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The Evolution of La Petite Église from Episcopal Protest to Lay Church

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**The Last Sentinels of Gallicanism: The Evolution of La Petite Église from Episcopal
Protest to Lay Church**

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award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts

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Abstract

The Petite Église is a grouping of communities of French Catholics which emerged from the context of Gallicanism, Jansenism and Revolution in opposition to the Concordat of 1801 between Napoleon and the Catholic Church. This opposition was first characterised as a protest of the bishops of the *ancien régime* to the demand of Pius VII that they resign their sees. To this day that opposition is incarnated in the communities of the Petite Église. These communities however exist without clergy and have developed their own religious and social customs and identity in adapting to their circumstances. The question at the heart of this study is of how a primarily episcopal protest transformed into this present lay community. Examination of the roles of the bishops, priests and laity in the formation of these communities allows us to see the multifaceted influences which engendered their existence, whether continued or purely historical. By examination of the conduct and writings of the anti-concordatist bishops we seek to demonstrate that the continuation of their protest, transformed into a community deprived of clergy, was instigated, and in some cases even willed, by them. The response of the laity to this loss of clergy reveals a remarkable and often painful loyalty to the bishops and to the principles of the Gallican Church of which they see themselves not only as the heirs, but the defenders.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

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My thanks above all to the bookseller on the Chaussée d'Ixelles in Brussels who first told me of the Petite Église.

This work is dedicated to the staff and students of the Bristol University Catholic Chaplaincy
'pars autem Domini populus eius'

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:

R. Allen

DATE:17th August 2019

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Introduction

La Petite Église represents a singular, albeit obscure, example of a community that has traversed over two centuries of history and grave challenges to its cohesion and membership but, through adaptation and fidelity to its identity, has ensured its continued existence.¹ ‘Petite Église’ is an umbrella term, denoting those Catholics who in the tumult of the French Revolution rejected the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution, remaining loyal to the Catholic Church, but who then also refused to recognise the legitimacy of the ecclesiastical structure after the Concordat of 1801.² This loyalty did not arise from an ultramontanistic attachment to Rome, but rather from an unstinted loyalty to Gallican principles. Rooted in Gallicanism and Jansenism, the movement provided for a body of Catholics fiercely loyal to both their Church and their country but whose tendencies were decidedly French rather than explicitly Roman. These dual loyalties to France and the Church would be severely tested by the Concordat of 1801 which aimed to restore the breach that had arisen with the Revolution, and to reorganise and restore the Church in France.³ The terms of the Concordat included an ecclesiastical legitimisation of the Napoleonic regime, together with a reorganisation of the ecclesiastical structure. This included a reform of French dioceses – the bishops of the *ancien régime* were asked to resign their sees in order to make way for the new hierarchy established by the Concordat. Thirty-eight of these bishops refused to do so, arguing that the pope had exceeded his powers. From exile in London, they published the *Réclamations*, outlining the basis for their refusal, urging the Catholics of France to resist the Concordat, and proposing to govern those Catholics, laity and priests, who remained faithful to them as a sort of parallel Church – the movement which became known as the Petite Église.

¹ Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche : Geste Édition, 1999), 15.

² Although generally known as the Petite Église the community has also been known by other terms in various regions where it existed such as *Blancs*, *Anticoncordataires*, *Blanchardistes*, *Clémentins*, *Dissidents*, *Enfarinés*, *Filochois*, *Illuminés*, *Louisets*, *Purs*, and *Stévenists*.

³ For studies on the Concordat see in particular: Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, ‘Commentaire du Concordat de 1801 entre la France et le Saint-Siège’ *Revue d’Histoire ecclésiastique*, 102 (1), 2007 : 124-154. François-Désiré Mathieu, *Le Concordat de 1801: ses origines, son histoire, d’après des documents inédits* (Paris: 1903). Émile Sévestre, *L’histoire, le texte et la destinée du Concordat de 1801* (Paris: Librairie de P. Lethielleux, 1905). Bernard Ardura, *Le Concordat entre Pie VII et Bonaparte, 15 juillet 1801: Bicentenaire d’une réconciliation* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001). Henry Horace Walsh, *The Concordat of 1801: A Study of the Problem of Nationalism in the Relations of Church and State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933). Jean-Pierre Chantin, *Le régime concordataire français. La collaboration des Églises et de l’État (1802-1905)* (Paris: Beauchesne, coll. Bibliothèque Beauchesne, 2010). Rodney Dean, *L’Église constitutionnelle, Napoléon et le Concordat de 1801* (Paris: Picard, 2004). Jacques-Olivier Boudon, *Le Concordat et le retour de la paix religieuse* (Paris: Institut Napoléon, 1998).

At its height, the Petite Église numbered some three-hundred clergy and 100,000 lay faithful distributed in various parts of France and Belgium.⁴ Initially directed by the bishops of the *ancien régime* who from their exile had rejected the Concordat, the members of the Petite Église continued to support dissident priests and to practise a clandestine religion as they had during the Revolution. Supported by its clergy, the Petite Église was thus able to provide a public opposition to the concordatist regime both in France and in England. This opposition provoked the ire of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and yet the Petite Église continued unabated. Its existence would eventually be threatened by the death or submission of clergy and the refusal of the last remaining bishop to provide new clergy for the community. As the clergy began to disappear, an adaptation to these changed circumstances would be necessary for the Petite Église to survive. At first the faithful, principally in Lyon and Poitou, attempted to rectify their situation by appeals to the Old Catholics or else priests who had been suspended by the concordatist bishops, yet both means of securing clergy for the Petite Église were to prove unsuccessful. As the clergy died and communities were left without ministers, the Petite Église developed an entirely lay-led form of worship and governance. Its unique ecclesiastical life resulted in a closed community, wary of outsiders and developing the peculiar social mores and identity which today count on the loyalty of some four-thousand adherents.⁵

The question at the heart of this research is to examine the transition of the Petite Église from its origins as an episcopal protest to its present state as an entirely lay-led community which retains elements of pre-Revolutionary Catholic life and worship, albeit adapted to the complete absence of clergy. The intentions of the bishops are especially relevant, given their unwillingness to provide new clergy, and yet, at the same time, encouraging the laity in their opposition to the Concordat. A key area of study, therefore, is the period immediately after the death of the last bishop of the Petite Église, when communities struggled to maintain their identity in the absence of clergy and, with varying degrees of success, to adapt to these changed circumstances or else disappear.⁶ The efforts of the communities that survived this transition are particularly useful in demonstrating the particular emergence of the Petite Église as a lay community from the context of a clerical dispute.

Up until now, studies of the Petite Église have tended to be articles or pamphlets focused on local groups such as those of Brittany, Toulouse, Cassaniouze, Charollais, Seez,

⁴ Guy Janssen, 'Autorités et dissidence: la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire', in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds.), « Sectes » et « hérésies » de l'Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 2002), 133.

⁵ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 15.

⁶ Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 19.

Burgundy, the High Alps, Lombez and Vendôme.⁷ In Belgium, an anticoncordatist group also arose which has also been the subject of historical research and local investigation.⁸ The two largest and most influential groups of the Petite Église, both historically and at present, are in the Poitou and Lyon, and more recent studies have focused on these communities and their relation to the wider society of these regions.⁹ Studies also exist on particular stages in the formation of the Petite Église and on the opposition to the Concordat more generally.¹⁰ Only one work exists that seeks to treat fully the history of the Petite Église, that of Drochon. This work has been heavily criticised, most especially by the members of the Petite Église. It is now some 120 years old and represents the voice of one who was himself ardently opposed to the Petite Église.¹¹

⁷ The Petite Église has often been the object of fascination or ridicule by the press throughout its history. For example, in 1892 a Parisian journalist described the group as ‘schismatics, heretics, and inoffensive old men’ :« Les Illuminés »: derniers débris du schisme anticoncordataire’ in *Le Matin : derniers télégrammes de la nuit*, 7 janvier 1892, 1, col. 4 – 2, col. 1; yet recent press articles are less than complimentary, with descriptions of the community as ‘living signs of schism . . . curious . . . archaic . . .’ ‘Vendée: les derniers survivants de la Petite Église’ in *L’Histoire*, Septembre 1993, 68-71. For regional groupings of the Petite Eglise see Etienne Aubrée, *Les Louisets* (Paris ; Perrin, 1943). J. Gros, ‘La « Petite Église » de Toulouse’ *La Revue de Paris*, (1906/05-1906/06), 622-643. J. Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze » « Les Enfarines » 1801-1911* (Aurillac : Moderne, 1912). Claude Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais* (Dijon: Bernigaud et Privat, 1930). L. de la Sicotière, *Notes sur la Petite Église au diocèse de Séez* (Évreux: 1894). Marie-Aimée Duvernois, ‘Les Blancs, minorité anti-concordataire : microdifférence religieuse et identité régionale dans le sud de la Bourgogne’ *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 64/ 1 (1987), 157-176. J. Roman, *Le Clergé des Hautes-Alpes pendant la Révolution: La Petite Église* (Paris: Picard et Fils, 1899). Paul Gabent, *Les illuminés ou anticoncordataires de l’ancien diocèse de Lombez* (Auch: 1906). Louis Chesneau, *Les Dissidents vendômois de la petite église* (Impr. Launay et fils, 1924).

⁸ Émile Torfs, *Le stévenisme dans le sud-ouest du Brabant* (Cercle Archéologique d’Enghien, 1955). F. Wijverkens, *Het anticoncordatisme of Stevenisme* (Hal: 1927). Given the separate political and ecclesiastical history of that country, the Belgian community will not form a focus for this study but will be referenced where appropriate.

⁹ Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004). Dane examines the motivations of the bishops and the conduct of the anticoncordatist clergy to trace the roots of the ‘dissident’ community, although his study is far from comprehensive. Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église en Vendée, Courlay et la famille Texier* (Fontenay-le-Comte, 1955) examines the rôle of the Texier family in the Petite Église of Poitou. Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991). C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911). Fernand Martin d’Auxois, *La Petite Église du Lyonnais* (Fribourg : 1987). Jean-Pierre Chantin, *Les Amis de l’Œuvre de la Vérité ; Jansénisme, miracles et fin du monde au XIX^e siècle* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1998). Yves Krumenacker, *Du jansénisme à la secte: Vie de Monsieur Claude Germain, cure de Lacenas (1750-1831)* (Paris: Publisud, 1998). Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961). J. Rouger and J-L. Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence* (UPCP/Geste Paysanne, 1987). presents the social position of the Petite Église in Poitou, especially the unique liturgical and moral life of the community, together with new pressures facing the community in the modern age.

¹⁰ C. Latreille, *L’opposition religieuse au Concordat de 1792 à 1803* (Hachette, 1910) and C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l’opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910).

¹¹ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015). Billaud accused Drochon of “changing dates, falsifying, elongating texts. . . without the least scruple”; see Auguste Billaud, ‘Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église’ in *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest et des musées de Poitiers* (Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest, 1957) 1957/07-1957/09, 207. C. Prost, a member of the community at Lyon declares the work of Drochon to be of “no historic value . . . the art of speaking without saying anything . . . saying things of which one does not know one word . . . it is always easy to be a journalist, but impossible to be a historian without a laborious preparation and perfect

A particular concern of this study is to make use of sources emanating from members of the Petite Église itself. Studies have hitherto either focused on the evolution of the Petite Église, the episcopal opposition, the place of the Petite Église in a local context or in its relation to other movements, or else have been the product of the condescending and inquisitive approach of those opposed to its cause.¹² The Petite Église has a clear understanding of its reason for existing and is marked above all by a fierce loyalty to its principles and practices. Though today a community wary of outsiders, material nonetheless exists which enables us to examine the voice of the Petite Église from a fresh perspective. This ranges from the theological arguments of the bishops and the prevarications of the last clergy, through the attempts to secure clergy and to have the cause of the Petite Église addressed by the Church at large, to more personal and individual texts of community members which enable us to examine the intransigent principles and adapted religious practices which cemented the Petite Église into the identity that characterises it today.

honesty”; see Joanny Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire, son histoire, son état actuel* (Paris: Bodin, 1906) 21-22. The ‘otherness’ of the Petite Église in French society has drawn several works of fiction to be written with members of the community as its subjects; see Ernest Pérochon, *Nêne* (Plon: 1920) regarding the community of Deux-Sevres, Charles Le Goffic, *L’Abbesse de Guérande* (Plon, 1921) centred around a female leader of the *Louisets*, Jean Gauthier, *L’Oïasse* (Éditions Henri Roudil, 1965) regarding the community and religious life of the Blancs, Jean-Paul Desprat, *Les Enfarinés* (Éditions de Rouergue, 2000) centred on a family of the Petite Église of Rouergue, Jeanine Picard-Chevalier, *Les Charrier du pas de Pierre* (U.P.C.P. – Geste Paysanne, 1985) on various generations of a family of the Petite Église, and Yves Viollier, *L’orgueil de la tribu* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 2003) which centres around a female member of the Petite Église and her flight from, and eventual return to, the community.

¹² This is especially the case in regard to Drochon.

I. The Distinctive Nature of the Petite Église

Whilst groups exist which have become distinct from the social and religious practice of mainstream Catholicism in France, and indeed groups of Catholics have maintained their identity whilst deprived of clergy, the Petite Église represents a community which has, in its development and to the present, emerged as a survival of pre-Revolutionary Catholicism albeit as an entirely lay community. The Petite Église, unlike other communities of Catholics, represents a community that has become adapted to the deprivation of clergy and thus developed a liturgical life which does not ignore this but rather maintains its principles in the reality of its situation. The question therefore at the heart of this study is to demonstrate how the protests of the exiled French episcopacy in the nineteenth century were able to form the lay community which exists in present-day France. What this study seeks to demonstrate is not only how that transformation took place, but also how the encouragement of the episcopacy led to both the distinctive identity of the community and a crystallisation of its relationship as separate, and different, from the wider Church. Before entering into an examination of those protests, the context in which they arose, and the actions which led to the community's emergence, it is necessary here to examine the present reality of the Petite Église so as to appreciate the singularity of the transformation which engendered the community.

We shall see below that the Petite Église emerged in differing ways in the various regions where communities developed. This has led to a lack of uniformity in its rituals but nonetheless communality exists in the principles which underlie these practices. The separateness of the community is not hidden and members do not attend mainstream Catholic worship. In Poitou and Charollais (where the community is known as *les Blancs*) community prayers take place in chapels belonging to the Petite Église, but elsewhere take place in family homes.¹ In some regions, the Petite Église has its own part of the local cemetery, but in Lyon, the deceased faithful are buried without separation from their neighbours.² Such chapels (to which 'outsiders' are not admitted) are not mirrored in the Petite Église at Lyon, where the faith is more domestic and familial, though nonetheless chapels do exist in Lyon and its environs, where hosts consecrated by the last priests are said to be kept.³ Although worship is

¹ Claude Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais* (Dijon: 1930) 225.

² Guy Janssen, 'Autorités et dissidence: la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire', in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds.), « Sectes » et « hérésies » de l'Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002) 143.

³ Fernand Martin d'Auxois, *La Petite Église du Lyonnais* (Fribourg: 1987), 37. With the last priests of the Lyon community dying in 1831, these hosts would be nearly 200 years old.

lay-led, the liturgy continues to be that of the eighteenth century rites with the essentially priestly parts adapted or excised. In the chapels, the altars are thus prepared for Mass with a priest, with the liturgical vestments laid out on the altar.⁴ In Poitou these vestments are presented with an empty chalice and ciborium.⁵ Without a priest there can be no consecration of hosts, but the gestures of the priest are imitated.⁶ In a further demonstration of a liturgy which highlights the deprivation of priests, and thus of the Eucharist, on the feast of Corpus Christi an empty monstrance is placed on the altar at La Plainelière.⁷ Such public rites portray a deep longing on the part of the members of the Petite Église for the Eucharist and an acknowledgement of this mystery of which they are deprived. In the same vein, funerals are also an occasion at which the absence of clergy and the particular situation of the Petite Église are openly acknowledged; at Courlay, coffins are placed over the grave of their last priest as a sign of devotion and the prayers recited mourn the loss of clergy.⁸ The use of such inherently priestly rites such as Mass, but adapted to the lack of clergy, reflect not only the situation of the community, but also incarnate the narrative which sustains it and which we shall see emerge; that it is through loyalty to the Gallican Church and the anticoncordatist bishops that they are deprived of clergy, but nonetheless remain faithful, in so far as possible, to traditional Catholic life and worship.

This adherence to pre-Revolutionary customs, which thus sustains the identity of the community as a continuation of the Gallican Church, is reflected in other rites that are

⁴ Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004). 117. In 1934, a journalist obtained entry to the chapel at La Plainelière and published images of the baroque decoration of the chapel as well as of the liturgy of the Petite Église. See J. Bonnenfant 'L'agonie d'un schisme en Vendée' in *L'Illustration* 18 août 1934 no. 4772. Apart from La Plainelière, other chapels exist at Cirières, Beaulieu-sous-Bressuire, Montigny, Petit-Plessis, Saint-Martin-les-Tilleuls, Puytharand, Richemont, Aubiers, Saint-André-sur-Sèvres ; see Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991) 86 and Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961) 594.

⁵ These, together with the vestments, had been taken from the parish church at Courlay at the death of the last priest of the Petite Église who had ministered there (being afterwards replaced with a concordatist priest by the ecclesiastical authorities). See de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 86.

⁶ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 110.

⁷ This feast is one of the most important in the life of the community in the Poitou and attracts the attendance of members from every region of the Petite Église; today this often amounts to some 900 faithful. See Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 117. Guy Janssen, 'Autorités et dissidence : la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire', 142; Janssen recalls overhearing a non-dissident member of the local population in a café on this day exclaiming 'It's the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of Mitterrand', in reference to the leftist tendencies of the Petite Église of Poitou to the present.

⁸ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 238. The text of the prayers are "Forgive him his sins and do not deprive him of the divine effects of the sacraments which You have instituted for Your Church; sacraments he desired to receive and which he was only deprived of because of the disposition of Your Divine Providence which keeps us faithful only to our legitimate pastors. We beg You therefore to have the greatest indulgence towards him whom You have willed to be deprived of the most sensible consolations in the last moments of his life just as it was for Your Son Our Lord" and "Lord, we beg You in particular for Your mercy for the repose of the soul of Your servant, who did not have the assistance of a priest, not that he did not desire it, but because of his fidelity to our ancient pastors"; see De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 89.

maintained or adapted. Sundays are the principal day of prayer, but communities have always held to the celebration of those feasts that had otherwise been suppressed by the Concordat thus further separating them from other Catholics. Members of the Petite Église fast according to the discipline of the eighteenth century and women must keep their heads covered on entering the chapel.⁹ The main focus of the liturgy is the reading of the texts of the Mass and Office from liturgical books as they were prior to the Revolution.¹⁰ In the larger chapels at La Plainelière and Cirières, an organ and singers are employed so that the liturgy can be sung (in Latin and French) but otherwise, in smaller chapels and in the home, the liturgy is recited – when time is short a ceremony suffices wherein the text is read rather than recited, although, given the length of the ancient liturgy, when recited or sung it is always done so at speed.¹¹ These divergent approaches reflect an ability to adapt to the needs of the community while remaining coherent with the desire to maintain the rites of the Gallican Church.

Whilst the above rituals are demonstrative of how the Petite Église has sought to maintain priestly and eucharistic worship without benefiting from either, other rituals of the community are more distinctive adaptations to its lay composition. As we noted above, whilst there is great veneration for the Eucharist by the community, it is the veneration of a Eucharist which is absent. The Petite Église has thus adopted the practice of spiritual communion, as Catholics were urged so to do by Pius VI during the paucity of priests in Revolutionary times, and as the anticoncordatist bishops urged the Petite Église to practise when deprived of clergy. The community therefore is able to maintain that its ritual of spiritual communion is in continuity with these mandates of the Church.¹² In keeping with a rigid respect for the Eucharist (even spiritually) and pre-Revolutionary rites, spiritual communion is made with the customs which traditionally accompanied actual communion – confession and penance, devotions the

⁹ Such practices were either heavily modified or abandoned by the Catholic Church in the era following the Concordat. See Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche : Geste Édition, 1999), 44. In a similar vein the Petite Église has retained customs which are now waning amongst other Catholics; alongside devotion to the Virgin Mary and saints, the Petite Église is especially devoted to the veneration of the ‘good priests’ and the anticoncordatist bishops. At La Plainelière there existed a small museum with relics of these clergymen, and a practice had arisen of scapulars made of the cassocks of their last priests whom they venerated as saints. Other practices include pilgrimages to places associated with the saints as well as to the tombs of the ‘martyrs’ of the Vendée. For the *Blancs*, too, pilgrimage has an important role with several taking place each year to churches, chapels or fountains which are deemed to have an especial significance. See de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 85 ; and Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais*, 228-234.

¹⁰ The missal in use is a reprint of the missal of La Rochelle of 1787; see Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 110.

¹¹ Around 1,200 members of the Petite Église live in the region of Courlay and La Plainelière today and some 150 in the region of Cirières; see Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 38-39, 44. The Epistle and Gospel, having been chanted or read in Latin, are also read in French, together with readings from pre-Revolutionary devotional texts taking the place of the sermon. See Joanny Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire, son histoire, son état actuel* (Paris: Bodin, 1906), 20.

¹² C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 201-202.

week before and after, and fasting before the act is made.¹³ This adherence to ancient customs is reflected in the rigorous preparation the children must make for their first (naturally, spiritual) holy communion; for one month they must learn, page by page, the catechism of 1790 of La Rochelle. Some groups continue the practice, now becoming rarer, of a full two years of preparation.¹⁴ Although spiritual communion is a usual custom for Catholics deprived of clergy, divergent customs exist in the Petite Église; in the practice of the *Blancs* for example the host is replaced by a cake, made in the family home, which is then distributed.¹⁵ Even the practice of spiritual communion provoked the curiosity of outsiders and the outrage of the concordatists; in 1857, the bishop of Poitiers accused the ‘sister’ who had been preparing children for their spiritual communion of simulating the eucharist by giving them unconsecrated bread, but the Petite Église protested that she was merely instructing them how communion appeared.¹⁶ Thus, even whilst the Petite Église followed the recommendations of popes and bishops for the conduct of Catholics whilst deprived of priests, these customs became distinctive in their context, serving to further highlight the Petite Église’s rejection of the surrounding concordatist clergy and marking it as a community apart from both Church and society. The examination of this study will show how this separation was fomented and encouraged.

Other rites which require a priest have not been adapted by the Petite Église; thus, affirming the community seeks not to create a new religion, but rather to remain faithful to its traditions in spite of its circumstances. Without a bishop, neither confirmation nor ordination are mirrored in any way. For confession, an examination of conscience takes its place, together with a direct confession to God and a self-imposed penance; Dane repeats the expression of the members of the Petite Église that they ‘would rather confess to a dog than a concordatist priest.’¹⁷ Lay Christians had always been able to perform baptism and thus the Petite Église celebrates this in the home or in a chapel and this is administered using the traditional pre-Revolutionary liturgical books by either an elder of the community, the one responsible for the

¹³ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 46. The assiduous fasting of members of the Petite Église could occasion embarrassment to the less penitential concordatist clergy see Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 238.

¹⁴ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 87. and Jean-Louis Neveu ‘Du catéchisme à la communion spirituelle’ in Jany Rouger and Jean-Louis Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence*, 64-77. Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 47.

¹⁵ Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais*, 226.

¹⁶ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 210-212.

¹⁷ Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire*, 20. Brun, ‘Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais’, 216. Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 112.

chapel or, in the case of Lyon, the school-teacher.¹⁸ In baptism, therefore, as in the Eucharist, we see the rites maintained, yet also the necessary modifications with regard to lay leadership.

Marriage represents a more evident case in which the Petite Église differs from the rest of French society; encouraged by their last priests, members of the Petite Église contravene French law and are married religiously before presenting themselves civilly. Although this created difficulties in the past, it is now tolerated by the authorities.¹⁹ Dane reports that in 2003 a religious ceremony took place at the chapel of La Plainelière after a civil ceremony had taken place; thus this may hint that the practice of the Petite Église may be beginning to conform with civil law.²⁰ These ceremonies take place early in the morning, in the presence family and friends, and are celebrated before a community elder.²¹ Here we see the Petite Église maintaining a rite, with adaptations encouraged by the last clergy, which not only underlines the lay status of the community, but which also differentiates it from civil practice established after the Revolution and the Concordat.

