



# The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution.

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# The Catholic Church in Europe since the French Revolution.

## *A Review Article*

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*The Cult of the Virgin Mary. Psychological Origins*, by Michael P. Carroll (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

*Catholic Cults and Devotions. A Psychological Inquiry*, by Michael P. Carroll (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989).

*The Miracle of Lourdes*, by Ruth Cranston (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1988).

*A Social History of French Catholicism 1789–1914*, by Ralph Gibson (London: Routledge, 1989).

*Privilege, Persecution, and Prophecy. The Catholic Church in Spain 1875–1975*, by Frances Lannon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

*Under the Heel of Mary*, by Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria (London: Routledge, 1988).

*Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, by Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

The persistence of the old regime in nineteenth-century Europe has been a familiar theme in recent historical writing. Monarchies sedulously inventing new traditions to bolster their popularity, parliamentary upper chambers stubbornly defending their prerogatives, landowning nobilities entrenching their power and privileges: These have been the motifs of an important revisionist historiography, a reaction no doubt to the overdrawn picture of a nineteenth century dominated by industrialization, a rising bourgeoisie and inexorable progress to parliamentary government (see Mayer 1981). The revisionism has been salutary, even if it has been more convincing in some respects than others. What comes as something of a surprise is the relative neglect of that classic institution of old regime Europe, the Roman Catholic Church. Internally declining, the butt of Enlightened intellectuals and political radicals at the end of the eighteenth century, the church in the last two hundred years has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for survival and rejuvenation. From Pius IX to John Paul II, Rome has centralised its power, mobilised the faithful and

taken on its enemies: liberalism and nationalism in the nineteenth century, socialism and communism in the twentieth, indifference and materialism at all times.

It would obviously be quite untrue to say that the Church's history has remained unwritten. Numerous works have chronicled pontificates or traced diocesan histories, while a rich literature exists on the various orders and congregations, cults and devotions. Accounts like this from within the Catholic tradition often deserve a wider impact, but a major obstacle is their interior, self-referential character, which seals the work off from mainstream historiography. Historians in the mainstream have commonly considered Catholicism, if they considered it at all, as a hopelessly obscurantist force at odds with the more serious isms that have shaped the modern age or, using a broadly liberal Catholic approach popular since the 1960s, have charted the stages whereby the church adapted itself to the requirements of modernity. The experience of research and teaching in the field prompts the feeling that the history of the church and Catholicism in the last two centuries remains in a historiographical ghetto. The investigation of church, religion, and society has had a central place in early modern European history; the same has not been true of the period after the French revolution, despite overwhelming evidence that this was no straightforwardly secular age. Happily there are signs of a change. There is a modest but growing body of work on modern European history concerned with church, religion and, popular piety (McLeod 1981; Obelkevich, Roper, and Samuel 1987; Kselman 1983; Cholvy and Hilaire 1985–86; Blessing 1982; Sperber 1984; Schieder 1986). The books considered here are a further indication of that trend, and I want to deal with some of the more important issues they raise.

The late eighteenth century was a low point in the history of the Catholic church. Centrifugal tendencies, Josephinist reforms, moribund orders and congregations, squabbles among Jesuits, Jansenists, and others over the intellectual direction of the church in an age of Enlightenment—all suggested decline. In 1773 Rome was forced by the Bourbon monarchs to suppress the Jesuits, the greatest champions of papal authority, and the 1786 synod of Pistoia challenged that authority openly. Three years later the church faced a revolutionary threat. Ralph Gibson's outstanding new book shows what that meant in France itself. The revolution abolished the tithe, then nationalized and sold off church property. It divided the clergy between those who swore the oath of allegiance to the new civil constitution and those who did not, and it disrupted the religious education of a generation, destroying the former "quasi-universal religious practice" (Gibson 1989:54) however lukewarm this might already have become in some areas. The year 1789 unleashed violent bouts of anticlericalism and dechristianization and a terror that led to the death of 2–3,000 clergy and the exile of over 30,000 more—although Gibson, it should be said, is alive both to the very real reasons for discontent with the

prerevolutionary church and to the clerically supported white terror of the counterrevolution. Everywhere in Europe that French armies spread, the church and its adherents faced similar material losses, disruptions, and indignities (see Blanning 1983). The harsh religious conflict imprinted itself on the century that followed.

