes, Nos Principes et nos mœurs (1868), 308–350.
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ovaries; it will make men impotent.) He is not willing to discuss the details of ‘permitted postures’, as the Catholic casuists do: “Where the devil were they sticking their noses?” he asks angrily. And he says not a word about contraception.

Another doctor, a member of the inspectorate of public health, said it ‘would dirty his pen’ to describe contraceptive methods. However, his book on Marriage Relations, which went through six editions, was an attack on conjugal onanism, which he declares, was ‘an almost universal usage’ in every social class. He condemns it as the scourge of the times, in language which is just as vigorous as Bishop Bouvier’s. He reaches the same conclusions as the Church, though by a different route. He quotes the latest scientific publications to argue that conjugal onanism produced appalling nervous disorders (though he does not say these were universal: he cites only a few cautionary examples). He recommends the rhythm method as a substitute—’chastity within certain limits’, moderation once again. It is interesting that in theory this doctor was liberal, indeed advanced. He sings the praises of Fourier, who had believed in free love and trial marriages; he thinks that sexual instincts should be satisfied from the outset of puberty and he condemns the law against marriage before eighteen. However, like the radical party in politics, which had the most advanced ideals in theory but practised the most prudent moderation, he is in no hurry to put Fourier’s ideas into effect. Contradicting himself he insists, like the Church, that the purpose of sexual relations should be reproduction.

The ordinary man was thus not presented with alternatives which were wholly clear cut. Proudhon might say that the masses looked on the Church as an institution that stopped them from being happy, but his own moral code was asceticism itself. Comte likewise did not attack Catholicism in order to foster moral licencce; he invented frightening totalitarian schemes to instil altruism into everybody. The republican attitude was well put by Louis Havet, professor at the Collège de France and later a leading Dreyfusard, who thus defined how France should be saved ‘by the republic and by free thought, by morals and by discipline…. We must free ourselves from all authority and all tradition that is not based on reason; we must at the same time govern ourselves severely, repress every weakness and every petty interest, practise respect and obedience to every proper command.’ The function of philosophy was to establish the rule of truth and duty. ‘The best religion is that which keeps moral character in its greatest purity and which prescribes to people the most severe rule of morals.’

Did the masses know what they were doing when they gave their support to the anticlerical leaders? Did they believe that liberation from the Church would give them freer lives? Were the bourgeois morals which the intellectual anticlericals dispensed to them a disappointment, so that they were cheated by the Third Republic, as they had been cheated in 1789? Or were the masses so indoctrinated by traditional values that they did not want a moral revolution? Louis Veuillot, one of the most influential Catholic journalists of the century, said that he was opposed to anticlericalism not least because he was a son of the petit peuple and anticlericalism was a bourgeois doctrine. Many socialists said the same thing. It is certainly impossible to isolate anticlericalism from the social and moral conflicts of the nineteenth century.

This essay has put forward a number of hypotheses which, it is hoped, further research may test and amplify. The first is that the confession is an institution the study of which could reveal a great deal to historians and social scientists, and that it is an institution which has taken on a variety of forms at different periods and in different regions of France and of the world. It requires—and indeed seems an ideal subject for—both comparative and interdisciplinary research. The methods of sociology and social

2 Dr Alex. Mayer, Des Rapports conjuaux considérés sous le triple point de vue de la population, de la santé et de la morale publique (1874, 6th edition), viii, 76, 221, 254.
1 L. Havet, Le christianisme et ses origines (3rd edition 1880), 1. xi. (My italics.)
anthropology are needed to discover how the confession has been practised over the last fifty years, to see not only what questions were asked, how careful and prolonged the scrutiny and how severe the penances, but also what the attitudes of the faithful to confession have been, how they have altered, how they compare with their attitudes to, for example, psychoanalysis, how they relate to other attitudes, for example, to authority and pleasure, and what connexion they have with the rest of the penitent's behaviour. It would be useful to contrast the French situation with the Greek Orthodox one, where there is far less anteclericalism and where confession is made not to the village priests but to specially authorized monks with a reputation for holiness, outside the village community.1 It would be worth investigating further the view put forward by an anthropologist studying an Italian village, that the confession is a key factor in explaining the power of the priest in social relations: the priest is able to act as arbitrator because he knows his parishioners' difficulties more intimately than anyone else in disputes, since he knows the hidden motives and private histories of those involved, he can often offer fairer justice than the police or the law courts.2 At another level, the historian of art and architecture would find fascinating material in the variations of the confessional box, which has known surprisingly many shapes. At one extreme is the confessional à surprise: one such had a painting of Christ on a panel which, at the touch of a button, changed into a picture of the devil with flaming eyes and gnashing teeth the size of tusks, to the accompaniment of frightening noises produced by whistles and organ pipes. Some confessionals offer privacy; others, such as those in some shrines to which peasants still come crawling on their knees, have the priest illuminated as though on a throne, while the penitent weeps publicly in full view of the crowds. It may be that these variations could be related to changes in the emphases of Catholic moral theology. Again, there are an enormous number of caricatures about the confession—descriptive, suggestive or bawdy—which would repay study: the history of humour, one may add, is still in a very primitive state.