These customs of the Petite Église have developed in response to the loss of clergy and thus formed the identity and separateness of the community. We shall see below that the adaptation to lay leadership, and thus of distinct customs, was foreseen by the last anticoncordatist clergy who encouraged such adaptations and sought thus to guide the community after their disappearance. Whilst some communities were lay-led from their emergence, others were forced to adapt, with the guidance of the last clergy, as the last bishops and priests either submitted or began to die. It is this lay leadership which is a distinctive feature of the Petite Église as a Catholic community. We have seen how rites usually led by priests are now practised with lay leaders, but the direction of the community itself is likewise solely lay, further underlining the separateness of the community from the wider Catholic Church. This is most visible at the Sunday liturgy of the community when the lay leader directs the rite,

¹⁸ The Roman Ritual has always contained an order of baptism ‘in case of necessity’ (that is without a cleric) and this is the rite used by the Petite Église. See Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 111. De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 87. D’Auxois, *La Petite Eglise du Lyonnais*, 36.

¹⁹ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 236. De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 88.

²⁰ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 118.

²¹ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 111. Drochon asserts that before the marriage is celebrated, the elder, following a supposed instruction by de Thémynes, makes the following declaration: “In view of the impossibility to marry according to the rite of the Catholic Church they are here to present themselves as husband and wife in legitimate and indissoluble marriage, with the vow to consecrate their marriage by a priestly blessing as soon as is possible”; see Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 236-237. This is similar to the words for the ceremony in the advice given by Métay for marriages (see below). Not only do the religious marriages of the Petite Église sit uneasily with civil law, but, given the necessity of a priest with faculties to receive the consent of the couple, those who were married before a priest of the Petite Église who had not these faculties were dubiously married according to the Church. Nonetheless, the Holy See began to recognise these marriages in the 1950s. See R. Naz *Dictionnaire de droit canonique: contenant tous les termes du droit canonique, avec un sommaire de l'histoire et des institutions et de l'état actuel de la discipline* (Letouzey et Ané, 1957), vi, 1438-1447.

announces the news of the community, forthcoming feasts and fast days and leads prayers for the sick or deceased.²² Another aspect of the life of the Petite Église which is sharply distinctive is the leadership role played by women in the communities. Given the exclusively masculine composition of the clergy, the Petite Église is distinct in that it has relied upon women not only for catechising but also for leading worship and establishing communities.²³ These women often lived together and directed the teaching of the children, such as at Cirières and Courlay. In Poitou, it is generally the women who direct the prayers at funerals, and, at Saint-Martin-Lars, Thérèse Cossin led a community, built a chapel, and suffered arrest and imprisonment for so doing.²⁴ At Gap the organisation of the Petite Église was administered by former religious sisters who directed meetings and arranged the visits of dissident clergy; women were also able to preach at the meetings of the community – an innovation which shocked authors in 1899.²⁵ The role of women in the Petite Église is therefore another example of how the transition of the community to lay religious practices necessitated and allowed for these women to take a role to which they would not otherwise have been admitted.

Thus, whilst socially the Petite Église did not withdraw from society, nor establish itself as a sort of cult, the religious practices and observances, and their absence from the concordatist churches and festivals, already marked them apart. This position did not mean that members only associated with their co-religionists, though contacts evidently always existed between different groups of the Petite Église.²⁶ These practices and organisation illustrate the adaptation of the Petite Église, in matters social, spiritual and cultural, into a lay community that is able to continue its communal and religious life whilst being deprived of clergy. It is important to note that in no way do these practices suggest any sort of abnegation of the hope that one day their cause will be addressed, but rather represents a position of waiting for such a time to come. Whilst not every community successfully adapted to the loss of clergy, those communities of the Petite Église which did transition to lasting lay direction were faithful to the instructions of the last anticoncordatist clergy. The examination of the rites and modus

²² Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 44. Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 237.

²³ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 40. In Chagnolet two women in particular, known as “pope” and “bishop”, held a particular position amongst members of the Petite Église; ministering especially to the sick and dying and presiding at funerals: see Bernard Sebilleau *L'étonnant abbé Doussin: aumônier des armées vendéennes, chef de la Petite Église, un intégriste avant la lettre* (La Roche-sur-Yon: 1982), 31.

²⁴ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 114. Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 229-230.

²⁵ J. Roman, *Le Clergé des Hautes-Alpes pendant la Révolution : La Petite Église* (Paris: Picard et Fils, 1899), 54-55, 60.

²⁶ Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais*, 342. Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 48. Boulay de La Meurthe is mistaken when he states that groups of the Petite Église had not relation to each other: Alfred Boulay de la Meurthe *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France* (A. Mame et fils: 1925), 329.

vivendi of the Petite Église above has demonstrated that the community exists as a separate phenomenon of French Catholic society, and thus leads us to the question at the heart of this study of how such a lay-focused community in the present day was able to spring from a purely episcopal protest of the eighteenth century.

II. Gallicanism, Jansenism and Revolution

Having noted the distinctiveness of the Petite Église in the social and religious realm the question arises, which is the heart of this study, of how this community and its practices developed. The rites, prayers, and narrative of the community are rooted, not only in opposition to the Concordatist Catholic Church, but also in the desire to maintain the French Church as it existed before the Revolution and the Concordat. The self-identification of the Petite Église as the heir of this tradition points to the need to understand its emergence in the context of the heritage it claims. The present existence of the Petite Église, and its distinct identity, arise from a multifaceted context. It is in the context of the tumultuous years immediately following the beginning of the Revolution that members understand their own *raison d'être*. Most historians of the community have also adopted this optic.¹ The Petite Église, in its development and mindset, is also influenced by the Gallican heritage in which members firmly situated themselves, and which shaped a standpoint of greater independence with regard to Rome. So too, the influence of Jansenism, notably for the community at Lyon, enabled a separatist view with regard to the Roman authorities to solidify. Whilst the influence of Gallicanism is self-evident in the writings of the Petite Église, the influence of Jansenism was a source of division, especially between the Jansenistic community at Lyon and the anticoncordatist episcopacy. How the influences of Gallicanism, Jansenism and the Revolution contributed to a mindset of separation and rejection which enabled the Petite Église to arise as a distinct community, both from the wider Catholic Church and within post-Revolutionary society, is the key question to be addressed in this section.

The context of Gallicanism provides an understanding of the rejection of the Concordat by the Petite Église from the point of view of a pre-existing model of the limitation of papal authority in the mind of the French episcopacy. The unmistakable influence of Gallicanist principles upon the episcopacy of the *ancien régime* made any wholesale submission of the clergy to an agreement between the French state and Rome almost unthinkable. The main thrust of Gallicanism was already outlined in the Concordat of Bologna of 1516 whereby the French king was given the right to nominate clergy of his choosing to ecclesiastical offices. The Declaration of the Clergy of France of 1681 further adopted and affirmed the independence of

¹ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris : 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs : 2015), 15. Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 35. The Petite Église is often described as a last survival of those Catholics of the Vendée who were faithful to the Church and to the king Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche : Geste Édition, 1999), 33.

the French Church by asserting the authority of the king in all temporal matters, insisting upon the superiority of Church councils over the pope, safeguarding the prerogatives of local churches, and limiting decisions of the pope to a ratification by local churches. According to Gallicanism the pope's power in temporal matters was therefore subordinate to that of the king, and in ecclesiastical matters to Councils and the rights of local churches.² When, as a result of the Concordat, Pope Pius VII demanded by use of his papal authority that the bishops of the *ancien régime* resign en masse, those influenced by the tenets of Gallicanism could not but see such a demand as both outrageous and unfounded. The opposition of the bishops of the Petite Église does not therefore represent some new movement of opposition to papal power, but rather an opposition firmly rooted in the ecclesiastical and theological context of the Church in France.

Whilst the Petite Église firmly identifies itself with the Gallican identity of the Church of the *ancien régime*, the influence of Jansenism has been both a cause of contention within the community and an influence from which members would later attempt to distance themselves. The Jansenist controversy grew out of the papal condemnations of works based on Cornelius Jansen's *Augustinus* regarding freewill and grace. Whilst the Jansenists gained an important following in the French Church, the Jesuits led the fight against Jansenism and the movement was condemned as heretical by Rome. The subsequent controversy regarding the acceptance of these papal condemnations naturally brought to the fore the concerns of Gallicanism, and the rights of the pope to exercise such authority over the French Church.³ Whilst a thorough examination of Jansenism and its history cannot be attempted here, the Jansenist controversy provides a further example of how the Gallican principles of the French Church led to an enduring resistance to the use of papal authority in France.

² For further studies on Gallicanism see Nigel Aston, 'The Established Church' in William Doyle (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of The Ancien Régime* (Oxford University Press, 2014) 285-301, Aimé Georges Martimort, *Le Gallicanisme* (Paris: Universitaires de France, 1973), Victor Martin, *Les origines du gallicanisme* (Bloud & Gay, 1939), Peter Campbell, *Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720-1745* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), Richard F Costigan, *The Consensus of the Church and Papal Infallibility: A Study in the Background of Vatican I* (Washington: CUA Press, 2005), Ambrogio A. Caiani, 'The Concile National of 1811, Napoleon, Gallicanism and the failure of Neo-Conciliarism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 70 (3) (2019), 546-564.

³ For detailed study of the Jansenist controversy see William Doyle, *Jansenism: Catholic Resistance to Authority from the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Thomas O'Connor, 'Jansenism' in William Doyle (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of The Ancien Régime* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 318-336; B. Robert Kreiser, *Miracles, Convulsions, and Ecclesiastical Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Léon Wuillaume, *Aux origines du jansénisme en France* (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009); Françoise Hildesheimer, *Le jansénisme en France aux XVIIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris : Publisud, 1991); and Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

The influence of Jansenism in the context of the emergence of the Petite Église was notable at Lyon, where the anticoncordatist clergy and laity were drawn from pre-existing groups of Jansenists. We shall see below that these Jansenistic tendencies caused conflict between the community at Lyon and the wider clergy of the Petite Église. Whilst these conflicts arose from the community's Jansenistic leanings, later generations of the community would attempt to distance themselves from these influences, and indeed from any identification with Jansenist ideology.⁴ Recent studies have also placed the Lyon community firmly in the context of Jansenism, especially in light of the influence of Jansenist clergy in forming the community.⁵ Later rejection of this identification may be rooted in an attempt to distance the community from accusations of heresy or else seek to focus the community's opposition on the Concordat. Despite this rejection, the influence of Jansenism on the Petite Église at Lyon provides a context in which a community of Catholics, from which the Petite Église at Lyon would be drawn, were already asserting their opposition to papal pronouncements and influence over their own spiritual and communal development.

Whilst Gallicanism and Jansenism provide the ideological context for the opposition that was to arise to the Concordat, it is in the historical context of resistance to the Revolution that the Petite Église most firmly situates its own narrative. Marius Duc, a leader of the Petite Église at Lyon, situates the emergence of the community within the context of 'the hatred of the revolutionaries against . . . the Catholic religion . . . [when] the churches were closed, the crosses were toppled and for ten years the name of God seemed eradicated from the memory of men'.⁶ Most especially the Petite Église claims for itself, in a view also expressed by historians, that to it belongs the heritage of those who resisted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy who participated in political, social and military resistance to the new socio-political and ecclesiastical order imposed by the revolutionaries.⁷ Members of the Petite Église wrote in 1869 to the Fathers of the First Vatican Council that

⁴ Writing to Léon Séché in 1891, a member of the Lyon community declared that the author had been misinformed in equating the Petite Église in Lyon and Poitou with the Jansenist movement. Séché contended, however, that the Petite Église did indeed have Jansenist roots and were called 'Jansenists' by the population of Lyon. See Léon Séché *Les derniers Jansénistes*, 3 vols (Paris: 1893), iii, 273-274.

⁵ C. Latreille 'Les origines jansénistes de la Petite Eglise à Lyon' *Revue d'histoire de Lyon* 1911, 43-50. Léon Séché *Les derniers Jansénistes*; Jean-Pierre Chantin, *Les Amis de l'Œuvre de la Vérité ; Jansénisme, miracles et fin du monde au xix^e siècle* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1998) ; Yves Krumenacker, *Du jansénisme à la secte: Vie de Monsieur Claude Germain, cure de Lacenas (1750-1831)* (Paris : Publisud, 1998).

⁶ Marius Duc (1824 – 1895) was one of the most important members of the Petite Église at Lyon and a delegate of the community to the Vatican Council. Although a leading member of the community, Duc rejected the idea that he was the head of the Petite Église of Lyon (see *La Croix* 24 décembre 1893 2 col 4.) and he would eventually leave the Petite Église. Marius Duc, *Concordat de 1801: Lettre d'un père a ses enfants* (Lyon: Imprimerie d'Aimé Vingtrinier, 1869), 10.

⁷ Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 84.

during the storms of the French Revolution God gave our fathers the grace to be faithful to this illustrious Gallican Church, of which the venerable Shepherds, united to the Holy Father Pius VI, declared anathema the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and suffered the most terrible privations, exile, and even death rather than forsake what behoved them with regard to their dioceses, the Holy See, and the universal Church.⁸

These acts of resistance and the role they played in the forming of communities of Catholics loyal to those clergymen regarded as the true heirs of the Gallican church, as well as the formation of lay-led Catholic communities loyal to the principles of those same clergymen, are thus the context of the communities from which the Petite Église was to rise.⁹

The exiled French bishops of the *ancien régime* were to make frequent reference to their equation of the concordatist clergy with those who had taken the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. During the uproar of the Revolution, this Civil Constitution sought to transform the Church into an agent of the Revolution and the clergy into agents of the State. This, combined with the pre-existing legislation seizing ecclesiastical goods and forbidding monastic vows, enflamed a significant number of Catholics against the Constitutional Church. The Constitution could be regarded as following a Gallican influence, in the sense that the French state claimed prerogatives for itself that were coherent with Gallican ideals, particularly the way in which the clergy were to be appointed by the state.¹⁰ Yet the Civil Constitution was by no means less of an outrage to the majority of Catholics because of these Gallican hints. The clergy were not merely appointed by the state, but elected; thus, non-Catholics could participate in the election of clergy. The Constitution, moreover, required assent to the new order in France and the consequent assent to the seizure of ecclesiastical goods and the repression of monastic life.¹¹ By the terms of the Constitution, the State also took to itself prerogatives that the Church had always claimed as its own, such as the circumscription of dioceses, residency requirements for clergy, and remuneration of pastors.¹²

With the Civil Constitution, therefore, the state took to itself the authority to implement a radical reorganisation of the Church in France which it subjugated entirely to civil authority. The Civil Constitution especially sought to control the conduct and adherence of the clergy by means of an oath that each cleric was required to swear before his flock and the municipality.

⁸ *Reverentissima commentatio ad sacro-sanctum oecumenicum Concilium Romanum de variis actis ad ecclesiam gallicanam spectantibus* (Genève: Imprimerie de J.-G. Fick, 1869), 4.

⁹ A. Roussel, 'Le Centenaire de la Petite Église' in *Le Correspondant* (Paris: 10 juin 1903), 973.

¹⁰ Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004), 16. Title II, article 1 see *The Civil Constitution of the Clergy July 12, 1790* in J.H. Robinson (ed.), *Readings in European History* (Boston: Ginn, 1906), ii, 423-427.

¹¹ Title II, article 21

¹² Title I, article 1, Title IV, articles 2 and 3, Title III.

This oath required the cleric ‘to watch with care over the faithful of the diocese entrusted to him, to be faithful to the nation, to the law, and to the King, and to maintain with all his power the Constitution decreed by the National Assembly and accepted by the King’.¹³ The Constitution further decreed that, unless this oath was taken, no cleric could exercise his office. It is hardly surprising that this rupture with the Church of the *ancien régime* would be in the forefront of the minds of the anticoncordatist bishops in their own later revolt against what they saw as the presence of the same principles in the Concordat.

When the oath became mandatory for all clergy on 16th January 1791, only half the clergy in France agreed to take the oath.¹⁴ In some regions the number who refused was much higher- 75% in the west of France.¹⁵ The result of this was to create in effect two churches in France with their respective clergy – the constitutional and those who refused the oath (the refractories); it was in the heritage of the latter that the Petite Église would place itself. Pius VI, to whose attitude in regard to the Civil Constitution the Petite Église would frequently refer, condemned the constitutional church and prohibited the clergy from taking the oath on April 13th 1791.¹⁶ The pope had already warned the king and episcopacy that acceptance of the Constitution would place France in schism with the Catholic Church. The Constitution was condemned by the pope as ‘heretical and schismatical’ because it overturned the primacy and rights of the Church and aimed to destroy the Catholic religion. Pius VI extolled the bishops who had condemned the Constitution but expressed horror that those bishops who had accepted the Constitution had already consecrated new bishops for the new, state-delineated dioceses. These consecrations were ‘unlawful, sacrilegious, and utterly void’ and the people were urged to avoid these ‘sacrilegious consecrators or assistants’. The new dioceses and constitutional bishops were condemned by Pius VI and suspended from the sacraments and all clergy were urged to reject the Constitution and continue their ministry, even if persecuted by the State. Above all the pope condemned the oath, declaring those who swore it perjurers and schismatics and separated from Catholic unity. As the pope noted, the French episcopacy as a body, save for four of their number, had generally protested against the Civil Constitution and refused to

¹³ Title II, articles 21 and 38 The text of the oath was promulgated and made obligatory for all parish priests and bishops on 27th November 1790. See Bernard de Brye, *Consciences épiscopales en exil, 1789-1814: à travers la correspondance de Mgr de la Fare, évêque de Nancy* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2004), 491.

¹⁴ Joseph F. Byrnes, *Priests of the French Revolution: Saints and Renegades in a New Political Era* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁵ Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche: Geste Édition, 1999), 11., and P. McPhee, *Living the French Revolution 1789-1799* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 2006), 80.

¹⁶ Pius VI ‘Dilectis filiis nostris s. romanae ecclesiae cardinalibus et ven. archiepiscopis et episcopis ac dilectis filiis capitulis, clero et populo Regnia Galliarum . . .’ in *Pii vi. pont. max. acta quibus Ecclesiae catholicae calamitatibus in Gallia consultum est* (Rome: Typis S. Congreg. Propaganda Fide, 1871), i, 141-161.

take the oath. This did not mean, however, that the Constitution was a dead letter. In fact by the time of the pope's denunciation, a new Constitutional body of bishops had begun to exist and expand and fill the new sees created by the Constitution. The denunciations of Pius VI, and the abhorrence with which the Constitutional Church was regarded, would later provide ample material, and encouragement, for the Petite Église in its own denunciation of the Concordatist Church.

Such is the context in which the anticoncordatist debate arose: the reticence of the refractories to submit to what they saw as a repeat of the Civil Constitution which they had regarded with horror. The persecutions of the refractory clergy had hardened the resolve of the clergy against the new Constitutional Church. Pius VI's decree against the oath resulted in the 9th June 1791 decree declaring papal bulls to be null in France, yet this did nothing to prevent the refractory clergy from continuing to occupy parishes and celebrate the sacraments. On 29th November of the same year, those who had not taken the oath were pressed to do so on pain of the loss of their civil liberties and strict surveillance. The National Assembly then presented an ultimatum to the refractories – if they do not comply they must be deported (27th May 1792), and gaoled for 10 years if they dared return. Further acts of the Assembly delivered harsher treatment for the non-jurors; successively, deportation to Guyana and death if they returned to France (decree 23rd April 1793), the death sentence for priests who had taken up arms, and for those who concealed refractory clergy (decree of 21st October 1793).¹⁷ Such acts typified a hardening of the attitude of the state to the refractories, but it served only to strain the activities of the refractory clergy rather than influence them to take the oath.

These measures reduced the number of refractory clergy in France and hampered their ministrations. The hostility of the state led many, especially the bishops, into exile – where we find those who were later to become the anticoncordatist party – and the war in the Vendée. The additional murder of priests and religious gave way to a necessarily clandestine and difficult ministry for those refractory clergy who remained in France.¹⁸ Already by the mid-1790s the context in which the Petite Église was to rise and to operate was discernible: a parallel clergy hunted and condemned by the state, clergy ministering under these pressures and, inevitably as a result of fewer refractory clergy and their persecution, the emergence of lay-led communities of Catholics.¹⁹ By the time of the coup of 4th September 1797 the refractory

¹⁷ Colin Jones, *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (Routledge, 2014), 239-244.

¹⁸ C.J. Mitchell, *The French Legislative Assembly of 1791* (E.J. Brill, 1988), 43-60.

¹⁹ Marie-Aimée Duvernois, 'Les Blancs, minorité anti-concordataire : microdifférence religieuse et identité régionale dans le sud de la Bourgogne' *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 64/ 1 (1987), 158.

clergy, deprived of the guidance of their now exiled bishops, hailed by their faithful as “*nos bons prêtres*” (our good priests), practised clandestinely, celebrating the sacraments under the guard of their faithful in woods, ravines or barns.²⁰ In those regions where there were no refractory priests, especially in parts of the Vendée, the faithful would gather on Sunday to recite the rosary led by an elder, often by the ruins of a destroyed church, and if they were impeded from doing so they would pray at home rather than associate with the constitutional clergy.²¹ In Lyon those loyal to the refractory clergy, and those of a Jansenist inclination who also rejected the Civil Constitution, gathered in secret chapels and oratories in ‘a sort of return to the practices of the primitive Church’.²² Those faithful to the refractory clergy naturally turned to these priests, in a time when only constitutional marriage was deemed valid by the state, to celebrate their ‘illegal’ marriages, as well as baptisms and the other sacraments.²³ Meanwhile, the Constitutional clergy, especially in the rural parts of the west of France, were often left to celebrate Mass in a half-empty parish church.²⁴ These parallel and clandestine practices of those loyal to the refractory priests, along with the emergence of lay-led communities and liturgies, were to become the hallmark of the *Petite Église*.

The coup d’état of 9th November 1799 and its replacement of the Directory with the Consulate, and the rise of Napoleon which was to follow, allowed the status of the Church to be once more called into question. Initially, churches remained closed and the refractory clergy continued to minister clandestinely; then, the decree of 28th December 1799 allowed churches to reopen. Yet the condition of those clergy who wished to take advantage of this new concession by Napoleon required that they promise loyalty to the Constitution of Year 8 which had established the Consulate.²⁵ In this, Billaud sees something of a prologue to the drama of the Concordat that was to follow.²⁶ Indeed, the reaction of the clergy was as divided as their reaction would be following the Concordat. Naturally hesitant of taking any oath to the state, the refractory clergy were no more convinced by the reassurance that the promise was ‘not an oath but only a civil engagement . . . to be faithful, that is to say to submit oneself and not to oppose’.²⁷ Deprived of the immediate counsel of their exiled bishops, the clergy were advised

²⁰ A. Roussel, ‘Le Centenaire de la Petite Église’ in *Le Correspondant* (Paris: 10 juin 1903), 976.

²¹ Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961), 25. Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 46.

²² C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911), 40.

²³ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 2-13. De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 22.

²⁴ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 29-30.

²⁵ Bernard de Brye, *Consciencés épiscopales en exil, 1789-1814: à travers la correspondance de Mgr de la Fare, évêque de Nancy* (Les Éditions du Cerf, 2004), 492.

²⁶ Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830*, 28.