What is striking about that century is the sheer persistence of the church. Hostile contemporaries saw this as a rearguard action against a liberal, nationalist, materialist and scientific age, symbolized by the notorious Syllabus of Errors in 1864. When Max Weber, at the beginning of the twentieth century, wrote his famous tract on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, he was recapitulating what had become a familiar European trope about the backwardness of Catholics and the Church (Blackbourn 1987). From the perspective of a particular grand narrative of progress and modernity, this is undeniably true, but the continuing strength of Catholicism in the nineteenth century was also a thoroughly modern success story. This was true not least in a sphere Weber could—and did—recognize: bureaucratic organization. In a period of centralization and bureaucratization, the church followed the same road as the state and business. This was especially true of papal power. One irony of the revolutionary period was that it discredited the Catholic opponents of papal supremacy and eroded the power base of the national churches, thus opening the way to the ascendancy of Rome. The proclamation of infallibility (1870) and the manipulation that accompanied it were the most obvious symbols of papal absolutism and Roman centralization, but there were many other signs of growing curial and papal power. These included new codifications of canon law, the reintroduction of Peter's Pence in the 1860s to aid Vatican finances, more summonses to Rome, more papal feast days. The growing use of the concordat, that government-to-government accord, was a sign of how national churches were short-circuited. The synod of Pistoia had been directed against "that diabolical and anti-Christian invention—the ancient machinery of papal monarchy"; a century later the beleaguered Catholic modernist priest, George Tyrrell, complained that "the tendency of modern Catholicism is to salvation neither by faith nor works but by machinery" (Perry and Echeverria 1988:62, 153).

This structure was replicated at the national and diocesan level, where the hierarchical structure was strengthened and the clergy more rigorously trained. Gibson has a wonderfully rich chapter on the secular clergy, where he discusses the great power wielded by the bishops over parish priests (much greater than under the old regime) and the "spirit of domination" (Gibson 1989:78–80) over their flocks that so many of the nineteenth-century clergy acquired from the seminary. The message remained what Gibson calls the "Tridentine model" of Catholicism, but the formidable structure through which it was propagated had novel features. At the same time, the reinvigorated clergy depended on bright young men recruited from the peasantry and

the rural lower middle class, who increasingly replaced the former bourgeois and urban clergy. This Stendhalian career open to talent did not stop short of the episcopate, as lowly born archbishops like Pie, Parisis, and Guibert demonstrated. We encounter growing professionalization of this kind throughout the European church.

The church also had its own special breed of professionals in the religious orders and congregations. Many were declining in the eighteenth century and persecuted during the revolutionary period and its aftermath. In France, the orders were attacked more systematically than the parish clergy (Gibson 1989:104). In Spain, Frances Lannon notes that 83 percent of the property belonging to religious orders was seized and sold between 1836 and 1845, the remainder following after 1855. Male religious were effectively proscribed, and the 50,000 enumerated in 1797 had all but disappeared by the 1840s (Lannon 1987:59). Much the same occurred across Europe, with varying time scales. But decline was followed by spectacular growth. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverria provide abundant evidence on the mushrooming of Marian congregations in the nineteenth century. Gibson and Lannon demonstrate the growth of religious orders and communities in France and Spain respectively. Their arguments are strikingly similar on two questions. Both point convincingly to the vital function of the new orders, given the inability of the prevailing social and political order to serve the needs of the ignorant, the sick, and the hungry. In structural terms, it is true that the church itself bore some responsibility for this. But it is also true that the congregations thrived by filling the large gap that opened up between the rhetoric and the reality of progress in the nineteenth century. Second, the revival of the religious congregations was “primarily and unprecedentedly a female phenomenon” (Lannon 1987:61). By 1904, female religious outnumbered their male counterparts in Spain by 40,000 to 11,000, a pattern that continued through the twentieth century. In France nearly 400 successful new female orders were established in the first eighty years of the nineteenth century, and there were 135,000 female religious in 1878. By then women constituted nearly three-fifths of all clergy (secular and regular), as against only one-third in 1789. In the late 1850s, around one girl in twelve who did not marry entered a religious order (Gibson 1989:105). The attraction of the orders is not difficult to understand: They provided women with an alternative to marriage and reproduction, an outlet for their piety and energy. Religious communities offered a structured society, security and companionship among members of their own sex and a vocation or career largely denied them elsewhere. Both Gibson and Lannon write with great understanding on this important subject. Although it has been neglected for too long by historians—not least by women’s historians drawn to more overtly progressive foremothers—there are welcome signs that this is now changing (Langlois 1984; O’Brien 1988; Clear 1988).