The second hypothesis is that the rigour of inquisition and the severity of sanctions may have some relation to the spread of anteclericalism and the decline in church attendance. Much has been written about the interference of the clergy in political disputes, but very little so far about the effects of its probing into people's private lives. However, in France it seems that the tenacious survival of Jansenist rigorism in certain areas, and its propagation well into the nineteenth century through Bailly's widely used seminary textbook and other works, did produce a clergy who were particularly repressive in dealing with sin and with pleasure. Sexual behaviour may have been an important subject of dispute between the priest and his parishioners, in a way which has not hitherto been realized. Bishop Bouvier's letter to the Pope, quoted above, is an extremely valuable piece of evidence. It asserts without hesitation that the prying by confessors into sexual habits and their prohibition of birth control was producing protests and driving people away from church. Naturally, it is impossible to generalize from this about the whole of France. More information will first be needed about how confessors behaved in different regions, and local factors may make it difficult to isolate the effects of their behaviour. In Brittany, for example, the existence of pardons (pilgrimages and feasts involving communal confession) complicates the issue; there also, though the priests fulminated against dancing, their pious flocks nevertheless made dancing one of their major recreations—a contradiction explained by the fact that the dances they indulged in were communal and totally without erotic content. In Lorraine, the formerly Jansenist regions have not abandoned religious practice: repression does not necessarily produce protest. The confession needs to be studied within the context of local traditions. But it is interesting to find a bishop pointing to sexual conflicts as a principal cause of alienation from the Church and this deserves investigation. As a preliminary, the chronology of the Church's teaching needs

1 I am grateful to Dr J. K. Campbell for this point, and for other helpful comments.
3 L'Observateur Catholique (1856-67), 12. 165.
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to be established: there is still no adequate history of Catholic moral theology, let alone of its application in practice. A recent doctoral thesis on the origins of sexual taboos in France and Germany—unfortunately unpublished and written in Dutch—has discovered a battle against masturbation in the eighteenth century. The author likens the ferocity of this campaign to the witch hunts of the Middle Ages and to modern anti-Semitism.¹ This enquiry would be worth pursuing into the nineteenth century. It leads one to wonder whether the opposition to birth control may similarly have been especially powerful in some particular periods. It would be interesting to know which clergy initiated this opposition, or whether they simply joined in an outcry started by others. An understanding of the nineteenth-century position would be greatly helped also by a comparison with reactions to puritanism in the seventeenth century.

The third suggestion is that these problems of anticlericalism can be used to shed light on the development of the family. Michelet’s hostility to the confession is linked with his concern for the emancipation of women. But he makes it clear that he is anxious not just to liberate women from clerical oppression; he also wants to strengthen the family and in particular the power of the husband in it. The confessor appealed to him as the great enemy or rival of the husband. Now in the nineteenth century the idea was frequently put forward that paternal authority was on the decline; and it may be that hostility to the confessor and anticlericalism was some form of rearguard action to safeguard or preserve this authority. The French family, however, is yet another subject on which practically no research has been done. It is extraordinary what large areas of French life still await investigation.

¹ Josef Maria Willem Van Ussel, *Sociogenese en evolutie van het probleem der sekuele propagande tussen de 16de en de 18de eeuw, vooral in Frankrijk en Duitsland. Bijdrage tot de studie van de burgerlijke sekuele moraal*. Amsterdam University thesis for the Doctorate of Letters, defended 28 February 1907.

CHAPTER II

THE CONFLICT IN EDUCATION

CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS (1850–70): A REAPPRAISAL

ROBERT ANDERSON

Catholic secondary schools in France have had a troubled history. The loi Falloux of 1850 inaugurated one of the few periods in the nineteenth century when they were able to expand with relative freedom from official interference and hostile criticism. The aim of this essay is to trace the effects of the loi Falloux in the first twenty years of its operation on boys’ secondary education. How did the new Catholic schools grow, and what different types of school were there? Why did parents choose Catholic rather than state schools, and how far was the division between the two sectors a social one? What education, moral and intellectual, did the Catholic schools give, and how did it differ from that of the state’s lycées? Finally, why did the development of these schools come to be seen, even by the conservative government of the Second Empire, as a threat to the social unity of France, so that the granting of ‘liberty of education’ led in time to a new cycle of repression?

It may be as well to say something at the outset about the provisions of the loi Falloux itself and the intentions of the men who made it. Their first aim, of course, was to remove the restrictions on private education which had existed since the creation of the University by Napoleon. The University had been intended to take over the Church’s functions as dispenser of education, and Napoleon’s legislation did not provide for any large-scale revival of private education; such private schools as were permitted to exist were regarded as ancillary to the University, which