²⁷ *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel*, 10 nivose VIII (31st December 1799), 3.

by Jacques-André Émery (himself a refractory priest) to make the promise. His influence convinced many of the bishops who had returned to France, as well as the refractory clergy of Paris.²⁸ Not all the refractory clergy were convinced, however, and Cardinal Maury disapproved entirely.²⁹ De Coucy, the exiled bishop of La Rochelle who was to have a major influence on the rise of the Petite Église in the Vendée, also condemned the promise, given that the Constitution allowed for divorce and excused the seizure of ecclesiastical goods.³⁰ The ecclesiastical situation was thus impossibly confused; clergy who had made the oath of the constitution and the refractories who had refused (and amongst the latter those who took the promise to the Constitution ordered by Napoleon and those who had not) were all opposed to each other. Constitutional bishops and priests had fallen away from their positions and in certain places the refractory priests simply took their place in empty parishes.³¹ Moreover, there remained a considerable party of the bishops of the *ancien régime* still in exile abroad who continued to exercise considerable influence in France. Napoleon, seeking to consolidate his own authority in France over both Church and State, thus sought to pacify and control the Catholic population by means of a concordat with the recently elected pope Pius VII. It is the response of the exiled episcopate to the Concordat, in the context of the sufferings of the clergy and faithful during the Revolution, that brought to birth the anticoncordatist party which would become known as the Petite Église.

²⁸ Jean Leflon, *Monsieur Emery : l'Église d'ancien régime et la Révolution* (Paris : Bonne Presse, 1945), ii, 12. Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830*, 33.

²⁹ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 10.

³⁰ Jean-Charles de Coucy (1746 - 1824) became bishop of La Rochelle in 1789 after which his diocese was suppressed by the Civil Constitution whence he fled to Spain. From his exile he opposed both the Revolution and the Concordat which he refused to recognise. He would eventually submit with the restoration of the Bourbons and was rewarded with the archdiocese of Reims. Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 45. The Petite Église always rejected the State seizure and ownership of ecclesiastical goods and to this day members will ensure property they purchase does not come from such sources. See also Guy Janssen, 'Autorités et dissidence : la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire', in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds.), « *Sectes* » et « *hérésies* » de l'Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 2002), 136. and De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 85.

³¹ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 47.

III. The Concordat of 1801

The prerogatives in Church and State which the bishops of the *ancien régime* enjoyed before the Revolution, together with the experience of the Revolution itself, gave rise to a mindset that was as independent as it was defensive amongst the exiled episcopacy. This both typified and accentuated the deeply rooted Gallican tendencies that were prevalent amongst them.¹ In this context a reactionary and defensive opposition to the Concordat from the exiled episcopacy was inevitable. After almost a year of delicate deliberations between the papacy and the Napoleonic regime, the Concordat was signed in Paris on 15th July 1801 by the representatives of Pius VII and Napoleon.² In the course of these negotiations, no reference was made to the exiled episcopacy of the *ancien régime*. Louis XVIII made use of their exclusion by planning with them to derail any future agreement between the Holy See and Napoleon.³ The aim of the Concordat was to harmonise the deeply fractious relationship between the Catholic Church and the French State which had arisen since the Revolution. The Concordat not only sought to normalise the situation of the Church in France, but also to heal the divisions amongst the French clergy. For Napoleon, the Concordat served the dual purpose of legitimising his regime and of giving the State a means by which to order and manage the place of the Church in civil society, especially in regard to the new political order.

The articles of the Concordat were guaranteed to prove deeply problematic to the royalist and counter-revolutionary attitudes of the episcopacy and the wider Church. The decree of the Concordat by which clergy were to swear to be ‘obedient and faithful to the government established by the Constitution of the French Republic’ was naturally reminiscent of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which had been so comprehensively rejected by the exiled

¹ Bernard Callebat in ‘Pérennité du mouvement anticoncordataire: deux siècles plus tard, les fidèles de la « Petite Eglise » persévèrent – Entretien avec Bernard Callebat et Jean-Pierre Chantin’ *Religioscope*, 31 October 2003 <<https://www.religion.info/2003/10/31/perennite-du-mouvement-anticoncordataire-deux-siecles-plus-tard-les-fideles-de-la-petite-eglise-perseverent/> [accessed 12 January 2019]

² H. Consalvi, *Mémoires du cardinal Consalvi, secrétaire d’État du pape Pie VII* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1864) 2 vols. ; Mgr Justin Fèvre, *Le Concordat de 1801* (Editions Saint-Sébastien, 2016) ; Jacques Créteineau-Joly, *Bonaparte, le Concordat de 1801 et le Cardinal Consalvi : Suivi des deux lettres au Père Theiner sur le Pape Clément XIV* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1869) ; François Désiré Mathieu, *Le Concordat de 1801: ses origines - son histoire, d’après des documents inédits* (Paris: Perrin, 1904) ; Émile Sévestre, *L’histoire, le texte et la destinée du Concordat de 1801* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1905) ; H. H. Walsh, *The Concordat of 1801: A Study of the Problem of Nationalism in the Relations of Church and State* (New York: Columbia, 1933). The text in French and Latin, together with other relative bulls and briefs of the Holy See: *Concordat et recueil des bulles et breffs de n. s. p. le pape Pie VII: sur les affaires actuelles de l’église de France : décret pour la nouvelle Circonscription des Archevêchés et Évêchés: publication du Jubilé, et indult pour la réduction des fêtes* (Paris: Chez Le Clere, Rondonneau et Lenormant, 1802).

³ M. Poniatowski, *Talleyrand et le Consulat* (Paris: Perrin, 1986). Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 35.

episcopacy.⁴ Moreover the text of the oath in article 6 bound the bishops to have no part in any activity or discussion contrary to the Napoleonic regime, and indeed to be agents of the state in reporting any knowledge of others acting in such a way. The Concordat thus attempted to transform the clergy into agents of the Napoleonic state in a way that would appear both egregious and unacceptable to many of the exiled bishops.

The stipulation of article 8, by which the prayer for the king was replaced by a prayer asking God to ‘save the Republic and the Consuls’ at the end of the public liturgy, was to serve as a frequent public reminder of the Concordat’s legitimisation of the regime. It is no surprise that many amongst the episcopacy would come to see it as nothing more than a continuation of the Revolution or else another usurping of power.⁵ Moreover, the control of the state over the Church was highlighted by the demand of article 5 that Napoleon, as first consul, should have the right to nominate bishops who were then to be confirmed by the Holy See. It is true that the right of the French king in this regard was symptomatic of Gallicanism, but to defer this right to Napoleon was an outrage to both royalists and the exiled clergy.⁶ Article 16 of the Concordat, in effect, bound the Holy See to recognise the Napoleonic regime as the true successor to the pre-revolutionary order, thereby granting the First Consul all the rights and privileges that had been accorded to the kings of France.

The precept of the Concordat that was to prove most contentious for the exiled clergy, thus becoming the *raison d’être* of the Petite Église, was article 2. It stipulated that the French dioceses were to be reorganised by the Holy See and the State. Accordingly, article 3 stated that ‘His Holiness will proclaim to the incumbents of the French diocese that he expects of them, with firm confidence, for the benefit of peace and unity, every kind of sacrifice, even that of their sees.’ As almost a hint of the poor reception that this demand was to receive

⁴ For articles 6 and 7, see ‘Le texte du Concordat 1801’ in De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 95-98 ; Guy Janssen, ‘Autorités et dissidence: la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire’, in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds.), « Sectes » et « hérésies » de l’Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels: Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles 2002), 134.

⁵ Janssen, *Autorités et dissidence: la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire*, 134.

⁶ Jean-Pierre Chantin places much emphasis on the royalist politics of the non-dimissinary (i.e. those bishops who had refused to resign their episcopal sees in wake of the Concordat) bishops, and he places their resistance in this context, especially given the submission of the majority of the bishops with the restoration of the Bourbons (see Bernard Callebat in ‘Pérennité du mouvement anticoncordataire: deux siècles plus tard, les fidèles de la « Petite Église » persévèrent – Entretien avec Bernard Callebat et Jean-Pierre Chantin’ *Religioscope*, 31 October 2003 <<https://www.religion.info/2003/10/31/perennite-du-mouvement-anticoncordataire-deux-siecles-plus-tard-les-fideles-de-la-petite-eglise-perseverent/> [accessed 12 January 2019]). Given that not all the bishops submitted under the Bourbons, however, it is difficult to state that their royalism was more ardent than their opposition to the Concordat. Ambrogio A. Caiani, ‘The Concile National of 1811, Napoleon, Gallicanism and the failure of Neo-Conciliarism’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 70 (3) (2019), 549-550 notes that the Concordat’s assertion of the right of Napoleon to nominate bishops is comparable to the same right accorded to the French king in the Concordat of Bologna of 1516.

amongst the exiled clergy, the article continues: ‘After this exhortation, if they should refuse this sacrifice commanded for the welfare of the Church, (a refusal, however, which His Holiness is not expecting), provision will be made for the government of the newly circumscribed dioceses by the new incumbents’. The Concordat itself, therefore, both foresaw the possibility of episcopal refusal of this demand and warned that such a refusal would be fruitless, since such bishops would simply be replaced. As we shall see, this article would confirm in the minds of many anticoncordatist bishops that the initiative surpassed papal prerogative at the expense of the theologically and canonically inalienable rights of bishops.

The fourth article presented the *fait accompli* of this demand:

... within three months of the publication of the bull of His Holiness, the First Consul of the Republic will make appointments for the archdiocese and diocese of the new circumscription. His Holiness will confer the canonical institution, following the forms established in relation to France before the changes of government.

Thus, in a stab at the heart of Gallicanism, the pope was to deprive the bishops of their sees by his own authority, whether they presented their resignation or not, and yet, making use of a hallmark of Gallican church governance, the French civil authority was to present its own nomination of the new bishops to the pope for his confirmation.

Pius VII swiftly demanded the submission of the French episcopate to the terms of the Concordat. A month to the day after the signing of the Concordat he issued the brief *Tam Multa* demanding the resignation of the entirety of the French episcopate.⁷ Citing the necessity of ‘the preservation of the unity of the holy Church and the reestablishment in France of the Catholic religion’, the pope was forthright: ‘You must spontaneously leave your bishop’s seats; it is necessary that you renounce them freely in our hands’. Appealing to their past loyalty and readiness for sacrifice, Pius VII cites the example of the three-hundred bishops who renounced their dioceses in wake of the Donatist controversy and exhorts the French episcopacy: ‘finding ourselves in this circumstance, in which the free resignation of your sees is above all necessary for the good of the Catholic Religion, we cannot in the least doubt that you are not to lend this act of respect to God’. The tone of the brief is one of necessity and of appeal to the piety and charity of the episcopate with none of the assertions of papal authority that would follow later. Nonetheless, for Pius VII the matter was urgent and the bishops were given a mere ten days to

⁷ For full text see A. Barberi, *Bullarii Romani continuatio Summorum Pontificum Clementis XIII, Clementis XIV, Pii VI, Pii VII, Leonis XII, Pii VIII et Gregorii XVI constitutiones, literas in forma brevis, epistolas ad principes viros, et alios, atque alloquutiones complectens* (Rome: Ex typographia Reverendae Camerae apostolicae, 1846), xi, 187-190.

place their letters of resignation into the hands of the pope.⁸ Any failure to give a clear and complete resignation would force the pope ‘to consider you as if you refused to comply with Our requests’. Thus, the brief does not warn of canonical sanctions or even deprivation should the bishops refuse. It is rather an appeal to their loyalty to the person of the pope in recognition of the need for Church unity.

Of the eighty-one bishops of the *ancien régime* still living in 1801, forty-five acceded to the request of the pope.⁹ Amongst those who resigned were the eleven bishops of the *ancien régime* who had returned to France and therefore had perhaps a more measured view of the pressing need for Church unity. At their head was the bishop of Marseille, Jean-Baptiste de Belloy, the senior member of the episcopacy, who was the first to comply, stating that if the Holy See deemed it necessary he was bound to resign.¹⁰ Amongst the bishops still in exile the response was mixed. Those in Italy offered their resignation, but in England only five of the nineteen bishops submitted with the remaining fourteen writing in protest to the pope.¹¹ As a body, the exiled episcopacy was evidently divided: quick submission contrasted with delays, requests for further clarification and outright protests.

The response of the Holy See to these refusals and prevarications was swift and precise. By the bull *Qui Christi Domini Vices* (29th November 1801) Pius VII suppressed the 135 dioceses of France and removed the jurisdiction of the bishops over them.¹² ‘With the most lively bitterness’ the pope recognised that whilst some bishops did submit to resignation others delayed or refused, ‘thus exposing France, robbed of her pastors, to new perils; not only the delay in the reestablishment of the Catholic religion’ but the exposure of the Church to an increasingly critical and dangerous situation. Pius VII saw fit to divest all ecclesiastics of their powers and prerogatives of jurisdiction, thereby rendering each diocese ‘free and vacant’. This action of the pope was an ‘act of sovereign jurisdiction such as had never before been known in the history of the Church’.¹³ After outlining the new structure of the French Church, the pope warned that any contestation of his bull would ‘incur the indignation of the all-powerful God and the blessed apostles SS. Peter and Paul’. Instead, it was the indignation of a considerable

⁸ The resignations ‘must be absolutely complete and not dilatory’ according to *Tam Multa*.

⁹ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs, 2015), 54-57.

¹⁰ René de Chauvigny, *La résistance au Concordat de 1801 : profils d'évêques--profils de prêtres* (Paris: Plon, 1921), 8-9.

¹¹ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 54.

¹² Barberi, *Bullarii Romani*, xi, 245-249. The bull was addressed not only to the bishops but to all the people of France.

¹³ Bernard Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation; being the history of the English Catholics during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century*, 3 vols. (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), i, 84.

party of the French episcopacy that was ignited by the pope's daring boldness, and this only served to encourage the bishops to organise themselves and begin to present their protests.

Immediately, the bishops who had refused to resign either wrote personally to the pope to outline their opposition or refused to recognise the pope's action regarding their dioceses.¹⁴ Organising themselves in exile, most especially in England, they reasserted their positions and powers and cast doubt, theologically, canonically, and morally, upon the actions of Pius VII. Moreover, through the clergy and faithful who remained loyal to them, they exercised their episcopal powers as an act of defiance to both pope and state. The opposition of the episcopate to the Concordat and the new order of the French Church set in motion what was to become the *Petite Église*. Whilst the political, social, theological, and canonical issues of the anticoncordatist party are already evident, one cannot neglect the role of emotion in guaranteeing the continuation of the controversy on the part of both clergy and people. It was this sense of loyalty and of being wronged that spurred the formation of a real and lasting anticoncordatist party, as would be demonstrated so clearly in the seminal texts of their party. It is in this context of Revolutionary turmoil, continued suspicion of the State, and betrayal by Rome that Roman situates the position of the Catholic faithful in the wake of the Concordat and the suppression of the ancient order of the French Church:

If one imagines, if it is possible, the state of the soul of a devout catholic who, during the Revolution, had risked his freedom and his liberty in order to remain in communion with his legitimate pastors, to hide refractory priests, to receive the sacraments; if one imagines what he must have felt upon seeing the priests and bishops who remained in communion with the Holy See during the storm and who had suffered for the cause in their person and in their property, now broken by the pope, hounded by the civil authorities, whilst all the while the favour of the Church and State was in favour of the schismatics whom once they had commanded the faithful to flee from Therein is the whole story of the *Petite Église*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Subsequently, as the episcopal opposition to the Concordat continued, these initial letters were published: *Lettre de plusieurs évêques françois retirés en Allemagne au pape Pie VII* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, 1802). *Traduction de la lettre latine écrite au pape par M. l'évêque de Blois* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, May 1803). *Traduction de la lettre latine écrite au Pape Pie VII par Mgr. l'Evêque de St. Pol de Léon* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, 1804).

¹⁵ J. Roman, *Le Clergé des Hautes-Alpes pendant la Révolution: La Petite Église* (Paris: Picard et Fils, 1899), 53.

IV: Organisation of Episcopal Protest

The anticoncordatist bishops, now divested of their sees, sought to outline their grievances and protests against the new order of the Church in France. Fourteen of the anticoncordatist bishops wrote a *Mémoire* to Pius VII from London in September 1801, once more refusing their resignations and setting out the theological, biblical, canonical and political reasons for their opposition.¹ This letter was enlarged and signed by thirty-eight members of the episcopacy in April 1803 and published as the *Réclamations canoniques et très-respectueuses adressées à Notre Très-Saint Père Pie VII contre différents actes relatifs à l'Église gallicane*; it was to become the fundamental text of the Petite Église.² Whilst an exhaustive examination of these texts is not of immediate use in tracing the evolution of the Petite Église from an episcopal protest to a lay-led community, they are fundamental for understanding the *raison d'être* of the Petite Église. This is so especially in light of their constant use as a point of reference by the community throughout its history. These texts, in which the origin and source of the anticoncordatist movement are to be found, encapsulate the personal protest of the bishops and were henceforth regarded as a defining canon of the Petite Église. Duc testifies to the place of the texts in the life of the community: 'These letters, these written instructions, wrestled from the grasp of the official inquisitors, were guarded respectfully in families and constitute even today a sort of spiritual treasury where pious souls gain consolation and encouragement.'³

The first place, chronologically, in this 'spiritual treasury' is given to the *Mémoire* of 27th September 1801, in which fourteen members of the episcopacy set forth their reasons for refusing to resign.⁴ This letter, written in response to the demand for episcopal resignations by the pope, and published in London in May 1802, represents the first definitive opposition of the anticoncordatist episcopacy. The signatories place the justification for their refusal in the context of their respect for the pope, but remain mindful of the suffering of the Church during the Revolution. Nonetheless, the signatories of the *Mémoire* insist that in demanding the resignation of the episcopacy Pius VII has exceeded his powers, infringed the precepts of Scripture, Church Councils and Canon Law, and endangered the position of the Church by

¹ *Mémoire des évêques français résidant à Londres, qui n'ont pas donné leur démission* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, 1802). These fourteen bishops included the nominated but not consecrated bishop of Moulins.

² *Réclamations canoniques et très-respectueuses adressées à Notre Très-Saint Père Pie VII contre différents actes relatifs à l'Église gallicane* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, 1804). The original Latin text was published as *Canonicae et reverentissimae expostulationes apud SS.DD.NN. Pium divina providentia papam VII, de variis actis ad ecclesiam Gallicanam spectantibus* (London: Cox, Fils et Bylis, 1803).

³ Marius Duc *Une Mission à Rome en 1869* (Lyon: Imprimerie Pitrat Aîné, 1889), 38

⁴ Billaud describes the *Mémoire* and the *Réclamations* as forming together the 'doctrinal catechism of the Petite Église' Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961), 70.

betraying the memory of his predecessor, Pius VI, who had urged the bishops to remain steadfast in the face of the revolutionary tumult. True to their Gallican principles, the bishops preferred a 'sad resistance' rather than an impossible obedience to a demand in which they had neither been consulted nor accorded their episcopal prerogatives.⁵

Whilst the *Mémoire* does not contain any explicit call for the Catholic laity to resist the new order of the Church in France, the text already creates an authority which lent itself to such resistance. The pre-existing division of the French clergy was now further deepened by the emerging anticoncordatist episcopal party.⁶ In his response to the *Mémoire*, Pius VII calls the bishops to adhere to his request for the sake of the Faith and of the unity of the French Church; but, in their response of February 1802, the authors of the *Mémoire* simply restated their position: '*neque nunc alia cogitamus, alia sentimus*' (nor now do we think one thing and feel anything other).⁷ This intransigence would become the hallmark of the anticoncordatist party.

Whilst the authors of the *Mémoire* stood their ground from their exile, the situation in France was moving forward. Pius VII had already deprived the bishops of their sees in November 1801; despite the on-going episcopal protests and divisions, the Concordat was promulgated in France on 8th April 1802. To the text of the Concordat, Napoleon appended the Organic Articles which placed the Church under greater control of the state.⁸ The French government now had a role in the publication of ecclesiastical decrees, appointments of clergy, the form of liturgy and celebration of feasts, the dress of priests, the content of catechetical teaching, the circumscription of dioceses and parishes, and the remuneration of the clergy.⁹ This modified Gallicanism effectively transposed the privileges claimed by Gallicanism for the king and the clergy onto Napoleon and the State. The daily encounter of French Catholics with the liturgy, catechetical teaching and popular devotions ensured that the Napoleonic domination of the Church would be evident to every one of her members.

⁵ *Mémoire des évêques françois résidens à Londres*, 2.

⁶ A polemical anticoncordatist pamphlet from 1815 sets the anticoncordatist clergy in stark opposition to the rest of the French clergy. See *Trois différens clergés en France depuis le Concordat: les évêques et les prêtres constitutionnels, condamnés comme hérétiques et schismatiques par Pie Vi, et l'Église dispersée; les évêques et les prêtres concordatistes, devenus, par leur réunion avec les constitutionnels, auteurs d'hérésie et de schisme au premier chef; les prêtres vraiment catholiques, restés constamment fidèles au roi* (London: R. Juigné, 1815).

⁷ Pius P.P. VII, 'Epistola summi pontificis ad illustrissimum Archiepiscopum Narbonensem' in *Recueil de pièces concernant la demande faite par notre Saint père le pape Pie VII. le 15. aout 1801 aux évêques légitimes de France de la démission de leurs sièges* (London: 1802). 'Responsum datum a pluribus episcopis galliarum londini degentibus' in *Recueil de pièces*, 26.

⁸ Article 24 specifically required those who taught in seminaries to subscribe to, and to teach the declaration made by the clergy of France in 1682 containing the principles of Gallicanism.

⁹ 'Loi du 18 germinal an X relative à l'organisation des cultes' in *Bulletin des Lois de la République française, an X, 2e semestre* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale des lois, 1802), 13.

For Pius VII, the articles were a humiliation which legalised the subservience of the Church to the Napoleonic regime. He therefore duly protested against them in his allocution of 24th May 1802 and through his legate, Cardinal Capara, he formally condemned them as having been approved without his knowledge or consultation; yet Napoleon did nothing.¹⁰ Though the Organic Articles were rarely applied to their fullest extent, they served to enforce the subjugation of the Church to the civil authority in a way sharply reminiscent of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy which the exiled clergy had so opposed and, indeed, regarded as the very reason for their exile and sufferings.

On 6th April 1803, thirty-eight members of the episcopacy of the *ancien régime* signed their *Réclamations*. This missive, in addition to the previous *Mémoire*, was to become ‘the manifesto of the anticoncordatists’.¹¹ The signatories, headed by Cardinal Montmorency, restated the grievances of the *Mémoire* against the new structure of the Church and the deprivation of the non-dimissary bishops from their sees. The bishops protested not only their own deprivation and lack of consultation, but also the rehabilitation of the Constitutional clergy and the subjugation of the Church to the State. Replete with arguments from Church history and ecclesiastical councils, the bishops declared their opposition and objected to all the acts of the Concordat, both ecclesiastical and civil. The *Réclamations* were not simply hyperbole from an aggrieved group of snubbed bishops, but rather a solidly argued text of Christian doctrine, to the extent that the Dominicans who were charged with its study by the Holy Office could find no theological cause for rebuttal.¹²

In contrast to his response to the *Mémoire*, Pius VII offered no response to the *Réclamations*. His reticence might have owed something to the theological and canonical coherence of the arguments put forward by the *Réclamations*, but perhaps it was simply due to the fact that the Concordat was already being implemented and the exiled clergy were an irrelevance. For Napoleon, however, the *Réclamations* represented a danger to the settlement of the Concordat. Accordingly, he ordered those who were found to be in possession of the writings of the non-dimissary bishops to be arrested.¹³ The Petite Église itself guarded the

¹⁰ See in particular ‘Réclamation contre les articles organiques fait au nom du siège apostolique par le cardinal Capara le 8 août 1803 et adressée au ministre de France Talleyrand’ in *Recueil des allocutions consistoriales, encycliques et autres lettres apostoliques des souverains pontifes Clément XII, Benoît XIV, Pie VI, Pie VII, Léon XII, Grégoire XVI et Pie IX: citées dans l’Encyclique et le Syllabus du 8 décembre 1864* (Paris: Librairie Adrien Le Clerc et Cie, 1865), 554-61.

¹¹ Bernard de Breye, *Consciénces épiscopales en exil, 1789-1814: à travers la correspondance de Mgr de la Fare, évêque de Nancy* (Les Éditions du Cerf, 2004), 86.

¹² C. Latreille, *L’opposition religieuse au Concordat de 1792 à 1803* (Hachette, 1910), 248.