The laity was also mobilized in new ways or at least with novel variations

on old ways. Sodalities and fraternities provide an instructive example. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many such bodies were deeply unpopular with the clergy because of their independence and tendency to blur the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The Bishop of Montpellier in 1837 found the confraternities of penitents “purely and simply scum” (Gibson 1989:57). Jonathan Sperber (1984) has found an identical situation in Germany at the same period. The general response was to bring such bodies under closer clerical discipline or to replace them by clerically controlled fraternities or sodalities, such as those of the Rosary, the Scapular, the Blessed Sacrament, and the Sacred Heart. Most prominent of all were those confraternities that took the name of the Virgin Mary, the burgeoning devotion to whom was central to the Catholic revival. Many of the present authors refer to the Children of Mary, a sodality that became one of the largest lay religious organizations in the world. In France, where it was founded, the disciplining element is plain: The threat of exclusion from the Children of Mary was, for example, held over young women to keep them from the sinful pleasures of dancing (Gibson 1989:93, 168, 191). Perry and Echeverria’s *Under the Heel of Mary*, as one might expect, contains a welter of references to this and other sodalities, which the authors see as the forerunners of the militant lay organizations of the twentieth century with their martial nomenclature: the Militia of the Immaculate Conception, the Legion of Mary, the Blue Army.

Some of the same motifs are evident if we look at the changes in modern pilgrimages. The Nolans’ book, which has a longer time scale than the title suggests, is an examination of over 6,000 postmedieval pilgrimage shrines currently in use that is inventoried and broken down by geographical place, by period of origin, by subject of devotion (Virgin, Christ, saints) and by object of devotion (statue, relic, painting). The work of two trained geographers, this well-researched volume predictably has a fine sense of place and includes excellent illustrations; it also benefits from an awareness of anthropological as well as historical work on pilgrimage. The authors have some good points to make against the rather crude distinction drawn in some Anglo-Saxon literature, the work of Victor and Edith Turner for example, between the traditional medieval and modern postindustrial pilgrimage, although the Nolans are much less illuminating than the Turners on the qualitative side: the multiple meanings for the pilgrims themselves (Turner 1974; Turner and Turner 1978; Turner 1979). The Nolans underline the importance of the early modern period, especially the seventeenth century, when more pilgrimages had their origin than at any other time; but they also show that an eighteenth-century slump was followed by a modern revival that had its high point in the 1850s–80s. The nature of pilgrimages also changed as they became more centralized on major sites during the railway age. (The advent of the automobile helped to revive local pilgrimages, but often these shrines were now local offshoots of major centres.) The broad contours of these changes emerge from their ac-

count, but the Nolans' concern with a taxonomy of origins leads them to pay less attention to the development of existing pilgrimage centres. For example, they note the seventeenth-century origins of the Kevelaer pilgrimage on the Lower Rhine and the 800,000 pilgrims that it now draws annually. They do not record its enormous growth in the nineteenth century (from 36,000 visitors in 1816 to perhaps 400,000 in the 1870s) nor that it was largely recast as a less spontaneous, more clerically disciplined pilgrimage encouraged at the expense of many smaller, local affairs (Nolan and Nolan 1989:100, 183; Sperber 1984:64–65, 67, 75). Notwithstanding the anathemas against modernity in the Syllabus of Errors, the Church learned from its enemies when it came to organising railway pilgrimages, just as it learned from the Great Exhibitions how religious relics could be illuminated to best effect (Korff 1977, 1983).

Nothing better illustrates this than the great apparitional pilgrimage sites, such as Lourdes. Three of the present volumes are centrally concerned with this subject: Cranston, Perry and Echeverria, and Carroll's *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*. Two of them—Cranston's sympathetic popular account is the exception—provide valuable information on the way that the apparitions of Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes were shaped by the recently promulgated doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, specifically by the pattern established in earlier apparitions vouchsafed to the novice nun Cathérine Labouré in Paris (1830) and by two young cowherds in the Alpine village of La Salette (1846). Bernadette actually described the Virgin wearing the costume of the Children of Mary which originated in Cathérine Labouré's visions. Although Cranston and Perry and Echeverria are radically different in approach, they share a concern with the effect rather than the genesis of the apparitions at Lourdes. What they reveal is the proficiency with which the site was developed once the apparitions had been authenticated. The building of the Domain, its separation from the profane by-products of the pilgrimage, the attention paid to lighting and the mechanics of running the water from the grotto into bathing tanks, the deployment of disciplined stretcher-bearers and their chiefs of service, the organization of special pilgrimage trains all suggest that same drive to organise and control popular piety characteristic of the nineteenth-century church. It was not only the spring water that was channelled at Lourdes. A similar pattern can be seen at other approved apparition sites, such as Pontmain (Normandy) and Knock (Ireland) in the nineteenth century, and Fatima (Portugal) in the twentieth.

Where the reformers of the Catholic Enlightenment had tried to extirpate the excesses of popular religion, the nineteenth-century church went with the grain, promoting a "'cleaned-up' form of popular religion where they were in charge" (Gibson 1989:156). In France this proved widely but—as Gibson notes—not universally successful. The same was true in Spain, where the difficulties were not confined to the south (Lannon 1987:22–29; Christian

1972). The great wave of modern Marian apparitions perfectly illustrates this partial success story. The church controlled the cults surrounding a few selected sites, although even here there were unsatisfactory seers and other problems (see the case of La Salette). But there have been many hundreds of alleged apparitions since the French Revolution, triggered by war or postwar uncertainty, political persecution, economic distress or social and familial dislocation. Like the emergence of famous stigmatists, such as the Belgian Louise Lateau and Theresa Neumann of Konnersreuth (Bavaria), these dramatic cases electrified popular sentiment in ways that often proved uncontrollable and difficult to square with recognized cults and devotions.

Michael Carroll ought to be a useful guide on these matters, for one of his volumes deals with the cult of stigmatists, as well as with major devotions (the Rosary, the Sacred Heart, The Stations of the Cross), while the other examines the mental make-up of visionaries, such as Bernadette Soubirous. But his books are seriously undermined by the reductionism to which psychoanalytical history has been prone. Chapters on the “anal-erotic origins of the Rosary,” on the Stations of the Cross as a “sadistic phantasy” representing a “regression to the anal-sadistic phase,” on devotion to the Brown Scapular among those for whom attacks on the church reactivated “infantile memories of the fecal attacks made in phantasy against the mother”—these and other essays betray a horribly familiar combination of ingenuity and crassness. The chapter on stigmatists in *Cults and Devotions* is one of the more plausible, and the examination of individual seers in *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* also has illuminating passages. (The latter book contains generally better-developed, more measured arguments, and has also been proofread.) Yet both volumes remain a vast disappointment. To be clear on this: There can be no principled objection to reading such sources against the grain, and the psychoanalytical approach can, at its best, tease out the meanings from the clues of behaviour from languages, silences, gestures (see Gay 1985). A Geertzian concern with unpacking the meaning of the small act, a preoccupation with the tiny clue, has become a more generally familiar historical strategy in the last decade. (See Davis 1983; Sabean 1984; Ginzburg 1982.) But Carroll’s neat little theorems simply lack historical and other kinds of depth, certainly compared with the outstanding work done in the same field by historians such as Caroline Walker Bynum and William Christian (Bynum 1987; Christian 1972, 1981). Others have explored with greater subtlety the rich social, familial, and devotional context of apparitions, and the collective resonance they achieved (see Kselman 1983; Devlin 1987). These recurring apparitions and cognate phenomena caused clerical embarrassment. The visionaries were often spiritually dubious, and the popular response they found—the unbound aspirations of local people, the improvised commercialisation, the mingling of the sacred and profane, the spontaneous behaviour of pilgrims who often defied their own priests—prompted official anxiety. It is probably most helpful to



see these episodes, including the recent visions at Medjugorje in Yugoslavia, as a series of telling chapters in the constant, often troubled interplay between church authorities and the popular piety of the faithful.