¹³ Augustin Theiner, *Histoire de deux concordats Histoire de deux concordats de la République Française et de la République Cisalpine conclus en 1801 et 1803 entre Napoléon Bonaparte et le Saint-Siège : suivie d’une*

memory of the sufferings of those who had been persecuted in circulating the *Réclamations* in France.¹⁴ For the Petite Église, the publication of the *Réclamations* would become the pivotal moment in which the non-dimissary bishops formed the opposition to the Concordat and formulated the principles that would define their existence.¹⁵

The *Mémoire* and the *Réclamations* both protest the loyalty and fidelity of the non-dimissary bishops to the person and office of the pope, but seek primarily to have recognised the prerogatives of the bishops themselves, thus affirming the true nature of the papacy, and indeed its limits, as far as the bishops were concerned. It is evident that the bishops did not seek to create a permanent parallel hierarchy to perpetuate the episcopal Gallican church, for they consecrated no new bishops nor did they ordain new priests.¹⁶ In a sense this reticence to secure their survival suggests a reluctance to encourage formal schism, but it did not go as far as making the Petite Église abandon its intransigence in face of the Concordat. It was this tension that would serve to perpetuate its protest in isolation from the clerical realm. Aside from the publication of their protests, the bishops indeed abstained from any demonstration of active hostility to Church and State.¹⁷ As late as 1819, one of the last surviving bishops, de Thémines, protested to Dr. Poynter, the Vicar Apostolic of London, that ‘he had not performed any episcopal function here [in London], and would not bless a cabbage’ without permission from the local ordinary.¹⁸ This, however, did not stop the bishops from ministering to their parishioners in their dioceses, thereby confirming that they considered themselves to have been unaffected by Pius VII’s deprivation of their sees. Despite this point, it cannot be said that the text of the *Réclamations* constituted in itself a manifesto for episcopal schism.

relation de son couronnement comme empereur des français par Pie VII : d'après des documents inédits, extraits des archives secrètes du Vatican et de celles de France (Paris : E. Dentu, 1869), i, 478.

¹⁴ Marius Duc *Une Mission à Rome en 1869* (Lyon : Imprimerie Pitrat Aîné, 1889), 35.

¹⁵ Marius Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants* (Lyon : Imprimerie d'Aimé Vingtrinier, 1869), 13. Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 80.

¹⁶ Alfred Boulay de la Meurthe *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France* (A. Mame et fils : 1925), 330.

¹⁷ Alfred Boulay de la Meurthe *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France* (A. Mame et fils : 1925), 327.

¹⁸ Alexandre François Amédée Adonis Louis Joseph de Lauzières-Thémines (1742 - 1829) from a noble family of distinction de Thémines would be appointed bishop of Blois in 1776. He would go to play a decisive role in the opposition to the Concordat and the formation and continuance of the Petite Église. Bernard Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation; being the history of the English Catholics during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), ii, 230.

V: Episcopal Polemics and the Seeds of a Parallel Hierarchy

We shall see below that the Petite Église's defence of its theological and ecclesiastical position was rooted in the *Réclamations* and the admonitions of the non-dimissary bishops. Given the protests that one finds in the *Réclamations* (which do not necessarily amount to an overt desire to separate from Rome) it seems difficult to reconcile the Petite Église's self-perception with the conduct of the non-dimissary bishops at the time of the Concordat. That the Petite Église emerged as a lay community seems at odds with its origins as an episcopal protest. My argument is that the anticoncordatist bishops provided the context and impetus for their protest to continue towards the formation of what would solidify as a lay community. What follows is an examination of the formation of that protest and the attitudes of anticoncordatist clergy in order to demonstrate that the clergy knowingly acted in a way that would foment, encourage, and form what was to become the lay-led Petite Église.

Whilst the exiled bishops did not seek to perpetuate their own number with new, and thus schismatic, consecrations of bishops and ordinations of priests, their monitions to their remaining clergy portray a more active, and latterly more open, opposition to the new order of the French Church. Drochon explains that the signatories of the *Réclamations* had never thought to separate from Rome.¹ Indeed, in 1802, 'in common accord' they addressed a letter to their dioceses instructing the clergy and faithful to regard the new concordatist bishops as 'delegates of the pope' and therefore as true bishops, though without prejudice to the prerogatives of the non-dimissary bishops themselves.² This implied that the laity could receive the ministrations of the concordatist clergy and thus live in harmony with the Church without ceasing to recognise the rights of their exiled bishops. The arrangement, in other words, implied 'no derogation of [their] jurisdiction which [they] retain wholly and entirely over the flock which God has confided [them]'.³ D'Argentré of Limoges goes further in a letter of 21st April 1802 to his clergy in which he asserts that both the clergy and the faithful can 'in sure conscience address themselves for spiritual causes to the newly instituted bishop'.⁴

The attitude of other non-dimissary bishops to their concordatist replacements was not so magnanimous. De Coucy conceded the same view as d'Argentré, but with a notable

¹ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 59.

² 'Sur les Réclamations des évêques non démissionnaires en 1803' in *L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi* 40 (1824), 375.

³ C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 7.

⁴ *Sur les Réclamations des évêques non démissionnaires en 1803*, 376. Drochon gives the date erroneously as 20 February 1802.

exception: he was happy to grant validity to the future acts of jurisdiction of the concordatist bishop of his diocese unless the incumbent was a former constitutional bishop.⁵ This admonition hearkens back to the sentiment which underlies the difficulties of the exiled bishops with regard to the Concordat, particularly the way in which it is rooted in a thoroughgoing abhorrence of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy as a direct result of the Revolution.⁶ De Coucy is of especial importance given the prominence of the Petite Église in the region of his diocese. In August 1802, de Coucy came to the view that Pius VII was literally imprisoned in Rome.⁷ With this in mind, he wrote to the pope on 1st September 1802 expressing his outrage and opposition to the new order of the Church in France.⁸ This letter from his exile in Spain was to be widely read by his clerics and faithful in the diocese of La Rochelle, thus becoming a capital text in the canon of the Petite Église, serving to legitimise their opposition.⁹

The letter of de Coucy is forceful and betrays indignation at the transformation, as he sees it, of the Constitutional Church into the Church of the State.¹⁰ He decries that by the will of Pius VII and the Concordat, the Constitutional and Revolutionary church had been given a sort of second baptism, betraying the pious memory of Pius VI and transforming in an instant ‘the heretic into the orthodox, the schismatic into a child of the Church, the wolf into the lawful shepherd, the priest confirmed in the Faith into a mere apostate of the priesthood’. De Coucy so deplores the Concordat that he informs the pope that the schism of the Constitutional Church was preferable to such a ‘perfidious reconciliation’ between the Constitutional Church and the Church of France, which would only lead the French Church ‘to execution and the tomb’. Furthermore he refuses the decree of Pius VII in declaring his see vacant, and pronounces the concordatist clergy to be true delegates of the Holy See, but not with a right to the title of the former dioceses, since his flock regard those Constitutional clergy who have failed to retreat or to repent as they would any other ‘notorious and public sinner’. As strident as the letter is, Billaud is at pains to note that the bishop only calls his priests and faithful to act against the

⁵ Archives nationales F/4/1044.

⁶ Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 9. De Coucy had been especially virulent in his denunciation of the ‘monsters’ and ‘assassins’ who had turned Paris into Babylon with their ‘satanic philosophies’; see Jean-Charles de Coucy *Lettre pastorale de monseigneur l’Évêque de La Rochelle, sur la mort de Sa Majesté très chrétienne Louis XVI: Donnée en Espagne le 20 février 1793* (Louvain: J.P.G. Michel, 1793).

⁷ ‘... he is so chained that he cannot even move one step unless commanded to do so by his enemies or false friends’ Archives nationales F/7/6439 *Coucy à La Neuville*, 25 août 1802.

⁸ ‘Lettre de M. de Coucy à Pie VII’ in Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961), 595-605.

⁹ Auguste Billaud, ‘Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église’ in *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest et des musées de Poitiers* (Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest, 1957) 1957/07-1957/09, 214.

¹⁰ ‘Lettre de M. de Coucy à Pie VII’, 601.

Constitutional clergy who had not retracted the civil constitution.¹¹ Yet, in his letter, as we shall see below, his priests and faithful found ample cause to refuse the Concordat altogether. In such a context, de Coucy can indeed be regarded as sowing the seeds of the Petite Église, most especially in his own diocese where it was to be so fruitful.

De Coucy was not alone in fomenting rebellion against the Concordat both before and after the *Réclamations*.¹² De Thémines of Blois was to become the standard bearer of the anticoncordatist party by preparing the way for the perpetuation of the Petite Église as a lay community, separate from the concordatist and post-Concordat French Church. Like de Coucy, de Thémines originally found his exile in Spain.¹³ He had responded to the demand of Pius VII to resign from his see in the affirmative, although with the condition that his resignation be submitted ‘if the majority of bishops pronounced in favour of the Concordat’.¹⁴ Thus was de Thémines counted in the first instance as one of the bishops who had resigned his see. In August 1802, however, he wrote to Pius VII, reneged on his resignation, and forcefully denounced the Concordat and subsequent decrees of Pius VII as contrary to Church doctrine and his duties as a pastor.¹⁵ His letter was not merely a renunciation and a protest, however, but a stark statement of intransigence. The faithful of his diocese, he affirms, could indeed avail themselves of the new hierarchy, but these clerics were ‘neither innocent, nor irreproachable’. For de Thémines, therefore, the new clergy and the Concordat were to be seen in the same vein as the constitutional Church and treated with the same, if not overt, certain caution. His opposition, coupled with that of de Coucy, would thus lend authority, and endurance, to the position of the Petite Église.

The more consequential and overt resistance of the non-dismissory bishops appears to have crystallised in the months succeeding the publication of the *Réclamations*. On 15th April 1804, thirteen of the non-dismissory bishops signed another letter addressed to Pius VII entitled *Suite des Réclamations canoniques*. It asserted the rights of the Gallican Church but, additionally, it called into question the articles of the Concordat based on the rights of the exiled Louis XVIII.¹⁶ The bishops reminded the pope that even he had recognised that Louis XVIII

¹¹ Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 216.

¹² Roussel describes de Coucy and de Thémines as ‘the founders of the Petite Église’; see A. Roussel, ‘Le Centenaire de la Petite Église’ in *Le Correspondant* (Paris: 10 juin 1903), 972.

¹³ René de Chauvigny, *La résistance au Concordat de 1801; profils d'évêques--profils de prêtres* (Paris: Plon, 1921), 12-13.

¹⁴ *Recueil de pièces concernant la demande faite par notre Saint père le pape Pie VII. le 15. août 1801 aux évêques légitimes de France de la démission de leurs sièges* (London: 1802), 33.

¹⁵ *Traduction de la lettre latine écrite au pape par M. l'évêque de Blois* (London: Cox, fils et Baylis, 1803).

¹⁶ ‘Traduction de la suite des Réclamations canoniques et très-respectueuses, adressées à notre très-saint Père le Pape Pie VII, par la Providence divine souverain Pontife, contre différents actes relatifs à l'Eglise gallicane’ in

was the only successor to the legitimate rights given him by God to govern the French state – a recognition which the Concordat and Organic Articles obviously ignored.¹⁷ The bishops asserted the ignominy of the seizure of Church goods and the authority given to the state by the Concordat over those things which properly pertained to ecclesiastical government: marriage, prayer, liturgy, the clergy &c. As we shall see, the contention of the anticoncordatist party with regard to precisely these subjects would become a vein running through their texts and publications.

The letter of 15th April 1804 was followed by another declaration which reaffirmed the inalienable rights of Louis XVIII and which reaffirmed the allegiance of the non-dimissinary bishops to the rights and prerogatives of the King, entirely in accord with Gallican principles.¹⁸ Their royalism, they declared, was not a political but religious obligation.¹⁹ These two works already set the bishops against the exercise of the pope's authority in regard to the Concordat. In the view of the non-dimissinary bishops, Pius VII had recognised a false authority in France; in doing so, he had also given a jurisdiction over ecclesiastical matters to those who were not only usurpers but to whom that jurisdiction could not belong, being proper to the Church and to the bishops.

Already we see the bishops forming the corpus of texts by which the Petite Église would justify its non-communion with the concordatist Church; yet these texts were addressed to Pius VII and continued the open debate between Pius VII and the non-dimissinary episcopacy.²⁰ The bishops also turned their attention to the laity and clergy of their dioceses and advised them on their conduct with regard to the concordatist clergy and church order. The concretisation of a parallel Petite Église in opposition to that of the Concordat is unmistakable in these documents. As we have seen, the non-dimissinary bishops tended in the first instance to urge their flock to see the new bishops as emissaries or delegates of the pope and, apart from those who had taken the oath to the Civil Constitution, they and their clergy could be approached for spiritual nourishment and counsel. On 6th August 1802, the non-dimissinary bishops of Lombez and Uzès, whose sees were now occupied by former constitutional bishops, wrote to

Traduction des réclamations canoniques et très-respectueuses adressées par les évêques soussignés à notre Très-Saint-Père Pie VII contre différents actes relatifs à l'Église gallicane : Nouvelle édition (London: Cox, fils et Baylis, 1813), 135-214.

¹⁷ *Traduction des réclamations canoniques*, 140.

¹⁸ 'Déclaration sur les droits du roi' in *Traduction des réclamations canoniques*, 215-34.

¹⁹ 'In resisting the legitimate authority [Louis XVIII] they resist the order established by God and thus become enemies of God Himself'. *Traduction des réclamations canoniques*, 227.

²⁰ Rather perhaps an open monologue, given the pope's reticence to reply.

Pius VII and informed him that they had reversed their decision to resign and were now determined to recognise no other legitimate bishops of their dioceses other than themselves.²¹

A more evident breach between the anticoncordatist party and the concordatist Church came with the promulgation of a *Signification officielle*, by which the bishops resident in London addressed the priests of their ancient sees who had been delegated by them to care of the faithful.²² Duc cites this letter as instructing the laity in France, by formal prescription, that ‘all communication with them [the concordatist priests] in things pertaining to religion be absolutely forbidden and interdicted’.²³ The commentary on the Concordat provided by the representatives of the Petite Église at the First Vatican Council frames the prohibition in just such terms:

... acting with all the authority given to them by their character as legitimate pastors and relying upon the Apostolic Letters and Briefs of Pope Pius VI . . . that the faithful must not have recourse save to the ministry of priests not accepting [the Concordat] and be placed under their direction.²⁴

In 1810, Seignelay-Colbert, bishop of Rodez, wrote at the suggestion of his fellow non-dimissary bishops (‘composing the true Gallican Church’) a blunt pastoral letter in which the anticoncordatist episcopacy clearly set itself apart from the concordatist clergy.²⁵ The faithful must ‘beware of recognising and confusing with the true Gallican Church’ the different collections of bishops and clergy to be found throughout France, be they ‘of the consul or concordatist’.²⁶ The non-dimissary bishops thus declared not only that they were the true representatives of the Gallican Church, but also that they alone could claim such representation. All others were

... fruits of the spirit of darkness, born of the French Revolution, born of impiety, pride, ambition . . . not breathing the spirit of Jesus Christ nor perpetuating His doctrine . . . A profane and usurping hand has invaded all . . . His defenders obliged to take flight,

²¹ ‘Extrait de la lettre de Monseigneur de Bethizy, Evêque d’Usez au Souverain Pontife, datée de Londres, le 6 août 1802’ and ‘Extrait de la lettre de Monseigneur de Chauvigny, Evêque de Lombez, au Souverain Pontife, datée de Londres le 6 août 1802’ in *Politique chrétienne* (Paris: 1816), i, 397-8.

²² Emile Gabory, *Napoléon et la Vendée* (Perrin, 1914), 160.

²³ Marius Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869* (Lyon: Imprimerie Pitrat Aîné, 1889), 37.

²⁴ *Reverentissima commentatio ad sacro-sanctum oecumenicum Concilium Romanum de variis actis ad ecclesiam gallicanam spectantibus* (Geneva: Imprimerie de J.-G. Fick, 1869), 10.

²⁵ *Lettre pastorale de nos maîtres dans la foi, les évêques non démis, composant la vraie Église gallicane, réunis à Londres: en date du premier jour de l’an 1810* (London: 1810).

²⁶ *Lettre pastorale de nos maîtres dans la foi*, 1.

and even the Head has not kept aloof from the fear or seduction, the ruse and the perfidy of the unjust and powerful man [Napoleon].²⁷

Given this stark contrast between the true pastors of the Gallican Church and those who have betrayed it, Seignelay-Colbert ‘forbids all communion in spiritual matters’ and rather recommends the faithful to those clergy who have never renounced the King or God. The bishop asserts that the likes of these ‘are not the dimissionary bishops’ but ‘those bishops of the Gallican Church who have kept their sees and remain the head of those sees’ unlike those bishops who have renounced their duty of care and of safeguarding their flock.²⁸ This 1810 letter therefore asserts indeed the continued existence of the Gallican Church, represented by the non-dimissionary bishops in their exile, in contrast to the pretender church of the concordatists. These assertions were repeated again in a letter of 22nd December 1813 in which the non-dimissionary bishops wrote to their loyal clergy and faithful that they

... had nothing more to say than to recommend to the clergy who remain attached to the true principles to keep loyal to all the writings the non-dimissionary bishops have made and signed in common and which contain therein the same true principles and which were made to enlighten the faithful and serve as a rule for the clergy who, following them, cannot thus lose their way.²⁹

Herein then, already in 1810, we see the separate anticoncordatist Church which was to become known as the *Petite Église* in opposition to the concordatist church.

Not all the non-dimissionary bishops accepted such a stance. Indeed, some lamented its excesses, which in fact prompted them then to offer their resignations to Pius VII.³⁰ However, it is evident that a core body of the anticoncordatist bishops adhered to, and promoted the idea, of themselves as the true Gallican Church against the false church of the Concordat. La Meurthe asserts that the body of non-dimissionary bishops as a whole cannot be seen as the origin of the *Petite Église*; rather, one must look to the conduct of priests in France as the root of the *Petite Église* as a separate ecclesiastical community.³¹ We shall examine below the conduct of priests with regard to the emergence of the *Petite Église*, but it is evident that the publications

²⁷ *Lettre pastorale de nos maîtres dans la foi*, 2.

²⁸ *Lettre pastorale de nos maîtres dans la foi*, 2-3.

²⁹ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 12.

³⁰ De Nicolaï of Béziers (in 1805) and de Bovet of Sisteron (in 1812) offered their resignations to Pius VII after their alarm at the conduct of their fellow non-dimissionary bishops. De Bovet wrote to Pius VII that he regretted that his refusal to resign had placed him ‘amongst the scandals of which [he] is the witness’; see Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 62.

³¹ Boulay de la Meurthe, *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France*, 328.

of the non-dimissionary bishops had already, by 1810, placed the anticoncordatist party apart from and against the concordatist church. The Petite Église itself certainly regarded the roots of its position within these protests of the bishops:

... from the depths of exile, the legitimate bishops ordered Catholics to avoid carefully all relations with the schismatic clergy; these recommendations were renewed until their death by these venerable prelates, and God gave grace to our fathers to observe them with an inviolable fidelity. Let us pray God, my children, that He grant us the same grace in our turn, so that, whatever the ordeals we are allowed to suffer, we may never give up the road that these legitimate pastors have traced for us, they who had received from God Himself the mission to us in the ways of salvation.³²

³² Marius Duc, *Concordat de 1801: Lettre d'un père a ses enfants* (Lyon: Imprimerie d'Aimé Vingtrinier, 1869), 14-15.

VI: ‘Nos bons prêtres’ : the rôle of the clergy in the emergence of the Petite Église

Having noted above the role of the anticoncordatist bishops in opposing the Concordat from their exile, and in organising and lending authority to opposition in France, we now must demonstrate the role of the clergy in France in encouraging that same opposition. Their role is capital given that, in many cases, it was these priests who would be revered by later communities of the Petite Église for having guided them into the opposition which defines them. So too, the direction of these priests with regard to the attitude, conduct, and identity of those communities played a vital role in their formation and continued existence.

Before turning to the organisation of the anticoncordatist party in France, directed by the bishops from their exile, we must first note that the bishops were not alone in their exile. It is in fact no surprise that in London, from whence came so many of the anticoncordatist rallying cries, an entrenched and extreme anticoncordatist movement arose. At the time of the Concordat, England not only hosted some nineteen exiled bishops, but also thousands of French priests who had fled rather than submit to the Civil Constitution and endure the persecutions that their refusal entailed.¹ Whilst the bishops had been asked to resign their sees in the wake of the Concordat, the exiled priests were not required to make any public act of submission at the time of the implementation of the decree. In the years following the Concordat most priests returned to France, save those who had settled in England working amongst the French community or had chosen to remain in exile in the hope of a Bourbon restoration.² It is amongst the latter that we see the emergence of an extreme anticoncordatist clerical party known as the *Blanchardists* after their most vocal leader, the abbé Blanchard. The existence of such a party, by which the bishops exiled in London were surrounded, served to crystallise their own opinions and lend encouragement to their opposition, which itself would then influence the anticoncordatist clergy in France.³

¹ See François Xavier Plasse, *Le clergé français réfugié en Angleterre* (Paris: Société général de Librairie catholique, 1886) and Dominic Aidan Bellenger ‘ « Fearless resting place »: the Exiled French Clergy in Great Britain, 1789-1815’ in K. Carpenter and P. Mansel (eds) *The French Émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789–1814* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 214-229.

² Bernard Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation; being the history of the English Catholics during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 87.

³ Blanchard’s literary output was considerable and came to represent the extreme end to which the anticoncordatist rhetoric and position could be taken; denouncing Pius VII as a heretic and a schismatic, Blanchard and his supporters were denounced by the English hierarchy but became a vocal party of opposition to Pius VII and the Concordat, heavily influencing the exiled bishops and especially de Thémines. See Abel Dechène, *Contre Pie VII et Bonaparte: Le Blanchardisme (1801-1829)* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Oie, 1932), 45. For Blanchard’s publications see *Controverse pacifique sur les principales questions qui divisent et troublent l’Église gallicane* (London: Cox et Baylis, 1802) ; *Première suite à la Controverse pacifique, où l’on développe les réclamations canoniques des évêques de France* (London: Cox et Baylis, 1805), 516-517, 424 ; *De l’état politique et religieuse de la France* (London: Cox et Baylis, 1806).

Contrasted with the exiled clergy in England, the anticoncordatist clergy in France had no hierarchy to direct them save the anticoncordatist bishops still in exile. Although La Meurthe asserts that the existence of the Petite Église is entirely due to ‘the instigation of a few independent and entrepreneurial priests’, it is evident that a number of non-dimissionary bishops instigated or encouraged the emergence of the Petite Église in their dioceses.⁴ An analysis of the encouragement that the bishops gave these groups through the local clergy will point unambiguously to the episcopacy as the origin of the lay-led Petite Église. Here we must also note, as we shall see below, that in some areas the emergence of the Petite Église was a purely lay phenomenon, albeit one which gained authority and encouragement from the pronouncements of the anticoncordatist episcopacy.

With the particularly strident rejection of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in the Vendée, it is perhaps not surprising that we find in that region a major centre of the Petite Église; this is, in part, also due to the role of de Coucy. His letter to the pope of 1st September 1802, condemning the Concordat, had spread through his former diocese – six clergy refused the Concordat in Parthenay and some fifty in the Bressuirais in January 1804.⁵ Only a month later, de Coucy was imprisoned in a Spanish convent by order of Napoleon and from his exile guarded a silence until 1814; nonetheless, with his letter of September 1802 and his own refusal to submit to the Concordat, he had given his clergy and people an example to follow. The letter had proved a catalyst and the priest Lucrès had, towards the end of 1804, forbidden the faithful who rallied to the anticoncordatist clergy to establish any communion with the concordatist church – a prohibition that was announced in Poitou by the dissident priests ‘in the name of de Coucy’. De Coucy himself had not actually given such orders. It had been Brion, a priest of the Petite Église, who had thought it expedient to attach the bishop’s name to these orders.⁶

Although his imprisonment deprived the Petite Église of Poitou of de Coucy’s ongoing encouragement, this sector of the Petite Église was to be the most numerous and prominent, a phenomenon clearly galvanised by de Coucy’s previous authoritative opposition. Besides the number of priests who refused the Concordat noted above, its adherents already numbered an impressive 20,000 in 1805.⁷ Amongst the most prominent of the clergy to refuse the Concordat, and those which were denounced to the Minister of Cults in Paris, were Texier

⁴ Alfred Boulay de la Meurthe *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France* (A. Mame et fils: 1925), 329 ; C. G. van Riel ‘La « Petite Église »’ *Revue internationale de théologie*, 28 (1938), i, 37 ; and Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004), 60.