But who were the faithful? The nineteenth-century religious revival was a patchwork affair that took place alongside widespread dechristianization. One obvious variable was regional. Gibson and Lannon indicate very clearly the differences in religious observance in two major Catholic countries: the north in Spain more devout than the south, the dechristianized Paris basin and other areas in the centre of France surrounded by the more devout far north, Brittany, the western Pyrenees and the eastern borders. Similar maps could probably be drawn up for other European countries, the regional variations often the reflection of much earlier patterns of christianization. But there were important new variables at work in the modern period. One was obviously class. In France and Spain, aristocratic and growing bourgeois support for the church was matched by the alienation of the industrial working class (and of many agricultural labourers). This had a number of familiar causes: the pastoral difficulties created by urbanization, the frequent lack of sympathy in the church for the problems of urban industrial class society and the conflicts it engendered, the interlocking of church and social elites. None of this was unique to France and Spain. But it may be worth noting that in countries and regions in which Catholics felt themselves part of a beleaguered group in social, denominational, cultural, or linguistic terms, the church was often able to put itself forward successfully as a popular force. Poland and Ireland spring obviously to mind; but we should not forget also the strength of popular Catholic devotion in industrialised areas such as eastern France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Rhineland-Westphalia. In the latter case, where Catholic workers faced Protestant bosses and a Protestant state machinery for much of the nineteenth century, the situation had parallels with Ireland under the Protestant ascendancy. The peculiar situation in Spain's Basque provinces (on which Lannon writes very well), where hostility to Madrid gave a special coloration to local Catholicism, may represent a variation on the same theme.

Despite their obvious position of subordination both within the hierarchy of the church and its teachings, women generally showed greater allegiance than men to the church. Women played no part in ecclesiastical decision making and were told by male priests to obey their husbands: "At every turn the message was clear: men were born for authority and social responsibility; women were born for domesticity, motherhood or sexual renunciation" (Lannon 1987:55). How can one explain this conundrum? Men resented the priest's efforts to regulate moral and sexual relations, which undoubtedly helps to explain the gender differential when it came to alienation from the church—a point Gibson makes extremely well. Conversely, though, women could play off the priest against the husband or father. Here, as in other respects, they could make a small dent in their powerlessness, a subject

warranting further research. It might, for example, be worth while to examine more closely the cult of Saint Rita of Cascia, an abused wife and later visionary nun, or the cult of Saint Maria Goretti, a young Italian rape victim venerated in Nettuno (Nolan and Nolan 1988:99, 132–3, 150, 234). The frequent requests for intercession by Mary or the saints to bring drunken husbands to penitence also suggest a way in which faith held out the hope of consolation. Like illness, faith could represent for women a weapon of the weak (see Scott 1985), just as modern visionaries (mainly young girls and women) commonly acquired a release from daily burdens and an enhanced status inconceivable in normal circumstances. At a different level, the opportunities for a form of self-affirmation potentially available to female religious had their parallel in the sphere of religious charitable activity so well described by Bonnie Smith for bourgeois Catholic women in Rouen (Smith 1981).

This female sphere was, of course, the other side of the coin of a male-dominated public world of affairs: business, journalism, science, the professions, and politics. In many ways that separation of public and private is illusory. Just as the public world of men was constructed on the basis of the domestic role played by women (whether servants or wives), so the sphere of domesticity was shaped by larger economic imperatives, subjected to the growing purview of the professionals and made the object of political debate under such rubrics as the family, education, and welfare. The church had its own position in these debates and seldom eschewed mobilizing the faithful against perceived political enemies.

There are different ways of looking at how the power of the church and the Catholic laity was brought to bear in the political arena. One approach has been to plot the stages by which a recalcitrant church gradually came to terms with science, the social question, and political democracy—in short, with modernity. Putative pioneers of modern Christian Democracy and social Catholicism, such as French priest and journalist Felicité Robert de Lamennais and German social bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, usually figure prominently in accounts of this sort, together with the importance of the pontificate of Leo XIII in prompting and legitimizing further openings in this direction. An obvious problem with this approach is the heavily teleological element that it shares with other historical interpretations based on modernization theory. In this particular case, enlightened clergy and lay people drag the church kicking and screaming into the twentieth century, as the rigidities associated with Pius IX and Vatican I yield to the modern reforms of John XXIII and Vatican II. There is also the question of where one focuses attention. This sort of model obviously better fits some of the more laicised Catholic societies of western Europe, such as Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, than it does the Iberian peninsula. Even in France, Christian Democratic and social Catholic initiatives have proved fitful and short-lived (see Whyte 1981).