⁵ Auguste Billaud, ‘Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église’ in *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest et des musées de Poitiers* (Société des antiquaires de l’Ouest, 1957) 1957/07-1957/09, 217.

⁶ Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 221.

⁷ Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 47.

of Courlay, Brion of Cirières, Gueniveau of Combrand, Legrand of Montigny, and Barbarin of Neuil-sous-Aubiers.⁸ Texier was to play a particular role in the Petite Église of the Vendée as the ‘apostle of the resistance’.⁹ The priests of the Petite Église in Poitou were harassed by the civil authorities, always aware of the past insurrections of the Vendéans and thus ministered necessarily clandestinely.¹⁰ That this ministry was not impeded by arrests, imprisonment or persecution is a testament to the fidelity of the dissidents of Poitou, who during the Revolution had become adept at hiding the refractory priests and saw no difference in performing the same duty for those who refused the Concordat.¹¹

In regard to the archdiocese of Toulouse we see a case whereby a non-dimissary bishop, Chauvigny de Blot of Lombez, directed the Petite Église not only in his own diocese but also in a diocese of which he had not been bishop. These actions therefore demonstrate the attitude of the anticoncordatist bishops that it was to them that the prerogatives of the Gallican Church had fallen, even in those areas where they had not previously enjoyed jurisdiction. The diocese of Lombez, before its abolition in 1790, had been a suffragan of Toulouse, yet in view of the resignation of the former archbishop, which meant that the see was now occupied by a concordatist, Chauvigny de Blot claimed jurisdiction over the diocese of his former metropolitan and urged the faithful to recognise no other bishop but himself.¹² A further complication arose with the death of Chauvigny de Blot in 1805, at which point the non-dimissary archbishop Dillon of Narbonne, as representative of the non-dimissary bishops in London, delegated jurisdiction to local clergy through Seignelay-Colbert of Rodez.¹³ The

⁸ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 45.

⁹ Pierre Texier (1758-1826) was born at Courlay to a family that had played a significant part in the Wars of the Vendée. He was ordained priest in 1787 after having been widowed and, as a result of refusing the Civil Constitution, went into hiding. He gained the respect and admiration of the local population as a result of his conduct during the wars of the Vendée and was named to the parish of Courlay by de Coucy in 1795. Hiding out of necessity in these years, he nonetheless ministered to his parishioners with zeal. Refusing the Concordat, he was hunted by the civil authorities without success and preached against Napoleon and the Concordat. He was able to return to his parish church at Courlay with the Restoration of Louis XVIII and ministered there until his death in 1826. His funeral was attended by more than 6,000 members of the Petite Église and he is held in veneration by existing members of the community. See Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 48-49 ; , idem, *La Petite Église en Vendée, Courlay et la famille Texier* (Fontenay-le-Comte, 1955), 15-20 ; and J. Rouger and J-L. Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence* (UPCP/Geste Paysanne, 1987), 29.

¹⁰ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église en Vendée, Courlay et la famille Texier*, 11.

¹¹ Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 56.

¹² Clément Tournier *Le cardinal de Clermont-Tonnerre: archevêque de Toulouse, 1820-1830, et le drame de la Petite Église* (Éditions de la basilique, 1935), 18. At the time of his exile during the revolution, Chauvigny de Blot named a refractory priest of Lombez, abbé Lucrès, as his vicar general; and now that the priest resided in Toulouse he was to act as the vicar general over all the archdiocese of Toulouse; see J. Gros, ‘La « Petite Église » de Toulouse’ *La Revue de Paris*, (1906/05-1906/06), 622-623.

¹³ ‘Extrait d’une lettre de Monseigneur Colbert, évêque de Rodez, adressée à un vicaire général de Lombez, datée de Londres , le 4 mars 1806’ in *Politique chrétienne* (Paris : 1816), i, 406.

Petite Église of Toulouse and its environs, therefore, taking its cue from its continued direction from the exiled bishops, developed a hierarchy with a dozen or so priests who celebrated Mass in private homes, established small chapels, and performed marriages.¹⁴ Amongst themselves, the independent ministry to which they had become accustomed nonetheless stoked strife amongst the priests.¹⁵ Under heavy police surveillance, the Petite Église of Toulouse was especially vocal and soon aggravated the civil authorities. Although the priests of the Petite Église were especially present in Toulouse, they only succeeded in attracting a few hundred adherents, with the majority of Catholics failing to see the ‘error’ of the Concordat.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the solicitude of the non-dimissory bishops in regard to an otherwise ‘vacant’ see meant that the Petite Église was able to take root and organise its affairs.

A more nuanced approach is seen in the regard to diocese of Séez, where d’Argentré had directed his clergy and faithful to approach the concordatist bishops and priests for their spiritual needs. Whilst one might surmise that this should have prevented the growth of the Petite Église in his diocese, his signing of the *Réclamations* and the reality of the situation in France meant that his refusal to resign would encourage the anticoncordatists of his diocese in their conduct and opposition.¹⁷ Whilst d’Argentré had advised his clergy and people to approach the ministers of the concordatist church, his own refusal to resign allowed his priests rightly to claim that they were merely following the urgings and example of their bishop. The directives of the anticoncordatist bishops in regard to their own dioceses was therefore important as a justification for the conduct of priests and laity of the Petite Église, but not all of the episcopacy sought to direct the clergy and the faithful. The bishops of Montpellier, de Malide, and of Béziers, de Nicolay, had both signed the *Réclamations*, but their neighbouring dioceses received different instructions as far as the Concordat was concerned. De Nicolay, from 1802, ceased any governance of his diocese or any encouragement of the Petite Église.¹⁸

¹⁴ J. Gros, *La « Petite Église » de Toulouse*, 626-628.

¹⁵ Jean-Pierre Chantin in *Pérennité du mouvement anticoncordataire*. J. Gros, *La « Petite Église » de Toulouse*, 638.

¹⁶ J. Gros, *La « Petite Église » de Toulouse*, 640.

¹⁷ In Alençon, the majority of the clergy assented to the Concordat save an elderly Broussin and a young Capuchin, de Marchand, who preached against the Concordat and were supported by aristocratic ladies, but whose efforts had little success. In Bellême, Poirier preached violently against Pius VII and attracted some 100 adherents for whom he celebrated the sacraments (known as the *Elus*). In Mortagne, several priests of the Petite Église functioned, supported by elderly ladies, and their influence extended to the surrounding countryside, but were left alone by the civil authorities. At their head was Martin, a former refractory priest who was referred to as ‘the Pope’ and lead the Petite Église in Mortagne until his death in 1843, who provoked the literary attack on the local priest. See L. de la Sicotière, *Notes sur la Petite Église au diocèse de Séez* (Évreux: 1894), 12, 20-21 and L. J. Fret *Le pape de Mortagne, ou Scène de mœurs Percheronnes* (Imprimerie-Librairie de N.-D. de Montligeon, 1897).

¹⁸ Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 305.

De Malide's conduct was less straightforward; he declared that he retained all his jurisdiction of his diocese and named Teissier as his vicar general, whilst at the same time urging his clergy to recognise and obey the new concordatist bishop, much in the same vein as d'Argentré had done.¹⁹ Consequently, whilst the bishops had publicly opposed the Concordat as a body, their actions in regard to their own dioceses were far from uniform.

Given the intransigence that was to mark the career of de Thémines of Blois, it is no surprise that we find the clergy of his diocese amongst the instigators of the Petite Église in both Blois and Vendôme. Along with de Coucy, de Thémines had been placed under house arrest in Spain in 1804. However, through the intervention of Emery and Cardinal Fesch, he was released and took up residence in England in 1810.²⁰ From there, he would preach and write against the Concordat and do all he could to encourage the Petite Église. Galvanised by the resistance of de Thémines, a group of anticoncordatist priests, chief amongst them Thoinier and Beaunier, ensured the non-dimissary bishops' protests were heard in his former see.²¹ Moreover, they insisted that their ministry was only exercised in the name of de Thémines with whom they were in contact through a priest delegated by him.²² In 1802, only fifty or so adhered to their opinions. By 1804 this number had grown to some 150, and by 1814 to an impressive 500.²³ The various publications of de Thémines and the non-dimissary bishops were spread through the region and the release of de Thémines from his imprisonment to the relative freedom of England served to encourage the Petite Église of his former diocese.²⁴ Encouraged by the new bishop of Orléans (in whose diocese Blois and Vendôme were now situated), who had declared the priests suspended from their ministry, the local authorities began to harass the anticoncordatists and to prosecute their priests.²⁵ The Petite Église lost one of their priests, Habert, who gave his submission in 1804, but the letters of the non-dimissary bishops further animated the Petite Église in Blois and Vendôme.²⁶ This is a clear example of how an active and vocal anticoncordatist bishop was able to aid the formation of the Petite Église in

¹⁹ Those clergy and faithful who rallied to Teissier became known as the *Purs* and met in small chapels or private houses to celebrate the sacraments and decry the Concordat. On 4th September 1804, Rollet, the concordatist bishop, declared them suspended from ministry. By the time of the death of de Malide in 1812, their numbers were significantly reduced. Then, in 1821, a debate between abbé Salomon and a concordatist priest further reduced their number as the arguments of the Petit Église were refuted point by point. See C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 52 and Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 306.

²⁰ Joanny Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire, son histoire, son état actuel* (Paris: Bodin, 1906), 8-9.

²¹ Louis Chesneau, *Les Dissidents vendômois de la petite église* (Impr. Launay et fils, 1924), 19.

²² Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 48-51.

²³ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 25, 32, 39.

²⁴ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 16-17, 24.

²⁵ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 20, 28.

²⁶ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 42-43.

his diocese. Centred around five priests who were faithful to de Thémynes, the Masses of the Petite Église were well frequented; by 1816 their oratories were full, especially at Easter, and many faithful came for the ministrations of those priests who declared themselves apart from ‘the great schism in France, the head of which is the Sovereign Pontiff’.²⁷ These extreme views could rightly claim to be found in the conduct and writings of de Thémynes who, as we shall see below, only became more entrenched with age.

Seignelay-Colbert, of Rodez, was, with de Thémynes, one of the more vocal non-dimissionary bishops. In the region of Rouergue, clergy of his former diocese followed his instructions to refuse obedience to the concordatist bishop and attracted a number of families both of Rodez and the former diocese of Saint-Flour to the Petite Église.²⁸ The town of Villecomtal in particular became a centre of the Petite Église due to the influence of two priests who resided there: Delhom and Regis. They regarded themselves as the head of the Petite Église in the region and were frequently in conflict despite calls for unity from Seignelay-Colbert.²⁹ They were assisted by a crowd of zealous women who stirred up the local population against the Concordat and rallied the faithful to the Petite Église.³⁰ Having relied on the support of Seignelay-Colbert for their ministry in his former diocese, the bishop’s death in 1813 placed them under de Thémynes, who supported Regis and Delhom in their ministry, as the ‘head of the Petite Église’.³¹

Although we have seen that certain of the non-dimissionary bishops were active in the rise of the Petite Église in their diocese, not every emergence of the Petite Église can be attributed to their instigation. By contrast, in some instances an organised Petite Église arose at the instigation only of priests or, in one instance, of the laity. In the region of Fougères the Petite Église, known as the *Louisets*, emerged as a group of female admirers of a refractory priest with a poor reputation who had established a centre in a local chapel before establishing a clandestine ministry in the wake of the Concordat.³² Celebrating Mass in private rooms, the

²⁷ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 109.

²⁸ Their adherents were to become known as the “enfarinés” (the floured ones) on account of their retention of the fashion to powder their hair. See J. Gibial *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze » « Les Enfarinés » 1801-1911* (Aurillac, 1912) p 5 and A. Roussel, ‘Le Centenaire de la Petite Église’ in *Le Correspondant* (Paris : 10 juin 1903), 972. This community also occasioned the subject of a novel Jean-Paul Desprat, *Les Enfarinés* (Editions du Rouergue 2017) in which the author explores the community’s existence as a separate community alongside their Catholic neighbours.

²⁹ Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 6-7.

³⁰ Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 8.

³¹ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 295. Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 9.

³² So called after the chapel of Saint Louis in the parish of Saint-Léonard where a group of female anticoncordatists grouped around the refractory priest Goret de Martinais. See Etienne Aubrée, *Les Louisets* (Paris : Perrin, 1943), 17 and Émile Pautrel *Notions d'histoire et d'archéologie pour la région de Fougères*

anticoncordatists were left alone until 1814, when a growth in their number occasioned a pastoral letter by the local bishop and prayers for their conversion before they were excommunicated.³³ The *Louisets* not only refused the Concordat but also supposed that the pope had never signed it, that Pius VII never came to Paris or that the pope was otherwise imprisoned. By 1815 the *Louisets* had two oratories in Fougères, two priests, and around 1,200 adherents. The young female members refused to marry their fiancés unless the men renounced the Concordat and, indeed, then refused even to consider marriage with a concordatist at all.³⁴ In 1816, the civil authorities decided to act to maintain order and the ‘so-called priest’ Fleury was expelled from the region.³⁵ All the same, other anticoncordatist priests also visited the region, though were eventually moved on, until one abbé de Juvigny came to reside at the house of a noble female *Louissette* in Fougères from 1828 until his death as their last priest in 1843.³⁶ In the diocese of Le Mans, where the bishop had died in exile in 1790, three priests in particular led the Petite Église and thus its emergence was also instigated by priestly, rather than episcopal, opposition.³⁷ Their last priest died in 1832, having refused to be reconciled with the Church, and leaving instructions to his people to baptise themselves and avoid any contact with ‘the intruders’ at all, even to resist military service.³⁸ With no priests to hear their confessions there were, each Easter, to examine their consciences assiduously and make a sincere act of contrition before God. Curiously, and in contrast to other groups of the Petite Église, he forbade his faithful to marry, even before the community, seeing ‘true priests’ as a necessity for such an act.³⁹ These instructions therefore demonstrate that the lay cult of the Petite Église was founded on the directives of the last clergy in these areas.

(Fougères: H. Riou-Reuzé, 1927), 199-200. Boulay de La Meurthe erroneously attributes this designation to their fidelity to Louis XVIII in his *Histoire du rétablissement du culte en France*, 329.

³³ Aubrée, *Les Louisets : Notes sur le schisme de la Petite Église*, 19-21.

³⁴ Aubrée, *Les Louisets : Notes sur le schisme de la Petite Église*, 22-24.

³⁵ Aubrée, *Les Louisets : Notes sur le schisme de la Petite Église*, 24-31.

³⁶ De Juvigny had been ordained on condition that he never exercise any ministry; however, he found himself much in demand from the Petite Église despite it causing the ire of the civil authorities; he was fined for celebrating religious marriages which had not first been celebrated civilly on two occasions. Aubrée, *Les Louisets : Notes sur le schisme de la Petite Église*, 32-34 and Roussel, *Le Centenaire de la Petite Église*, 975.

³⁷ Louis Calendini, ‘Un Foyer de la Petite Église’ in *Les Annales fléchoises et la vallée du Loir* (Société d'histoire, lettres, sciences, et art de La Flèche), (1913/01-1913/12), 251.

³⁸ During the Revolution, those who refused military service had also been hidden by those who were to emerge at the Petite Église. This refusal continued amongst certain sectors of the Petite Église. In 1806 the attempted arrest of two members of the community at Courlay for refusing conscription resulted in the death of two soldiers and a crushing response from the State which then imprisoned fifty-two people and sentenced three to death. See Guy Janssen, ‘Autorités et dissidence : la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire’, in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds.), « Sectes » et « hérésies » de l'Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 2002), 136.

³⁹ Calendini, *Un Foyer de la Petite Église*, 251-253. Calendini states that these instructions were passed down orally by members of the community.

In Lyon, together with Poitou, we find one of the two most important groups of the Petite Église that continues to exist today, especially in the suburb of Croix-Rousse and so too an example of priestly, rather than episcopal direction.⁴⁰ The development of the Petite Église in the region of Lyon is distinct from the anticoncordatist movement elsewhere, in that its roots also lie in the Jansenist movement.⁴¹ Although the Petite Église of Lyon would later reject any notion that they were Jansenists, it is evident that the first clergy and faithful were attached to these principles.⁴² The anticoncordatists of Lyon came from a theologically well-educated group of Jansenistic laity and their clergy.⁴³ The Jansenistic clergy had been tolerated in the archdiocese of Lyon by archbishop de Montazet, although de Marbeuf, who succeeded him, was opposed to Jansenism.⁴⁴ De Marbeuf had died in exile in 1790, yet his vicar general, Linsolas, remained during the Revolution and was able to exercise a clandestine ministry amongst the laity, of whom many were attached to Jansenistic teachings. Not all of the Jansenists of Lyon opposed the Concordat, however; the Jansenists at Forez, and their priest Jacquemont, lamented the Concordat but felt compelled to accept the new order.⁴⁵ For Jacquemont the fact that the see of Lyon was vacant after the death of de Marbeuf meant that the concordatist bishop ought to be recognised.⁴⁶ This view was not shared by all the Jansenistic clergy and well-regarded theologians and pastors such as Chaix, Germain, Calais, Grand, Mercier, Maurin, Heurtier and Vial thought rather that the see of Lyon had been destroyed by the Concordat and the new bishop, Fesch, was a mere usurper.⁴⁷

Chaix was to be the author of the ‘credo’ of the Petite Église at Lyon; his *Catechisme sur le Concordat* described the Concordat as the most ‘horrible attack that any pope has yet committed of this type against the Church’.⁴⁸ Pius VII, moreover, had ‘sold and delivered the Church to the French Consulate and to all the sovereigns who would wish to suppress Her and destroy Her’. Chaix was of the mind that faithful priests who rejected the Concordat had no

⁴⁰ Bernard Vignot, *Le phénomène des églises parallèles* (Les éditions du Cerf, 2010), 28. Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche: Geste Édition, 1999), 27.

⁴¹ C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911), 2.

⁴² See Léon Séché *Les derniers Jansénistes*, 3 vols. (Paris: 1893), iii, 273-274 and C. G. van Riel ‘La cause de la Petite Église au concile du Vatican et après’, *Revue internationale de théologie*, 28 (1938), iii, 149-151.

⁴³ See Emile Bonnardet *Les Lyonnais au collège de Juilly, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Lyon: Imprimerie Mougin-Rusand-Waltener, 1902).

⁴⁴ M. Rebouillat, ‘Les groupes anticoncordataires existant encore en France’ in *Annales de l’Académie de Mâcon* (1968-1969), 26 ; James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 171.

⁴⁵ Séché, *Les derniers Jansénistes*, ii, 91-93 and Latreille *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 68.

⁴⁶ For the division between the Jansenists of Forez and the anticoncordatists of Lyon see Latreille *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 145-169.

⁴⁷ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 91.

⁴⁸ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 69.

need of any permissions from the concordatist bishops and indeed should not pray for them in the canon of the Mass but rather remain loyal to the bishops of the *Réclamations*.⁴⁹ Germain was to become the most influential priest of the Lyon community; organising not only a pastoral ministry to the Petite Église but also instructing young men in theology, establishing a hostel for young girls, a retirement home and altogether organising not only the spiritual life of the Petite Église but also forming a community that was self-sufficient.⁵⁰ Thus, at Lyon, the Petite Église was constituted by these Jansenistic clergy who adhered to the non-dimissory bishops, together with the faithful of Jansenistic and anticoncordatist tendencies who gathered around them. This Jansenistic and anticoncordatist character of the Petite Église at Lyon would, however, soon divide them not only from their fellow Jansenists in Forez, but also from the concordatist clergy of France, and soon, too, even from the support of de Thémines.

In contrast to the areas in which the exiled bishops or local anticoncordatist clergy encouraged and enabled the Petite Église, the anticoncordatists, or *Blancs*, of Charollais were never supported by their own clergy, nor was their refusal to submit to the Concordat instigated by any member of the clergy.⁵¹ Their existence, rather, lies in their refusal to attend a neighbouring village for Mass or else a parish led by a former constitutionalist priest.⁵² These families had been instrumental in hiding refractory priests and naturally reacted with horror at the expectation that they were now to submit to the ministrations of a former constitutional priest.⁵³ In Saint-Germain-des-Bois, the local community simply refused to attend the neighbouring parish and gathered under the direction of an elder who led their prayers and catechism.⁵⁴ The majority submitted when their village eventually obtained its own, concordatist, priest.⁵⁵ The *Blancs* did not disappear, however, and their numbers stabilised; the community numbered 220 in 1852 and 206 in 1911, with a dispersed but not less ardent community continuing to exist today.⁵⁶ The *Blancs* therefore represent a unique and immediate adaptation to a lay community, stemming from the Revolution rather than the Concordat, that other communities of the Petite Église would also traverse to varying degrees of success.

⁴⁹ Jean-Pierre Chantin, *Les Amis de l'Œuvre de la Vérité; Jansénisme, miracles et fin du monde au xix^e siècle* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1998), 97. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 87-89, 100.

⁵⁰ Yves Krumenacker, *Du Jansénisme à la secte : vie de Monsieur Claude Germain, curé de Lacenas (1750-1831)* (Publisud, 1998), 14-15.

⁵¹ Claude Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais* (Dijon: 1930), 220-222.

⁵² Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 28.

⁵³ Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais*, i, 224.

⁵⁴ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 29.

⁵⁵ Brun, *Les Blancs ou anticoncordataires du Charollais*, i, 223.

⁵⁶ Marie-Aimée Duvernois, 'Les Blancs, minorité anti-concordataire : microdifférence religieuse et identité régionale dans le sud de la Bourgogne' *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 64/ 1 (1987), 157-176.

The growth and development of the Petite Église in the various regions in which it was able to organise opposition to the Concordat was thus not due to just one phenomenon, nor did it follow one pattern. Certainly, the exiled bishops were, in individual cases and as a body, instrumental in encouraging this opposition amongst clergy and the laity. The texts and directives issued by the bishops from afar served to galvanise, and in the view of the Petite Église to legitimise, their refusal to submit to the concordatist church. Yet, in areas where the bishop of the *ancien régime* had died, or submitted, opposition nonetheless arose; independent local clergy were able to organise the Petite Église without the support of a bishop. Indeed, in other areas, the Petite Église arose as an entirely lay community. The influence of the experience of the refractories in the Revolution, the public opposition of the bishops, the independent nature of the local clergy, and the still simmering hostility to the State and the clerics which had supported it over the Civil Constitution, all contributed to the differing ways in which the Petite Église was able to arise in different areas and in different ways.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This suspicion of clerics with regard to their stance in respect of the State is typified by an account of Drochon that in 1805 the anticoncordatist priest Ballard had had his church broken into and the liturgical vessels and books stolen. He was able to obtain replacements but the missal with its red covers caused great turmoil amongst the Petite Église he served in the village of Pin: ‘What is this book? It is the book of Bonaparte, the book of divorce!’ they cried, and in less than a minute thirty people had filled the church exclaiming that Ballard had sold himself to Napoleon and was preaching divorce. Such incidents show the suspicion of the members of the Petite Église even towards their own, and their view that infidelity was everywhere. See Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 246.

VII: Episcopal Direction and Abandonment

With the fall of Napoleon in 1814 and the return of Louis XVIII, the Petite Église hoped for an end to the Concordat and for their grievances to be addressed by the restored monarchy. To their disappointment, in May 1814 a circular letter came from the Ministry of Cults forbidding priests of the Petite Église from exercising any ministry and mandating their submission to the concordatist bishops.¹ In July, however, de Talleyrand-Périgord was able to obtain the king's approval for a text which declared the non-dimissary bishops to be the only legitimate bishops of their dioceses.² In the same month, Cortois de Pressigny, the former bishop of Saint-Malo, travelled to Rome to obtain an abrogation of the Concordat from the pope.³ At the time of the return of Louis XVIII, 16 signatories of the *Réclamations* remained alive (two had resigned under the empire – Nicholaï of Béziers in 1805 and Bovet of Sisteron in 1812) and thus, in November 1814, the king wrote to each of these prelates to inform them that their continued refusal would be an obstacle for the negotiations in Rome.⁴ This led six of the bishops to write to the king offering their resignations on 15th November 1815, but with the express wish that Louis XVIII keep this secret until negotiations with Rome had concluded.⁵ With the return of Louis XVIII after Napoleon's 100 days, a turning point in the life of the Petite Église commenced with the negotiations now in full flow for what was to be the Concordat of 1817: on 8th November 1816 six non-dimissary bishops, including de Coucy, wrote to Pius VII to resign their sees.⁶ This left only eight surviving non-dimissary bishops whose numbers were soon to be further depleted.⁷ Thus, by the end of 1817, only four bishops remained firm in their refusal; de Villedieu of Digne, Amelot of Vannes, de Vintimille of

¹ Auguste Billaud, 'Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église' in *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest et des musées de Poitiers* (Société des antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1957) 1957/07-1957/09, 224.

² Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 214 C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 130.

³ *L'Ami de la religion et du roi: journal ecclésiastique, politique et littéraire* 2 (1814), 21.

⁴ Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 56. Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 126. Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 120.

⁵ Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830*, 437.

⁶ The '100 days' (in fact 111 days) designated the return to Paris of Napoleon from his exile on Elba until the restoration of Louis XVIII (20th March 1815 - 8th July 1815). The bishops who offered their resignations in 1816 were Talleyrand-Périgord of Reims, de Coucy of La Rochelle, de La Fare of Nancy, de Chilleau of Châlon-sur-Saône, de Bonnac of Agen and de La Tour nominated to Moulins. *L'Ami de la religion et du roi* 20 (1819), 25. Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 160. Auguste Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* (Paris: 1961), 437-438. Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 160.

⁷ Bonnac of Agen resigned on 12 November 1816, Bethizy of Uzès died in London on 8th August 1817, Varelle of Gap renounced all opposition, de Caux of Aire died in Paris on 30th October 1817. See Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 162.

Carcassonne and de Thémines of Blois.⁸ Villedieu, Vintimille and Amelot were octogenarians who, though refusing their resignation, ‘lived in Paris in full and public communion with the concordatists’.⁹ De Thémines, however, remained resolute, writing to Louis XVIII that he could not resign his see, for, although ‘legitimacy was on throne, illegitimacy was on the altar.’¹⁰ De Thémines thus took up the standard of the Petite Église as the last ‘true’ bishop of the Gallican Church.

Whilst the priests and faithful of the Petite Église may have regarded these submissions with confusion, and no doubt a sense of abandonment, these submissions did not mean the extinction of the various anticoncordatist groups. In Poitou the clergy had already taken matters in hand after the prevarications of de Coucy upon his return from exile. De Coucy returned to France in August 1814 and was soon faced with the issue of the Petite Église in his diocese.¹¹ En route to Paris he stopped at Poitiers and, in conversation with his clergy, he reminded his vicar generals that, whilst he had asserted himself as the sole legitimate bishop, he had also affirmed that the concordatist bishops and clergy should be regarded as the delegates of the Holy See; as we have seen, it was Lucrès who had forbidden any communion with them.¹² On 17th August, three priests of the Petite Église (Legrand of Montigny, Vion from La Chapelle-Largeau and Joubert from Boismé) delegated by their colleagues met with their bishop to recount their experiences during his exile and ask for direction as to their future conduct.¹³ They explained to the bishop that after the return of the monarchy they had been able to return to their parish churches, but they had persisted in their refusal to submit to the concordatist bishop of Poitiers.¹⁴ The bishop, citing the desire of Louis XVIII to answer the ecclesiastical difficulties, advised them simply to wait and see, but the clergy urged the bishop to advise, given that they still had faithful to minister to daily. After being pressed, de Coucy told the priests to report to their fellow clergy that he had no orders to give and that he could only repeat what he had said before; that is, that the vicar generals of Poitiers represented the Holy See and that one could not be mistaken in being united, through them, to the Holy See; ‘for the rest, everyone should follow his conscience’.¹⁵ A general meeting of all the clergy of the Petite

⁸ Ardura erroneously states that only two bishops ‘categorically refused’ the Concordat – de Coucy and de Thémines ; see Bernard Ardura, *Le Concordat entre Pie VII et Bonaparte, 15 juillet 1801: Bicentenaire d'une reconciliation* (Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 113.

⁹ Pierre Louis Blanchard *De la communion in divinis avec Pie VII* (London: G. Schulze 1821), 26-27.

¹⁰ Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 163.

¹¹ *L'Ami de la religion et du roi* 2 (1814) 186.

¹² Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 226.

¹³ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 57. Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 228.

¹⁴ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 55.

¹⁵ Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 229.

Église of the region was then held at Montigny towards the end of August. Lagrand reported the vagaries of de Coucy's instructions, albeit omitting his instruction with regard to submitting to the concordatist bishop of Poitiers, and, given the apparent indecision of de Coucy, asked his colleagues what they thought right to do.¹⁶ Texier of Courlay suggested that they act according to their conscience, adding poignantly, 'for me, I shan't change.' 'Nor us' his colleagues replied.¹⁷ This response was to mark the intransigence – or loyalty – of the Petite Église that was to become such a recurrent characteristic of its continued existence; de Saisseval describes it as representing 'the birth' of the Petite Église of Poitou.¹⁸ Thus, the submission of the bishops, and of de Coucy in particular, served not to dissuade the Petite Église but rather to affirm pre-existing independence from the episcopacy and trace their own future path.

That future trajectory would be personified by de Thémines who, as the last bishop of the Petite Église, remained firm in his refusal to recognise anything save the Gallican Church of the *ancien régime* of which he claimed to be the last representative: in the French chapel in London he openly proclaimed that he 'was the bishop of Blois and would be until his death'.¹⁹ De Thémines continued to be held in deep veneration by the Petite Église who saw in him the source of the instructions with which they maintained their position and identity.²⁰ Since his residence in London in 1810, de Thémines had denounced the Concordat; moreover, as we have seen, he encouraged the dissident priests of the Petite Église in the area of his own diocese. In 1811, de Thémines had written to Napoleon describing himself as the 'administrator of the ecclesiastical province of Paris' and stated that he would recognise him if Napoleon himself agreed to recognise the jurisdiction of de Thémines. Napoleon found the letter ridiculous, so the relationship of de Thémines to the episcopacy and to Louis XVIII was harmed.²¹ Further letters followed to the pope, to Talleyrand and to the Council at Paris.²² In London, especially

¹⁶ Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830* 400. Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 230. Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 70.

¹⁷ De Saisseval *La Petite Église du bocage vendéen*, 56-57. Billaud, *Mgr. de Coucy et la Petite Église*, 232. Billaud notes here that for Drochon (see Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 155) this marks the point of no return for the Petite Église: 'in place of having for its head bishops without pope, it would now only be led by priests without bishops, without powers, without authority, awaiting what would arrive fatally that which we see today: a group without priests, without teachings, without a fixed doctrine, without direction, without sacraments'. For Billaud, however, this simply indicated that it was a matter of waiting for the expected restoration of the Gallican Church that the return of Louis XVIII would accomplish.

¹⁸ De Saisseval *La Petite Église du bocage vendéen*, 58.

¹⁹ *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains* (F.G. Levrault, 1834), v, 807.

²⁰ Marius Duc *Une Mission à Rome en 1869* (Lyon: Imprimerie Pitrat Aîné, 1889), 42. *Reverentissima commentatio ad sacro-sanctum oecumenicum Concilium Romanum de variis actis ad ecclesiam gallicanam spectantibus* (Genève: Imprimerie de J.-G. Fick, 1869), 18-20.

²¹ 'Sur un écrit publié par M. de Thémines' in *L'Ami de la religion et du roi* 19 (1819), 210.

²² Louis Chesneau, *Les Dissidents vendômois de la petite église* (Impr. Launay et fils, 1924), 30-31.

as the other non-dimissinary bishops died, resigned or returned to France after the Restoration, de Thémynes became isolated from his episcopal colleagues and yet encouraged in his position by the exiled French clergy and the *Blanchardists*; Blanchard would even go so far as to claim that de Thémynes could give ecclesiastical permission to any priest ‘by reason of his universal jurisdiction’.²³ This astonishing claim confirms the view that de Thémynes was regarded by himself and the dissident clergy as the last bishop of the Gallican Church and thus the ‘head’ of the Petite Église.²⁴

After his fellow non-dimissinary bishops had resigned, he wrote three letters to Louis XVIII in which he restated his positions.²⁵ In his letter of 15th October 1817, which would be regarded as instructive for the Petite Église in later generations, de Thémynes stated his desire that ‘the *Réclamations* and oppositions of the Gallican Church be perpetuated until the redressing of wounds and injuries.’²⁶ In his pastoral letters of 15th February 1826 and 7th August 1829, de Thémynes rallied his faithful again to the position of the non-dimissinary bishops of 1803; the *Réclamations* were to be the ‘guiding star’ of those who remained loyal to de Thémynes in opposing the now defunct Concordat of 1801 and the very much living concordatist Church.²⁷

What, then, did de Thémynes see as the future for the Petite Église as it continued to adhere to the position of the *Réclamations*? Despite his intransigence, de Thémynes did not, by his actions, ensure the continuation of the Gallican Church whose rights he continued to maintain and whose woes he grieved over. Had he wished to continue the clergy and episcopacy in the Petite Église it would have been necessary for him to consecrate new bishops or ordain new priests; there is no record that he did so. In Lyon, Germain had prepared several young men in theology with the hope of presenting them to de Thémynes for ordination. However, a rupture between de Thémynes and the Petite Église of Lyon over issues connected with their apparent adherence to Jansenism put an end to such a possibility and by 1822 he had cut off all

²³ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 180.

²⁴ Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation*, ii, 224. Abel Dechêne, *Contre Pie VII et Bonaparte: Le Blanchardisme (1801-1829)* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Oie, 1932), 173.

²⁵ 15th October 1817, 20th December 1817 and 27 December 1818 see *Lettres de l'évêque de Blois à sa majesté très-chrétienne le roi Louis XVIII* (London: 1819). *L'Ami de la religion et du roi* 19 (1819) 212-213. Alexis François Artaud de Montor, *Histoire du Pape Pie VII* (Chez Vanlinthout et Vandenzande, 1836), 397-399. Drochon describes the letters as ‘violent confused ... a vexed spirit one cannot take seriously, whom even his oldest friends have abandoned’ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 180-181. De Chauvigny goes further and states that the letters bring into question the sanity of de Thémynes de Chauvigny, *La résistance au Concordat de 1801; profils d'évêques--profils de prêtres*, 208.

²⁶ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 40.

²⁷ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 40.

contact with the community of Lyon.²⁸ Until this time the Petite Église at Lyon had been supported by de Thémynes. After their members were denounced to him, de Thémynes instructed them to formulate a profession of faith which would adhere to the condemnations of Jansenism contained in the *Formulary* and *Unigenitus*.²⁹ The Lyon community however argued that they too condemned the five propositions condemned in *Unigenitus* but that these propositions were not present in Jansen's *Augustinus*.³⁰ De Thémynes could not accept prevarication and saw any acceptance of such a position on his part as endangering his fidelity to the position of the *Réclamations*.³¹ 'My only strength is to be always the same', adding that 'the Gallican Church bears too great a name ... what scandal and what unhappiness if one would finish by burying her in the cemetery of Saint-Médard'.³² This breach with the community at Lyon and the rejection of the seminarians on the grounds of Jansenism only cemented the future of the Petite Église as a lay community, willing deprived of clergy by de Thémynes.

Given the submission and death of his fellow anticoncordatist clergy, de Thémynes recognised that the Church in France, as he understood it, '[was] close to its end' but stated that the position of maintaining the principles of the Petite Église was now to be passed to the laity. These 'simple faithful' and 'children of light' were to maintain the opposition until the day that the injuries and wounds of the French Church were redressed.³³ Thus in the correspondence of de Thémynes we see the projected future of the communities of the Petite Église; deprived of clergy it was to the laity that the cause of the French Church had been passed, a position to be maintained until the 'wrongs' of 1801 had been redressed.³⁴ 'Many

²⁸ C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911), 171-179

²⁹ In 1665 Pope Alexander VII required all clergy to profess the *Formula of Submission for the Jansenists* by which was condemned the five propositions judged as heretical in the work *Augustinus* by Cornelius Jansen. *Unigenitus* was the bull of Pope Clement XI of 8th September 1713 by which the Jansenistic works of Pasquier Quesnel were formally condemned for the Church universal; although these works had previously condemned by a papal brief this had been regarded by some of the French clergy as opposing the prerogatives of the Gallican Church. Despite a vocal minority of French clergy who had opposed the condemnation of Jansenism in *Unigenitus*, Cardinal de Fleury had, by 1730, been successful in removing Jansenistic clergy from parishes and seminaries; see Thomas O'Connor, 'Jansenism' in William Doyle (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of The Ancien Régime* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 328-329.

³⁰ Fernand Martin d'Auxois, *La Petite Église du Lyonnais* (Fribourg: 1987), 28.

³¹ The thirty-eight bishops who had signed the *Réclamations* had all adhered to the formulary and *Unigenitus*; see C. G. van Riel 'La cause de la Petite Église au concile du Vatican et après' *Revue internationale de théologie*, 28 (1938), iii, 151.

³² Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 178. Saint-Médard was the scene of the rise of the Jansenistic convulsionnaire movement around the tomb of François de Pâris ; see Catherine-Laurence Maire *Les Convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard; Miracles, convulsions et prophéties à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) and Jean-Pierre Chantin, *Les Amis de l'Œuvre de la Vérité; Jansénisme, miracles et fin du monde au XIXe siècle* (Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1998), 7.

³³ 'Letter au roi 15 octobre 1817' in *Lettres de l'évêque de Blois à sa majesté très-chrétienne le roi Louis XVIII*, 21. Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 182.

³⁴ 'Letter au roi 15 octobre 1817' in *Lettres de l'évêque de Blois à sa majesté très-chrétienne le roi Louis XVIII*, 21 ; see also Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 182.

pretend that the laity must play no part in this religious affair, but I say on the contrary that apostolic succession is the salutary dogma of all the world: *omnis homo miles* [every man is a soldier]’ he wrote, thus asserting that a lay resistance had its place.³⁵ Already in his pastoral letter of 15th February 1826, he had recognised that the faithful of the Petite Église were beginning to be deprived of the clergy and thus the sacraments and urged them instead to have recourse to prayer and to spiritual communion.³⁶ This was a bold assertion that, even though deprived of clergy, the faithful of the Petite Église were to be faithful to their position, even at the cost of their sacramental life. It is precisely in these circumstances that the origins of the Petite Église as it has survived until the present must be placed, and they are inseparable from the role played by de Thémynes at that crucial time.

Whilst the intention of de Thémynes for the Petite Église to continue without clergy is evident in both his inaction and his writings, it is more difficult to surmise how he intended the communities to survive in the absence of a clergy to lead them or administer the sacraments. Duc affirmed in 1889 that de Thémynes had spoken of his ‘spiritual testament’ in correspondence with the Marquis de Bonneval.³⁷ This spiritual testament consisted of three letters: to the pope, to all bishops, and to the faithful of France instructing them to refrain from communion with the concordatists as long as the violation of their principles continued. Duc states that these letters did indeed exist, and that a collection had been taken at Lyon for the cost of their publication. The death of de Thémynes, however, had led the manuscripts to fall into hands ‘to which they had not been destined’, thereafter being lost; the Petite Église would, therefore, in the future, have to rely on the already published writings of de Thémynes and the example of his obstinate refusal.³⁸

The death of Mgr. de Thémynes in Brussels, on 2nd November 1829, brought to an end the episcopal protest of the Petite Église.³⁹ In the last weeks before his death he had finally signed an act of submission to the Holy See in an extraordinary *volte-face* by which he

³⁵ *Letter to the Marquis de Bonneval, 20th August 1825* ; see Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 43.

³⁶ Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 201-202.

³⁷ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 41.

³⁸ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 40-42.

³⁹ De Thémynes seems to have retired to a more peaceful life in Brussels a few months before his death. De Chauvigny supposed this was out of a desire to escape the dissident clergy in England who had grown ever more pugnacious with the English Catholic hierarchy; see René de Chauvigny, *La résistance au Concordat de 1801; profils d'évêques--profils de prêtres* (Paris: Plon, 1921), 221-222. Curiously de Thémynes also entered into a civil suit against three of his supporters with regards to the profit made by the sale of editions of the *Réclamations*; see ‘de Thémynes vs. de Bonneval’ in *The Law Journal* (London: J. Holmes, 1829), vii, 35-38. At the death of de Thémynes, only one signatory of the *Réclamations* remained alive – Mgr de Vareilles of Gap who had long submitted to the concordat. He died two years after de Thémynes at the age of 98 in November 1831; see Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 42.

abandoned the position he had staunchly maintained for nearly thirty years.⁴⁰ Whilst the submission of de Thémines was celebrated and publicised by the concordatist Catholics, the Petite Église either silently mourned the act or else contested its authenticity.⁴¹ The will of de Thémines, dated 19th October 1829, bears no hint of any change of opinion. Indeed, the bishop maintains his previous ‘dispositions towards the Gallican Church’, leaving his chalice and pectoral cross to the ‘last priest of the Gallican Church’ on the orders that after their death they be broken up and the money given to the poor to prevent the sacred items falling into ‘spurious hands’.⁴² The death of de Thémines might otherwise have brought a swift end to the Petite Église; yet, the movement had already taken root and although de Thémines provided no new clergy for his followers he did provide them with the impetus to maintain their position come what may.

⁴⁰ ‘Sur les déclarations faites par M. de Thémines dans sa dernière maladie’ in *L’Ami de la Religion et du Roi* 62 (1830) 225-230.

⁴¹ Billaud, *La Petite Église dans la Vendée et les Deux-Sèvres 1800-1830*, 587. De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 69.

⁴² The National Archives : Prob 11/1776 ‘His Eminence [sic] Alexander de Thémines, bishop of Blois’.

VIII: Loss of Clergy and Adaptation to Lay Leadership

Having lost the last bishop in 1829, and therefore the possibility of new clergy, the Petite Église would lose its last priest less than twenty five years later.¹ From this moment, the Petite Église was transformed from a body of dissident Catholics into an entirely lay-led and lay-ministered community. De Thémines had ordained no new clergy, nor were any of the existing priests especially drawn to the anticoncordatist movement.² Although a significant minority of the French clergy had belonged to the Petite Église, they were by no means evenly distributed geographically. As the clergy became aged or infirm, especially in those places that were not large centres of the Petite Église, the faithful could only hope to hear Mass once a year or so with the visit of a priest who would also prepare the children for communion and hear confessions. Between these rare visits, the faithful already had recourse to a lay cult, such as had been practised in the days of the Revolution when refractory priests were necessarily hidden.³ These experiences, both during the persecutions of the Revolution and of the emergence of the Petite Église at the time of the Concordat, would already provide the context and support for what would become a community that functioned without clergy.

By the time of de Thémines's death in 1829, a number of communities had already evolved into lay-led organisations. In some areas, the death of the clergy also resulted in the disintegration of the Petite Église, with its members submitting to the concordatist church now that they were deprived of clerical leaders and the sacraments. The acknowledgement of the declining numbers of clergy also gave rise to some unique practices in some communities; in the territory of Le Mans, the members of the Petite Église were so distressed at the idea of dying without a true priest to celebrate their funeral that if a person was ill or near death, a 'living funeral' would be celebrated for them so they could die knowing that the prayers or

¹ The identity of the last priest of the Petite Église is a matter of contention amongst scholars. Bluteau identifies the last priest as Ozouf who died in 1847 after a chequered career blighted by drunkenness during which, at one point, he was an unsuccessful coffee-shop owner in Nantes; see Marcel Bluteau, 'Jean-Nicolas Ozouf, ancien curé de Jard, dernier prêtre de la Petite Église' in *Souviens-toi, raconte-moi le Pays jardais : revue de l'Association Patrimoine du Pays jardais* 18 (2015). Janssen identifies Planty of Marmande who ministered at Pont-Saint-Marie as the last priest, who died in 1852; see Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche : Geste Édition, 1999), 30. A more curious identification is that found in Gabent who states that a rich lady of Gontaud-de-Nogaret, near Marmande, in the diocese of Agen, was in possession of a chapel where she gathered around herself a sort of convent of female members of the Petite Église at a place named Bachelier. These women refused the services of all priests but succeeded in sending to Utrecht their gardener, Muret, who, though married with children, was ordained by the old Catholics and returned to the region. His ministry extended not only to the convent but also to the Petite Église throughout the region, until his death on 28th December 1891. Gabent is the only historian of the Petite Église who recalls the ministry of Muret; see Paul Gabent, *Les illuminés ou anticoncordataires de l'ancien diocèse de Lombez* (Auch: 1906), 183.

² Joanny Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire, son histoire, son état actuel* (Paris: Bodin, 1906), 11.

³ C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 39-40.

presence of the concordatist clergy would not follow them, and thus at death they were simply buried.⁴ Such practices already signal a new stage in the life of the Petite Église, foreshadowing the forthcoming struggle to adapt to the loss of clergy. In some areas this loss would very soon result in the entire disappearance of the Petite Église. With the death of Lucrès in 1823 and of Dilhan in 1824, for example, the Petite Église of Toulouse disappeared entirely within just a few years.⁵ In de Thémines's diocese of Blois, the clergy of the Petite Église had been more divided than their confreres in Poitou, especially in regard to marriage.⁶ Such divisions only served to fragment an already disparate and marginalised community. With the death of Thoinier in 1835 and Beaunier in 1852, the community in Blois and Vendôme was left in the lurch.⁷ Though they had been served by zealous priests they did not prove as well-lived as Blois under de Thémines and, being advised by their last priests to turn to the concordatist church, there was no member of the Petite Église left in the area by 1856.⁸ In this case, therefore, we see not only the difficulty of maintaining a cohesive community after a divisive clerical ministry, but also an admission by the clergy that the cause of the Petite Église was essentially a clerical one and that it was better to belong to the concordatist church than to no church at all.

This was not to be the view of the clergy in other areas, where instead the faithful were urged, along the lines of de Thémines, to continue resisting the Concordat come what may. The faithful were not always obedient to the urgings of their last priest to submit to the concordatist church. In Rouergue, the leading priests, Delhom and Regis, had died in 1833 and 1835 respectively, the latter having urged his flock to return to their parish churches and recognise the concordatist church.⁹ With the death of Regis, however, the faithful appealed to those colleagues of de Thémines who remained in London, asking for another priest.¹⁰ Given their diminishing numbers, they were advised to address themselves to the surviving priests of the Petite Église in Poitou.¹¹ The community did attempt to forge links with the clergy of other

⁴ A. Le Guicheux *Chroniques de Fresnay : Assé-le-Boisne, Douillet, Montreuil-le-Chétif, Saint-Aubin-de-Locquenay, Saint-Georges-le-Gaultier, Saint-Léonard-des-Bois, Saint-Ouen-de-Mimbré, Saint-Paul-le-Gaultier, Saint-Victeur* (Le Mans: Leguicheux-Gallienne, 1877), 195.

⁵ J. Gros, 'La « Petite Église » de Toulouse' *La Revue de Paris*, (1906/05-1906/06), 643.

⁶ Beaunier advised the faithful to avoid civil marriage at the town hall, whereas Thoinier advised them to follow the civil law as he did in this regard; see Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris: 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 275. Louis Chesneau, *Les Dissidents vendômois de la petite église* (Impr. Launay et fils, 1924), 33-38.

⁷ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 46-55.

⁸ Chesneau, *Les dissidents vendômois de la Petite Église*, 56.

⁹ J. Gibial *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze » « Les Enfarines » 1801-1911* (Aurillac, 1912), 9.