Partly because of the countries they treat, the volumes under review largely present a different and perhaps more familiar story of violent clerical hostility to liberalism, socialism, and secular modernity. In few countries was this more evident than France and Spain. As Lannon puts it (1987:119), “the Spanish church found it hard to come to terms with parliamentary democracy and pluralism, and for a long time much preferred an authoritarian regime that defended its doctrines and controlled its enemies”. Her account of the church’s complicity in undermining democracy and the atrocities committed by the victorious rebels of 1936 is all the more damning because of her careful half-tones and attention to countervailing currents. Perry and Echeverria also draw heavily on Spain, France and Italy, in a book that relentlessly catalogues the mobilization of the faithful for reactionary purposes behind a politicized Mary. They show how the nineteenth-century cult of Mary was encouraged in opposition to a radical-socialist emphasis on “Christ the worker” (see Berenson 1984), and the two authors have valuable things to say about the political uses of Marian apparitions, especially in the case of Fatima and anticommunism. Perry and Echeverria pass many familiar episodes through their Marian prism: the ambivalence of the Vatican in the face of fascism, the benefits the church derived from Mussolini’s regime, and the dynamics of the various clerico-fascisms found in Portugal, Spain, Belgium, France and Croatia—although, oddly, they omit Austria.

Perry and Echeverria continue their account through the virulent Cold War anticommunism of the church in Europe and beyond, pointing out the Vatican’s heavy reliance on the United States for both money and intellectual justification. Bodies like the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Knights of Columbus pumped millions of dollars into Rome, while there were more Jesuits in the United States by 1964 than in Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands combined. The authors rehearse Rome’s machinations in Latin and Central America, including its efforts to suppress Liberation theology, under the memorable heading of Our Lady of National Security, and have much to say about militant lay organizations, including the Opus Dei, now increasingly cast in the villain’s role that the Jesuits filled for so long.

A passionate book, given force and point by its central concern with militant Marianism, it never addresses the issue of the relationship—the tension, perhaps—between reactionary Marianism and other forms of Catholic social and political mobilization. Pope Paul VI may have presided over a “Marian renaissance” (Perry and Echeverria 1988:266–73); but as the authors point out, his elder brother was prominent in the Italian Christian Democratic Party, and the pope enjoyed an intimate friendship with Aldo Moro, an architect of the Historic Compromise with the Communists. Perry and Echeverria have replaced one teleology (the church moving inexorably towards pluralistic modernity) with another (the church perpetually dedicated to reactionary nastiness under Mary’s banner). Surely the point is that the church had the sheer

plasticity to embrace believers of widely differing views and that it could—and did—change. Frances Lannon makes that abundantly clear in her final chapter, “Towards Modernity.” More than that: the meaning of Mary was itself multivalent: There are parallels with the different meanings with which Joan of Arc was invested in modern France (Warner 1981; Krumeich 1989). The Virgin stood for peace and justice as well as anticommunism. Modern apparitions have included “The Virgin of the Poor” at Banneux, and many of them achieved their large followings because they were perceived as intercessions in favour of the downtrodden, the neglected, and the ill-used. Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff looked to Mary as a “prophetic woman and liberator”; others have invoked Mary, “Mother of the Poor” (Perry and Echeverria 1988:280; Gebara and Bingemer 1989). Modern feminist writers on Mary have, of course, explored other possible meanings (Warner 1976). Even the relationship of militant Marianism to interwar facism is a good deal more ambivalent than Perry and Echeverria allow. One indefatigable writer on Mary and Marian apparitions they do not mention was the Austrian, Friedrich von Lama (1934). No progressive hero, he was killed (like his son) in a Nazi concentration camp, a fate shared by countless thousands of Catholic clergy and lay people across Europe, most notably in Poland.

John Paul II’s use of modern media to proclaim an antimodern message, the general retreat from Vatican II in recent pontificates, renewed apparitions of the Virgin: these might suggest a reprise of the Marian century. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. Yet the advent of a Polish pope, the transformation of the church in Spain, and the utterly altered position of the Jesuits are among many signs that some things do change. It may be time to place a question mark against the anticlerical view of the church as the automatic handmaid of reaction and the liberal Catholic belief that the future of the church lies in coming to terms with modernity. The “persistence of the old regime” with which this essay began remains a useful way of addressing the history of the church since the French revolution; yet postmodernist perspectives are also having their inevitable effect on the ways in which we approach religion and popular piety. Research is shifting onto fruitful new terrain. Ten years ago it would have been possible to build up a sizable library on the church and politics since the French revolution, but few outside the Catholic tradition were writing about popular cults and devotions, pilgrimages, and apparitions in the same period, and few anywhere about women and the church. The present volumes and others demonstrate what can be learnt from research in these areas, as well as the benefits of social and cultural history, when the politics are left in.

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