¹⁰ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 300.

¹¹ Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 9.

regions, but geography made any normal sacramental life impossible. The Petite Église of Rouergue, now without priests, did maintain contact with other clergy, especially in Fontenay le Comte, but these contacts were sporadic and individual.¹²

Unable to have the support of their own priest, the Petite Église at Rouergue opted to gather in Villecomtal on Sundays and on the days of the feasts suppressed by the Concordat in order to read together the texts of the Mass and pray the rosary.¹³ Although they had been a stronghold of the Petite Église, the lack of direction of the community, their desolation regarding the lack of sacraments, and the urging of local concordatist clergy, all conspired to ensure the imminent collapse of the community at Rouergue. The faithful of Villecomtal then wrote to the Pius IX in 1850 asking for help. The pope replied that when Pius VII had protested against Napoleon's Organic Articles he had acted within his rights. Pius IX therefore urged the faithful to return to the unity of the Catholic Church in France.¹⁴ With only two exceptions, the Petite Église of Villecomtal wrote to the pope again in May 1850 affirming their submission and returned to their parish church, thus extinguishing the Petite Église of Rouergue in what had been its stronghold.¹⁵ The last member of the Petite Église of Villecomtal died in 1896, and, in neighbouring Cassaniouze, the efforts of the local clergy secured the submission of the last family of the Petite Église in 1911, to the congratulations of the local bishop and the Apostolic See.¹⁶ In the case of Rouergue, therefore, the decline of the Petite Église was a multifaceted phenomenon, reflecting in varying degrees a lack of encouragement from the remaining clergy, an unwillingness and inability to adapt to a lasting lay cult of the part of the

¹² The relations between the now lay community of Rouergue and the last remaining priests shed interesting light on the community's realisation not only of the need for priests for certain matters but also of the reticence of the remaining clergy to entrust strictly priestly functions to the laity. The lay community of Rouergue had been left holy water by their now deceased priests, and an even more precious treasure: consecrated hosts. After several years of adoring these hosts, a layman of the community took the extraordinary step of transporting them to Fontenay le Comte in order to renew them. These new hosts then remained in Rouergue until 1848, when they were taken to one of the last priests of the Petite Église at Rouen who refused to give them new hosts. Being unable, canonically, and unwilling to give themselves communion from these hosts, members travelled to surviving priests to confess and receive communion. This demonstrates the strong attachment of the community to the sacraments and their unwillingness to be deprived of them; and yet, they were increasingly unable to succour themselves on account of their lay status; see Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 10-11.

¹³ This following of a distinct calendar, that of the Church of the *ancien régime*, which rejected the ten day week of the revolutionary calendar and then the decision of the concordat to move feasts such as Corpus Christi to the nearest Sunday, would also be a mark of distinction of the Petite Église; see Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche: Geste Édition, 1999), 136.

¹⁴ For the text of the letter of Pius IX see 'Soumission de plusieurs dissidents de la Petite Église' in *L'Ami de la religion et du roi* 152 (1851) 298-299.

¹⁵ Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 304. Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 12.

¹⁶ Gibial, *Histoire de la « Petite Église à Cassaniouze »*, 44-46.

faithful, various overtures by local concordatist clergy and even Rome, and, for those who persevered, eventually death.¹⁷

Other communities were more successful at adapting to the death of their last priests, although this would not always guarantee their survival. The *Louisets*, for example, maintained their identity after the loss of their clergy and refused to visit the concordatist churches or clergy. Their communities were led by the elders of their families who not only gave direction to the community but also took on the role of leading prayers and those sacraments that could be celebrated without a priest in a manner that was to become typical in those communities which persevered.¹⁸ Whilst the *Louisets* did successfully adapt to lay leadership immediately after the loss of their last priest in 1843, the community gradually diminished due to intermarriage and conversion, and only a handful of members existed by 1943.¹⁹ What befell the *Louisets* was also to be the case for the Petite Église in the diocese of Séez where the last priest, Martin, had died in 1843. This community had also adapted to a lay leadership, electing from their number an elder or patriarch and organising a domestic lay church. Yet, in this case also, the pressure from local concordatist clergy and the persistence of mixed marriages meant that in what had been a thriving centre of the Petite Église at the beginning of the nineteenth century only one member remained in 1894.²⁰

As we have seen, the Petite Église in Poitou was supported by a group of priests who had been united as a body in their perseverance since de Coucy left them directionless. Texier in particular had rallied the people of Courlay against the concordatist clergy and continued to hold their services in the parish church despite difficulties placed upon the clergy of the Petite Église by the civil authorities and concordatist clergy.²¹ Texier died on 15 March 1826 to the great mourning of the Petite Église, with some six thousand attending his funeral. The priest Labourd had come from Cirières to give Texier the last sacraments (he had refused the ministrations of the local concordatist priest); celebrated the funeral Mass and, the next day,

¹⁷ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 23.

¹⁸ A. Roussel, 'Le Centenaire de la Petite Église' in *Le Correspondant* (Paris: 10 juin 1903), 977.

¹⁹ Etienne Aubrée, *Les Louisets* (Paris : Perrin, 1943), 43.

²⁰ L. de la Sicotière, *Notes sur la Petite Église au diocèse de Séez* (Évreux: 1894), 22.

²¹ The response of the civil authority to the Petite Église varied in different regions and at different stages of its history, but in Poitou, especially, given the counter-revolutionary tendencies of that area, the French authorities pursued priests and members of the Petite Église with frequency; in 1814, some seventy priests of the Petite Église were in prison for their refusal of the Concordat; see Guy Janssen, 'Autorités et dissidence : la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire', in A. Dierkens et A. Morelli (eds), « *Sectes* » et « *hérésies* » de l'Antiquité à nos jours (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 2002), 137. The local concordatist clergy also strongly opposed the ministry of Texier and his colleagues; on 21st July 1820, Bouillé, bishop of Poitiers, formally denounced the dissident clergy, but this did nothing to impede their ministry; see Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église en Vendée, Courlay et la famille Texier* (Fontenay-le-Comte, 1955), 19.

said what was to be the last Mass of the Petite Église in the parish church of Courlay.²² Members of the Petite Église then removed the chalices and other ecclesiastical objects so that they would not fall into the hands of the concordatists, thus allowing them to be used at the chapel which was to be constructed at La Plainelière in 1829 some two kilometres from Courlay and on the land of the Texier family.²³

The Petite Église of Courlay was desperate to secure another priest and thus abbé Couillaud came to live with the Texier family to minister at La Plainelière. This happy result would not last. Couillaud died in 1830, signalling the diminishing numbers of clergy of the Petite Église in Poitou who now only made rare visits to communities to baptise, witness marriages, and hear confessions.²⁴ At La Plainelière the community still ardently desired a pastor, but this led to difficulties and scandals.²⁵ After these misadventures with clergy, the Petite Église at Courlay resigned itself to lay leadership and lay-led ceremonies directed by the Texier family.²⁶ Having been the centre of the Petite Église in the west of France, the community of Poitou saw numerous submissions to the concordatist church whose bishops were especially keen to stamp out the “schism” in their dioceses. All the same, the community centred at La Plainelière remains a living community of the Petite Église to this day. These

²² Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 66.

²³ Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004), 100. Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 161. M. Rebouillat, ‘Les groupes anticoncordataires existant encore en France’ in *Annales de l’Académie de Mâcon* (1968-1969), 25.

²⁴ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 72.

²⁵ In 1834, an anticoncordatist priest of Lyon, Maisonneuve, took up the care of the community, arriving with his ‘niece’. He was particularly fond of drink and charged the faithful money for absolution; compared to the venerable Texier, his conduct caused some members of the Petite Église to turn to the concordatist church. The noble family of de Rochejaquelein had always been favourable to the Petite Église, so, to bring an end to the scandal, they brought another priest, Merinville, to Courlay to interdict Maisonneuve who then promptly left. Another priest, Bernier, arrived at La Plainelière in 1853; he had been ordained by the concordatist bishop of Nevers and exercised his ministry in his native Luçon. The scandal he left in his wake everywhere soon resulted in his suspension from ministry by his bishop. For two weeks he ministered at La Plainelière, celebrating the sacraments and attracting members of the Petite Église from all over the region who rejoiced to have a priest. Nonetheless, his conversations seemed strange and his conduct provoked rumours such that he fled in August 1853. Reappearing at La Plainelière in October, the marquis de la Rochejaquelein arranged to have him expelled from the region by the civil authorities who arrested and charged him with a number of crimes; see Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 162-163, Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 103, and de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 72. Both Drochon and De Saisseval recount a song that became popular amongst the Petite Église of Poitou at the time recounting this drama:

“*Le curé de la Godère,
Est en grande colère,
Contre Mossieu Texier
Qu’a voulu le chasser*”

²⁶ In 1893 Bertaud Texier, the then lay leader of the community, wrote to Drochon explaining that the Petite Église was also deeply wounded by these priests who had “duped their good faith and ardent thirst for spiritual aid. They were taken advantage of and exploited by these persons who had abused their simplicity and their too great credulity. Such events will, without a doubt, never taken place again.” See Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 206.

Vendeans had benefited from the ministry of Texier and of his family who had not only formed a community that was successful but also one that was geographically and socially cohesive.

The Petite Église of Lyon, which was also to welcome other clergy when deprived of its own priests, has the unique additional feature of an outreach to clergy outside the Roman Catholic Church. Within one week in 1831, the community would lose its last priests, Germain and Mercier. Germain had advised his faithful simply to ‘wait and pray’.²⁷ The Petite Église at Lyon seems to have been less willing to accept the privation of clergy than other communities. Already the community of Lyon had suggested to de Thémynes that an approach might be made to the episcopacy of Savoy for aid.²⁸ Yet, this was firmly rebuffed by de Thémynes: ‘we are certainly Christians and Catholics but above all we are French in origin ... thus it is to the French bishops and to the Gallican Church that we must hold’.²⁹ This unwavering Gallicanism was not to be viewed by the Lyon community as overriding their spiritual desire for clergy and for the sacraments. Thus, we not only note a further difference in the thought of particular quarters of the Petite Église but also a position on the part of Lyon that would lead them to approach those outside the anticoncordatist movement.

The leadership of the community had passed to the layman Pont, though his attempts to renew links with de Thémynes’s remaining clergy were unsuccessful on account of the community’s adherence to Jansenistic principles.³⁰ As was the case in Poitou, the Petite Église of Lyon was also approached by a concordatist priest, in their case Giraud, who offered to act as priest for the community. His offer was however rejected; he had been censured by his bishop and the Petite Église was sceptical that one who had adhered to the Concordat now proposed to lead a community opposed to it.³¹ Whilst their Jansenistic character had caused a breach with other clergy of the Petite Église this also opened another possibility for the community at Lyon as it searched for an answer to the distress of deprivation of the sacraments.

From 1815, members of the community had also begun to enter into communication with the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, which was both sympathetic to Jansenism and owed its existence to a breach with Rome occasioned by a desire to maintain episcopal independence.³² In 1828 Delompnes, a member of the Lyon community, wrote to Buul, the Old

²⁷ C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911), 184.

²⁸ Savoy had been part of the Kingdom of Sardinia after the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and thus was no longer under the Concordat from that date.

²⁹ ‘Lettre de M. Goss aux fidèles de Lyon’ in C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l’opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 203, and De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 116

³⁰ Latreille *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 180-185.

³¹ Latreille *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 185-188.

³² C. G. van Riel ‘La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht »’ *Revue internationale de théologie*, 28 (1938), II., 65. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 190.

Catholic priest in Amsterdam and latterly bishop of Haarlem, describing the difficult situation in Lyon where the last priests were already infirm and thus some of the faithful had not been able to attend Mass for some months.³³ Delompnes visited the Old Catholics several times from 1815 onwards, presented the Old Catholic bishops with a copy of the *Réclamations*, and received from them a chalice consecrated for one of the Lyon priests as well as holy oils. Still, the Old Catholics, for all this kindness, refused to send any clergy to Lyon.³⁴

In 1848, communication resumed and Delompnes appealed to Buul to come to the aid of the Petite Église in Lyon in ‘our misery, and spiritual distress, deprived of all external religion’.³⁵ Archbishop Santen responded with esteem for the Petite Église but stated that there was no union between Lyon and Utrecht and urged the Petite Église to end their schism and accept the Concordat.³⁶ At Lyon this only provoked another recourse to Utrecht, leading the Old Catholic bishops to agree to study the case of the Petite Église and the text of the *Réclamations*.³⁷ On 1st April 1853, the Old Catholics responded with great formality, but without altering their position.³⁸ They agreed that Pius VII had exceeded his authority and that the *Réclamations* represented a legitimate protest, albeit one with ruptured communion in the Church, but nonetheless concluded that the anticoncordatist bishops had abandoned their cause implicitly by committing ‘apostolicide’ in not ordaining new clergy.³⁹ The loyalty of the Petite Église to their bishops was praiseworthy, but the Old Catholic Church stated that it was ultimately untenable and ‘unjust’ to break with the Catholic Church. Duc recalls that this unexpected negative response from the Old Catholics was like a ‘thunderbolt’ for the community, such that ‘our elders believed it prudent to keep the affair secret so that the majority would not know about it’.⁴⁰ Having broken with de Thémynes, been abandoned by Utrecht, and deprived of clergy, the Petite Église of Lyon was left only to ‘wait and see’ as Germain had advised.

³³ ‘Lettre de M. Delompnes de 18 juillet 1828’ in Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht », 65.

³⁴ Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht », 65-77.

³⁵ ‘Lettre de M. Delompnes de 29 juin 1848’ in Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht », 67

³⁶ ‘Lettre de Mgr. van Santen à M. Chapellon de 18 octobre 1850’ in Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht »’69 and Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 226.

³⁷ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 197-198.

³⁸ ‘Sentiment de l’Église de Hollande sur la cause des évêques de France, auteurs des Réclamations canoniques et sur la position des fidèles qui demeurent encore aujourd’hui attachés à cette cause, proposée en forme de Lettre de Nos Seigneurs l’Archevêque d’Utrecht et les évêques de Haarlem and de Deventer à quelques fidèles dits anticoncordatistes, du diocèse de Lyon’ in Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht »’ 70-77.

³⁹ The Old Catholics did not consider that they themselves had broken communion with Rome and in 1850 regarded themselves as part of the Roman Catholic Church, which for them was the Church of Christ. This conception would be broken by the First Vatican Council; see Riel, La « Petite Église » et « L’ Église d’Utrecht », 77.

⁴⁰ See Fernand Martin d’Auxois, *La Petite Église du Lyonnais* (Fribourg: 1987), 30. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 203.

We are able to gain great insight into the mind of the lay members of the Petite Église through two documents in particular. Duc's 'Lettre d'un père a ses enfants' of 1866 is a didactical work of one of the leading members of the community at Lyon, written not only for members of the community, but also published for the wider public. The journal of Francois Métay, a rural member of the community in Poitou, covering the years 1878-1883, is a private document which nonetheless also offers counsel for members of the Petite Église, and especially his community.⁴¹ These two documents show the same mind and practices in two very different places where the Petite Église had already transitioned to a lay community.

Duc explains to the next generation of the community the reasons why 'we keep far from the churches and regard the existing clergy of France as schismatic'.⁴² There is an extraordinarily bold rejection of the concept of papal infallibility which would be defined in the latter part of the same century as Catholic dogma and yet entirely in accord with the attitude of the Jansenistic clergy of Lyon.⁴³ The 'Lettre' affirms that bishops take their power, not from the pope 'as some erroneously believe, but from Jesus Christ Himself'.⁴⁴ Those who say the pope could sign the Concordat because of his infallibility are to be condemned, for the concept of papal infallibility is 'contrary to Holy Scripture and the doctrine of the Church'.⁴⁵ This bold assertion already foreshadows the scant success the Petite Église would find at the First Vatican Council (1869-70), which defined the dogma of infallibility, and places the later conversion of Duc as an even greater theological evolution. In the 'Lettre', citing Pius VI against the Constitutional Church, Duc states that nobody can establish a new diocese or bishop unless the existing bishop is dead.⁴⁶ The Concordat, moreover, is portrayed as a gross betrayal of the clergy who suffered in the Revolution, and extols the bishops of the *Réclamations* in almost hagiographical terms.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Francois Métay (1811 – 1889) was an eminent member of the Petite Église of Poitou; a father of a large family and a fuller in the commune of La-Chapelle-aux-Lys, Deux-Sèvres. His family was distinguished by his older brother Pierre-Augustin, who had written a tract concerning the Concordat for which he had been imprisoned: *Le Père Jacques, ou Entretiens sur la constitution civile du clergé, sur le concordat passé entre Bonaparte et Pie VII, sur les lois et décisions de l'Église concernant ces deux actes, sur la dénomination de Petite-Église et de Dissidents, et explication de plusieurs prophéties qui ont rapport au temps présent et à venir: Par Pierre-Augustin Métay, cultivateur à la Foy-de-Saint-Pierre-du-Chemin (Vendée)* (Robuchon, 1851). The journal covers the years 1878-1883 and is concerned with religious reflections, notes on the harvests and weather, and matters of family interest. Now in the possession of his descendants it has been transcribed in Raymond Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay, membre de la Petite Eglise 1878-1883* (Editions Les gorgones, 1998).

⁴² Marius Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants* (Lyon: Imprimerie d' Aimé Vingtrinier, 1869), 3.

⁴³ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 17.

⁴⁴ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants*, 4-5.

⁴⁵ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants*, 15-16.

⁴⁶ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants*, 7.

⁴⁷ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d'un père a ses enfants*, 11-12, 12-15.

Métay rejects the Concordat as ‘heretical’: ‘I remain attached to the Church where God remains and I refuse that of this sad Concordat’, he states, but goes further in his rejection of the action of Pius VII: ‘Catholics absolutely cannot go to the church of the concordatists to hear Mass nor in any other circumstance . . . and one cannot pray with them ever’.⁴⁸ Métay believed

... with the Council of Constance that the Church is found amongst faithful Catholics . . . with the same Council that the pope can be mistaken, and with the same Council that councils are before the pope and with the same Council that the Church exists amongst the faithful no matter their conditions or even what sex they are ... that Pius VI in his briefs that date from 1792 was right to dictate the path to follow for the times which presented themselves ... that the day on which Pius VII signed the Concordat with Bonaparte, and by the same Concordat forsook the 38 bishops legitimately instituted and placed the heretic [Napoleon] in their place ... I believe that Pius VII by this act ... ceased to be pope ... and I believe that all those who separated from him to follow the bishops ... are the true Church.⁴⁹

This sedevacantist thought of Métay expresses the most extreme view of the *Petite Église*. It had been openly expressed by the *Blanchardists* whilst Duc, who did condemn the Concordat and Pius VII, did not go so far in his rejection of Pius VII.

What then does the ‘Lettre’ of Duc suggest for the next generation of the *Petite Église*? No concrete or practical advice is given with regard to prayer, only an exhortation to maintain the position of the *Petite Église*. The pope and Church are to be obeyed and respected, but their conduct in regard to the Concordat cannot be accepted.⁵⁰ To those who call for the *Petite Église* to return to the Church because the bishops of the *Réclamations* are not to be heeded he retorted that ‘time does not erase injustice’.⁵¹ The minds of the new generation of the *Petite Église* are not to be troubled by the deprivation of the sacraments because these must only be received from the hands of legitimate pastors.⁵² With recourse to the Catechism of Lyon and to the instructions of de Marbeuf, the faithful are urged to console themselves rather with a sincere love of God, with trust and with fidelity, and with simple prayers in the home.⁵³ ‘Only God knows’ how long the situation will endure, and all that the *Petite Église* can do is pray and implore God that the situation will be redressed. The ‘Lettre’ is thus a simple call to continued loyalty to the position of the bishops of the *Réclamations*, no matter what spiritual privations that might entail.

⁴⁸ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 34. [1] (numbers in brackets refer to the pages of the journal).

⁴⁹ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 58. [33]

⁵⁰ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d’un père a ses enfants*, 18.

⁵¹ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d’un père a ses enfants*, 19.

⁵² Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d’un père a ses enfants*, 20-21.

⁵³ Duc, *Concordat de 1801 : Lettre d’un père a ses enfants*, 21-22.

Métay is ardent in his rejection of the concordatist Church and advises the young people of the Petite Église never to pray with heretics: ‘do not go to any of their services, neither to weddings nor to funerals . . . having no communion with them in the things of religion ... you know that outside of the church there is no salvation, the concordatist church cannot be the catholic church.’⁵⁴ Métay also offers practical advice on how the youth of the Petite Église were to proceed without sacraments, which allows us to see how the lay community practised its faith.⁵⁵ In regard to baptism, Metay advises: ‘consult your catechism ... recite the *Veni Creator*, then make acts of contrition and of the love of God (and say the *Credo* and the *Confiteor*) because to administer the sacrament one must be in a state of grace and use holy water if you have any.’⁵⁶

It is marriage, however, that principally occupies the thoughts and writings of Métay, especially the question of whether one ought to marry civilly and to whom one could be wed. In 1881 he writes: ‘... having examined the writings of the Fathers and in particular of Pius VI ... I believe myself authorised to give my consent that my children should marry civilly’ and, further, that ‘for marriage one must marry religiously before civilly because it has been well explained that religious marriage is the only marriage and the civil is only civil, we are well advised not to consider it otherwise’ – this was indeed to be the practice of the Petite Église up to the present.⁵⁷ The fact that his daughters had married their cousins seems to have especially troubled Métay, as a dispensation from the Church was normally required; but he is consoled that ‘there are in the briefs of Pius VI power given to all the bishops of France to give dispensation to all decrees reserved to the pope for all the time of persecution ... and when there is no bishop the simple priest may perform marriage for cousins without difficulty.’ For Métay the situation of the Concordat meant that normal discipline was suspended; he cites the ancient patriarchs who preferred to have family members marry each other rather than ‘falling into heresy’ and even that ‘it is better for brother and sister to marry each other than fall into heresy . . . and the concordatist Church is certainly heretical.’⁵⁸ Métay’s instructions for how the

⁵⁴ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 63. [41], 65. [46].

⁵⁵ In his journal, Métay mentions praying before ‘the Blessed Sacrament’, a term usually applied to the Eucharistic host consecrated by the priest at Mass and kept in the tabernacles of churches and chapels. Metay, however, has no access to priests or to the Mass; rather, ‘the Blessed Sacrament’ describes a wooden box painted with an image of a monstrance (the item used to ‘show’ the Eucharistic host for adoration) and the name of Christ. This object was used as a focus for worship and prayer during the lay-led liturgy. Such a substitution of the consecrated host for an object to represent it is a glimpse of the profound eucharistic devotion of a community deprived of the Eucharist. See Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 60-61. [37]

⁵⁷ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 56. [30], 61. [38]

⁵⁸ Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Métay*, 59. [34], 60. [35]

religious marriage ceremony was to take place also invoke the crisis of the time and the need to adapt to the loss of priests.⁵⁹

The 'Lettre' of Duc and the journal of Méta y thus already demonstrate the mind and practice of communities of the Petite Église after the loss of clergy. Heeding the instructions of de Thém in es, the other bishops and many of their last priests, the faithful of the Petite Église continued to avoid the concordatist clergy and their services. This did not mean the abandonment of religious practice but rather an adaptation of this religious life to the changed circumstances. With no priests, communities would now be led by a lay elder who was judged especially competent and who often (especially in the case of the Texiers of the Vendée) belonged to a family well-established in the community. This lay leader would be responsible for the affairs of the Petite Église, and especially for leading prayers; although in Lyon the organisation was less hierarchical and more familial and communal.⁶⁰ This lay responsibility for the community and for prayer has, as we have seen, its antecedents amongst those Catholics who rejected the Civil Constitution during the tumult of the Revolution.

⁵⁹ '... confess, give a penance, obtain the consent of the parents, notify four witnesses (men of age if possible) and place themselves before a crucifix or if one doesn't have one the Blessed Sacrament. Placing the right hand in each other and pronouncing the words prescribed you say: in view of the impossibility of having a catholic priest to marry us, in view of the decrees of the holy council of Trent and the briefs of the Holy Father Pope Pius VI, (the man:) I declare before God, the Holy Virgin, the angels, the saints, and the witnesses who are here present that I take today for my wife and legitimate spouse (here one says the name and first name of the spouse) and I promise an inviolable fidelity. The woman then says the same words' Baptiste, *Carnet-journal de François Méta y*, 62. [39].

⁶⁰ d'Auxois, *La Petite Eglise du Lyonnais*, 35.

IX: The Last Sentinels of Gallicanism

With the announcement of the First Vatican Council in 1868, we see the Petite Église eager to take advantage of an opportunity to present its cause to the Church universal and thus also the expression of a hope for a change in its circumstances. In the event, this was to be the last public expression of the cause of the Petite Église and in fact would only serve to cement the position of the community and its existence as a lay organisation. This would also be the final period of the literary history of the Petite Église, giving rise not only to new editions of the *Réclamations*, but also to a commentary on the text. Moreover, the whole period is the subject of what can be considered the last publication of the Petite Église: *Une mission à Rome* by Duc, which recounts events surrounding the Petite Église's presentation to the Council from the point of view of the community itself.

The Petite Église had not been silent in the years since the death of de Thémis. We have seen how the community at Lyon placed its cause before the Old Catholics in the same way as the case of the *Réclamations* had been placed before other Catholic bishops; in 1842, the archbishop of Florence had been presented with a copy, and during his exile in Lyon, Franzoni, archbishop of Turin, had read the *Réclamations* and other anticoncordatist pieces.¹ Nothing however came of these presentations to these members of the Catholic hierarchy. The call of the Council by Pius IX caused 'great emotion' amongst the members of the Petite Église, who considered this the very opportunity they had been waiting for. The objection was raised that schismatical bishops should not be the judges of the Petite Église, but Duc refuted such arguments by pointing out that the Council was not just the French bishops, but the whole Catholic Church.² Meetings of the faithful in both Poitou and Lyon considered their course of action, and, in consultation with each other, the communities of the Petite Église decided to present themselves to the pope and Council, together with the *Réclamations* and a commentary.

The Commentary, deeply imbued with Gallican principles, was the result of a careful study of the *Réclamations* and other letters and texts of the non-dimissary bishops, together with consultation with the elders of the community who were witness to the first growth of the opposition of the Petite Église.³ The text of the Commentary, printed in French and Latin, seeks to 'fulfil the promise [of] the last pastors of the ancient Church of France' in placing the cause

¹ Marius Duc *Une Mission à Rome en 1869* (Lyon: Imprimerie Pitrat Aîné, 1889), 43. Joanny Bricaud, *La petite Église anticoncordataire, son histoire, son état actuel* (Paris: Bodin, 1906), 12

² C. Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon* (Lardanchet, 1911), 205.

³ *Reverentissima commentatio ad sacro-sanctum oecumenicum Concilium Romanum de variis actis ad ecclesiam gallicanam spectantibus* (Genève: Imprimerie de J.-G. Fick, 1869). See C. Latreille, *Après le Concordat, l'opposition de 1803 à nos jours* (Hachette, 1910), 254.

of the *Réclamations* before the Council. The Commentary recalls the history of the sufferings of the Church during the Revolution, and the difficulties of the Concordat and Pius VII's actions in establishing the new order of the Church in France.⁴ The *Réclamations* are cited as the protest of the non-dimissionary bishops against 'the measures which seek to break the sacred links they [the bishops] have to their churches'.⁵ Additionally, the present state and conduct of the Petite Église is presented as obedience to the instructions of their pastors to have nothing to do with the concordatist clergy.⁶ Yet now the hour has come, the Commentary proclaims, to 'accomplish ... the recommendations that were made to us, and this work ... impels us in this supreme moment to place at the feet of the Chair of Saint Peter ... a faithful example of these *Réclamations*.'⁷

Whilst the *Réclamations* were re-printed in Lyon, the Commentary was refused by many French printers, given that it attacked the Concordat and thus the law of the State, and had to be printed in Geneva in the summer of 1869.⁸ Desirous of expressing their cause with exactitude, these texts were read in special meetings of the communities in Poitou and Lyon, and appended with some 500 signatures of the members of the Petite Église.⁹ These texts were sent ahead to Rome for the Council Fathers, but, already in the midst of their preparations for the Council, the Petite Église had had occasion to meet the bishop of Oran, Callot.¹⁰ Passing through Lyon en route to Rome, Callot received members of the Petite Église, and copies of the texts destined for the Council, and would continue this open attitude to the Petite Église both during and after the Council.¹¹

Berliet and Duc, had been appointed by Poitou and Lyon to present the cause of the community to the Council, and departed for Rome on 30th November 1869.¹² The delegates took every effort to ensure that the *Réclamations* and commentary were delivered into the hands of the bishops assembled for the Council and supplicated for an audience with the pope himself.¹³ Although no audience was forthcoming – given the affairs of the Council – the

⁴ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 4-8.

⁵ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 8.

⁶ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 8-10, 18-20.

⁷ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 24.

⁸ *Reverentissima commentatio*, 46.

⁹ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 45-46.

¹⁰ Callot was formerly parish priest of the Good Shepherd parish in Lyon which counted members of the Petite Église in its territory. Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 256.

¹¹ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 47-48.

¹² Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 47-49.

¹³ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 50.

delegates succeeded in ensuring that the texts were delivered to the pope.¹⁴ Whilst in Rome the two delegates were able to renew their friendship with Callot who aided them in distributing their texts and met with them each day.¹⁵ The presence of the Petite Église in Rome occasioned a favourable report in the press which expressed surprise at the numbers of the faithful of the Petite Église and admiration for their loyalty.¹⁶ Having distributed the texts, the delegates prepared to return to Lyon, having been promised by Callot that he would be solicitous for their cause and keep them informed.¹⁷ The delegates, before taking leave of Rome, addressed a letter to Maingret, a member of the Petite Église in Poitou, assuring him of their success, but urging patience from the whole Petite Église given the length of time the Council was expected to take.¹⁸

The Council did indeed discuss the cause of the Petite Église in its sessions, but the French press reported, to the great distress of the community, that this had not all been positive. On 16th June 1870, the journal *La France* announced that the anticoncordatists had been condemned by Dechamps, of Malines, who was enraged by the conduct of the Belgian anticoncordatists in his diocese and wished the Council to condemn the Petite Église and altogether for them to be denounced and anathematised.¹⁹ The anxiety of the community was assuaged by the visit of Callot to Lyon in August 1870. The bishop affirmed that Dechamps had indeed condemned them to the Council, but that seven or eight other bishops had spoken in their favour. Far greater news came, however, as Callot announced that the Council had decided to write to the Petite Église recognising the non-dimissary bishops as ‘defenders of the Church’ and approving the conduct of the Petite Église, but nonetheless urging them to recognise the concordatist clergy as legitimate given that all the clergy of the Petite Église were

¹⁴ Duc explains that all audiences were suspended owing to the Council and that even bishops would only be received as part of a group from their ecclesiastical province. Whether the pope read the texts and had any reaction to them cannot be ascertained, but Ricci, the master of the papal household, assured Berliet and Duc that he had personally placed their texts before the eyes of the pope and that they remained on his desk. Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 51-52, 52-54, 58-60.

¹⁵ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 54-55, 61.

¹⁶ See *Journal des villes et des campagnes* 27 décembre 1869 1. cols. 2-3.

¹⁷ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 62-63

¹⁸ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 64-67

¹⁹ See ‘Postulatum archiepiscopi Mechlinensis ad eandem rem spectans’ in Konrad Matin (ed.), *Les travaux du Concile du Vatican* (Poussiélgue, 1873), 263-264. Dechamps was not successful in obtaining such a condemnation by the Council because it was judged not relative to the discussions of papal primacy; see Latreille, *Après le Concordat*, 266.

long since dead.²⁰ Callot could not say when the letter would come, but when it did he would come straight back from Africa to celebrate with them.²¹

Duc's text declares that this was at last the long-hoped-for solution and recognition that the Petite Église had been waiting for, but the text then returns to the present and to reality:

The Council, which was adjourned on 11th November 1870, was not able to reunite and continue its work. The letter, formally announced by the bishop of Oran [Callot], never came. And the Vendéans and the Lyonnais, who signed the Commentary to the Council, persevere with certainty in their attachment to the principles defended in the *Réclamations* of 6th April 1803. Patient and resigned, they await the hour of God and His bishops. Thus, a soldier, faithful to his orders, remains unwavering at his post until the moment his superiors relieve him of his duty.²²

This unswerving loyalty was to keep the Petite Église in the same position it had held since the episcopal protest and in the same particular practices of a lay Catholic community which characterises it even today. After the Vatican Council, both in Poitou and in Lyon, individual members submitted to the concordatist Church. Amongst them was Marius Duc who had led all the efforts of the Petite Église before the Council.

After the promised letter from Rome failed to materialise, the Petite Église again took up contact with the Old Catholics. Aside from friendly correspondence and visits, however, no concrete alliance between the two bodies ever came about.²³ Duc approached Foulon, archbishop of Lyon, in 1892, lamenting the twenty-two years of silence from Rome, and was met with pastoral solicitude from the archbishop who then wrote to Rome.²⁴ Foulon transmitted his high opinions of the Petite Église and their devotion to Leo XIII and asked the pope to consider their continued desire to unite with the Apostolic See.²⁵ The pope replied in July of that year, but, whilst he praised the fidelity of the Petite Église, he nonetheless affirmed that no-one could hold that Pius VII had been mistaken, nor that he had excised the true Church from France.²⁶ This led Duc to a crisis which concluded with a realisation that the situation had so changed that to hold to the *Réclamations* made little sense. He submitted to the

²⁰ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 78. Jean-Emmanuel B. Drochon, *La Petite Église, essai sur le schisme anticoncordataire* (Paris : 1894, reprinted Editions Pays et Terroirs: 2015), 227-234, casts doubt on whether such a letter would really be expressive of the Council's mind, given the affirmations of papal infallibility and the fact that the Council Fathers had been critical of the *Réclamations*. This is also the view of Latreille (*La Petite Église de Lyon*, 221) who questions whether a Council so favourable to papal infallibility would really be so warm towards the Gallican sentiments of the Petite Église.

²¹ Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 79.

²² Duc, *Une Mission à Rome en 1869*, 80.

²³ C. G. van Riel 'La cause de la Petite Église au concile du Vatican et après' *Revue internationale de théologie*, 28 (1938), iii, 144-147.

²⁴ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 225-226, 228-229.

²⁵ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 230.

²⁶ 'Lettre de N.T.S.P. le pape Léon XIII à Mgr. l'évêque de Poitiers', in Drochon, *La Petite Église*, 320-323.

concordatist Church on 16th January 1894, a year before his death, together with his family and a handful of other members of the Lyon community – those who remained were especially disappointed with his submission.²⁷ In Poitou, other members, including Bertaud Texier, followed the example of Duc, and, in 1896, a mission preached in the region converted three members to the concordatist Church.²⁸

The wider Catholic Church would continue to urge the Petite Église to conform; in 1900 Leo XIII again appealed to the community at Lyon, and, in 1910, Couillé spoke in the name of Pius X in declaring that the doors of the Church were open without condition, yet these calls went unheeded.²⁹ With the separation of Church and State in 1905 and the denunciation of the Concordat, the question was posed as to whether the anticoncordatists would continue to exist without any concordat to oppose.³⁰ Nevertheless, the Petite Église continued unaffected – their entire position had been based on the unyielding refusal to recognise the post-Revolutionary state's jurisdiction over the Church.³¹ In the succeeding years, the Catholic Church continued to call on the Petite Église to return. To ease such a return, Mesguen, bishop of Poitiers, obtained clarification from Rome that no abjuration was necessary for a member of the Petite Église to receive communion, nor were they to be denied the sacraments if they accepted them, for such an acceptance would imply a return to the fold. In April 1952, the Holy See ruled that the baptisms and marriages (between themselves) of the Petite Église were to be considered valid, but marriages between Catholics and members of the Petite Église needed the permission of the bishop for validity and were to be regarded as other mixed-marriages.³² Nonetheless, despite all these overtures, the Petite Église did not submit, and only small numbers submitted to the Catholic Church, either in response to the Roman overtures, or, as had otherwise been the case, for reasons of marriage.³³

²⁷ Duc's death was reported in *Le Matin* 30 mars 1895 2 col. 4., which also noted the active role he played in the civil and commercial life of Lyon; see A. Roussel, 'Le Centenaire de la Petite Église' in *Le Correspondant* (Paris: 10 juin 1903), 984.

²⁸ The press of the archdiocese of Lyon announced the news of his conversion with great triumphalism and described his reception at the parish church of Courlay in minute detail; see 'La Petite Église' in *Semaine religieuse du Diocèse de Lyon* 31 mai (1895) 191. See also Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 238-239. For an account of the conversion of Duc and the correspondence that preceded it, see Charles le Clercq, 'Le retour à l'unité de dissidents lyonnais et Vendéens en 1893-1896' *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 32.i (1958) 38-52.

²⁹ Latreille, *La Petite Église de Lyon*, 239, 244.

³⁰ 'La « Petite Église » à Lyon et la dénonciation du concordat' *Bulletin religieux de l'Archidiocèse de Rouen* (12 mai 1906) 493-494.

³¹ Guy Coutant de Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen* (Hérault, 1991), 80.

³² R. Naz *Dictionnaire de droit canonique: contenant tous les termes du droit canonique, avec un sommaire de l'histoire et des institutions et de l'état actuel de la discipline* (Letouzey et Ané, 1957), vi, 1438-1447.

³³ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 81.

In 1955, Pius XII, after the supplication of Vion, bishop of Poitiers, appointed the missionary bishop Derouineau as ‘Apostolic Visitor’ to the Petite Église in Poitou.³⁴ Pius XII urged the Petite Église into unity with the Catholic Church and Derouineau assured them that their customs and practices would be safeguarded. Nonetheless, Derouineau shocked the members of the Petite Église when he demanded to be allowed to celebrate Mass for them in the chapel at La Plainelière.³⁵ Relations between Derouineau and the Petite Église were warm, but his mission was unsuccessful, and a similar mission given by Pius XII to bishop Morel in regard to the Stevenists of Belgium only succeeded in returning five members of that community to the Catholic Church.³⁶ The Second Vatican Council marked another, and more successful, attempt at rapprochement from Rome.³⁷ John XXIII wrote to the Petite Église in Poitou and Lyon, on 11 March 1960, confirming Derouineau’s mission amongst them; this pope was decidedly favourable to the Petite Église: ‘one does not condemn fidelity’, he said of them.³⁸ Approaches by Cardinals Bea and Willebrand during the Council led 125 members of the Petite Église of Poitou to submit to the Catholic Church but the members of the Petite Église contend that the number was not so large.³⁹ Despite these attempts at rapprochement, the Second Vatican Council, with its widespread changes to Catholic liturgy and practice, further cemented the gap between the Petite Église and the Catholic Church.⁴⁰

To the present, the Petite Église survives and continues to hold fast to the principles and instructions of its clergy and the practices it developed in the wake of its transformation into an entirely lay-led community. Today they count some 4,000 members,⁴¹ including the

³⁴ The bishop was especially knowledgeable regarding the Petite Église and had several family members who were members of the community; see De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 82.

³⁵ De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 82 ; Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage*, 107.

³⁶ M. Rebouillat, ‘Les groupes anticoncordataires existant encore en France’ in *Annales de l’Académie de Mâcon* (1968-1969), 140. For the Belgian mission see R. Naz *Dictionnaire de droit canonique: contenant tous les termes du droit canonique, avec un sommaire de l’histoire et des institutions et de l’état actuel de la discipline* (Letouzey et Ané, 1957), vi, col. 1438-1447.

³⁷ Yves Congar describes meeting Derouineau at the Council and the bishop’s despair, on account of the ‘sectarian and Jansenistic’ nature of the Petite Église of Lyon and the general intransigence of the community. See Yves Congar *My Journal of the Council* (Liturgical Press, 2012) 256.

³⁸ See Jean Huguet *Un cœur d’étoffe rouge: France et Vendée 1793, le mythe et l’histoire* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1985), 206-207.

³⁹ Augustin Bea, (Card.) *Aux membres de la Petite Église de France* (Vatican: Imprimerie polyglotte vaticane, 8 mars 1964). De Saisseval, *La Petite Église du Bocage Vendéen*, 84. Jean-Louis Neveu ‘Une conversion travaillée’, in Jany Rouger and Jean-Louis Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence* (UPCP/Geste Paysanne, 1987), 61.

⁴⁰ The *Blancs*, for example, refuse to address a cleric in lay dress as anything other than a lay person. See Marie-Aimée Duvernois, ‘Les Blancs, minorité anti-concordataire: microdifférence religieuse et identité régionale dans le sud de la Bourgogne’ *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 64/ 1 (1987), 162. See also Guy Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions* (La Crèche : Geste Édition, 1999), 51.

⁴¹ For general statistics see Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 6 and Janssen, *Autorités et dissidence : la Petite Église catholique anti-concordataire*, 134.. For the community at Lyon see D’Auxois, *La Petite Eglise*

larger communities at Lyon (numbering some 500) and in Poitou (around 3,000), but also the anticoncordatists in Belgium and the *Blancs* in Bourgogne. Contacts exist between the communities, and especially between Poitou and Lyon.⁴² There is nothing in their outward appearance, language or general conduct that sets them apart from their neighbours, but the Petite Église nonetheless maintains its unique identity and religious practices.⁴³ These practices continue to be those developed or continued during the adaptations necessary with the loss of clergy, nowadays with only minor changes, such as a reduction of fasts and working on the feasts suppressed by the Concordat when deemed necessary.⁴⁴ In Poitou, the children attend the schools of the state rather than the private Catholic schools, whereas the community at Lyon has its own schools – one each for boys and girls – which only accepts members of its own community.⁴⁵ In Lyon, members of the Petite Église easily pass unnoticed amongst the inhabitants of the large, modern city, whereas, in the villages and towns of Poitou, the names of dissident families are well known together with their places of worship. The community continues to lose members through mixed-marriages but also from the general decrease in religiosity and a changed morality that has affected all religious communities.⁴⁶ So, too, societal changes have affected the Petite Église and the younger generation are less attached to the moral and religious principles of previous generations of the Petite Église.⁴⁷ Relations between members of the Petite Église and the other Vendéans are good, especially amongst the younger generation. Nevertheless, the two groups frequent different shops and members of the Petite Église prefer to employ other members.⁴⁸ This in itself underlines the status of the Petite Église today – a community conscious of its own history and identity which it seeks to maintain, and which sets it apart from its neighbours, but nonetheless an identity which is lived out in the modern world. Given all the pressures mounted against the Petite Église, by the civil authorities, by the wider Catholic Church, by conversions of its members, by the loss of clergy,

du Lyonnais, 34. Rebouillat estimates the number at Lyon to be somewhat lower at 350 in 1969 see Rebouillat, *Les groupes anticoncordataires existant encore en France*, 27.

⁴² Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 49.

⁴³ Duvernois, *Les Blancs*, 163-165.

⁴⁴ Janssen, *La Petite Église en trente questions*, 57.

⁴⁵ Nicole Morin, 'Laïcité et dissidence' in Jany Rouger and Jean-Louis Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence*, 78-84. and Fernand Martin d'Auxois, *La Petite Église du Lyonnais* (Fribourg : 1987), 36.

⁴⁶ Paul Rignac *Le mystère des blancs* (Arconce éditions 2013), 12. and Pierre Dane, *Les dissidents du Bocage* (Petit Pavé, 2004), 120-123.

⁴⁷ Bernard Callebat in 'Pérennité du mouvement anticoncordataire: deux siècles plus tard, les fidèles de la « Petite Eglise » persévèrent – Entretien avec Bernard Callebat et Jean-Pierre Chantin' *Religioscope*, 31 October 2003 <<https://www.religion.info/2003/10/31/perennite-du-mouvement-anticoncordataire-deux-siecles-plus-tard-les-fideles-de-la-petite-eglise-perseverent/> [accessed 12 January 2019]

⁴⁸ Jean-Louis Neveu et Isabel Radchiff-O'Neill, 'Les deux visages d'une paroisse: Courlay en Deux-Sèvres' in Jany Rouger and Jean-Louis Neveu (eds.), *La Petite Église, deux siècles de dissidence*, 92-101.

by rejection from other communities, the Petite Église represents a remarkable survival of a community which has traversed all these difficulties through unswerving loyalty to the bishops of the *Réclamations*, religious devotion to their priests, and a conviction that they have no need to change until such a time as the actions and intransigence of their ancestors and pastors are finally vindicated.

Conclusion

The survival of the Petite Église can thus be seen as forged by its context. The sufferings of Catholics faithful to the refractory priests during the Revolution had already created a climate where the Church was pitted against the State and Catholics were suspicious of clergy and all whom they viewed as agents of the revolutionaries. Their loyalty to the refractory priests and exiled bishops of the *ancien régime*, who encouraged them in their resistance, already created the mindset of a ‘true Church’ against that of the new order of the Revolution. The adaptations to the crisis of the Revolution already foreshadowed the future conduct of members of the Petite Église; hidden priests, persecuted by the civil authorities, who ministered clandestinely, and communities without such priests who refused to visit the liturgies of the Constitutional clergy and thus adopted a domestic and lay religious practice. The horror of such Catholics with regard to the State and its clerics already precipitated an adverse reaction to any agreement between the Church and the State which had persecuted it. Thus, with the Concordat, such opposition was almost inevitable. The Gallican views of the exiled bishops meant that they were not constrained to protest publicly against Pius VII and assert their own individual rights as bishops. This Gallicanism also enabled those who chose to follow them, be they clergy or laity, to adopt a mindset of themselves as the loyal and true Gallican faithful who had been wronged by the State, but now also by the pope and the Church. The refusal of the oath of the Concordat was thus no more than the same refusal that the refractory clergy had made when confronted with the oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. For those of the Petite Église of Lyon the experiences of the Jansenist controversy also provided an already existing sense of persecution by the Roman authorities who had again misunderstood their cause in opposing the Concordat.

The exiled bishops may not have envisaged their protest leading to the formation of what would be, some two-hundred years later, a still existing anticoncordatist and lay community, but they provided the rhetoric and instructions which could ever be invoked by the Petite Église for their continued stance and practice. The failure of the bishops to ordain new clergy may have revealed their resignation to the futility of their cause, a cause many of them either died in up-keeping or else eventually abandoned, but de Thémines with his intransigence and failure to provide clergy can without a doubt be said to have been the instigator of the transformation of the Petite Église from an episcopal protest to a lay Church. His incessant demands for loyalty to his just cause and his instructions to the laity with regard to their conduct when deprived of priests - the very priests he had refused to provide for them – engendered and

emboldened the continuation of the Petite Église. Those clergy faithful to his principles left amongst the faithful to whom they ministered a heritage of continued resistance and opposition to the concordatist Church.

That this was not purely a mythology surrounding the episcopal protests and a loyalty to the *ancien régime* has been shown in the writings of the laity of the Petite Église. These laity expressed a fierce adherence to the same principles of de Thémynes and were ardent in their desire that the following generations uphold the rights of the Gallican Church and its wronged bishops against the heretical and illegitimate concordatists. Whilst the loss of clergy was painful, as we see by the appeals to the Church of Utrecht, the upholding of their cause was of such import that these privations were seen as an issue to be met with adaptation rather than abandonment. The lay-led community life and worship of the Petite Église is not a surrender to the idea that their cause is lost, as we see in their approaches to both Vatican Councils and their continued desire to have their antecedents vindicated. Rather, it constitutes a uniquely persistent effort to lead a life and worship that is at once priestly without priests, and eucharistic without the Eucharist. This unique adaptation to its circumstances is thus the real distinctiveness of the Petite Église and its history. Its adherents had been urged by de Thémynes to take their own responsibility for upholding the cause of the ‘true Gallican Church’. In the process, he succeeded in emboldening the members of the Petite Église to realise his instruction ‘*omnis homo miles*’ – every man is a soldier – that same spirit which keeps them, as Duc wrote, awaiting ‘the hour of God and His bishops. Thus a soldier, faithful to his orders, remains unwavering at his post’.

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