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Devious Priests and Wayward Wives: Combatting Rural Resistance to the Constitutional Church

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When the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was passed on July 12, 1791, many praised it as a cure to the maladies that had long plagued the Gallican Church: corruption, luxury, and inefficient spending. The Constitutional Church was to remain Catholic while adapting to the spirit of the French Revolution. By making the clergy servants of the state, legislators in the Constituent Assembly had transformed the relationship between Church and State, on the one hand, and the Gallican Church and Rome, on the other. It is thus not surprising that many scholars have characterized the controversies surrounding the Constitutional Church primarily as a continuation of *Ancien Régime* theological and political debates that had long divided the clergy, particularly those concerning Jansenism.¹ For most French people, however, the principle issue was less ideological and more practical: how had the Civil Constitution altered the relationship between priest and parishioner, and between believer and God. Despite legislators' claims to the contrary, many clerics and lay people alike insisted that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy fundamentally corrupted the Catholic faith. In 1791, the author of a petition calling for the toleration of non-juring priests described the Civil Constitution as a "a heap ... of several heresies" that "reversed the fundamental principle of Catholic doctrine."² For those who held this view, the constitutional clergy were heretics, and thus, incapable of fulfilling the sacred function most crucial for believers seeking salvation: the performance of the sacraments.

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy proved to be one of the most divisive issues of the early revolutionary period, made even more controversial by the institution of the compulsory Ecclesiastical Oath in early 1791. This oath required the clergy to swear loyalty to the nation, the law, the king, and consequently, the Civil Constitution. Despite the hardline approach the government took in demanding acceptance of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, many clerics

¹ Catherine Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la Nation: Le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1998); Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). See also Catherine Maire, "L'Église et la nation: Du dépôt de la vérité au dépôt des lois: la trajectoire janséniste au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 46 (1991): 1177–1205. On their scholarly differences, see Catherine Maire, "Aux sources politiques et religieuses de la Révolution française: Deux modèles en discussion," *Le Débat* 130 (May–Aug., 2004): 133–53; Dale Van Kley, "Sur les sources religieuses et politiques de la Révolution française," *Commentaire* 108 (Winter, 2004–5): 893–914.

² Adresse des Catholiques de N... à la Municipalité Pour demander la tolerance et le libre exercice de leur religion (n.p. : n.p., 1791), 3.

refused, while many others recanted their oath after the pope condemned it in the spring of 1791.³ Across France, non-jurors, or “refractories,” were slowly replaced with the jurors who constituted the new constitutional clergy. The people of France were bound by law to accept the constitutional clergy. In practice, however, juring bishops and priests faced a great deal of resistance in many locales.⁴ The juring clergy, whether established members of the community or new-arrived *intrus*, often suffered rejection of their sacerdotal services, harassment, and sometimes even violence.

Timothy Tackett’s work on the Ecclesiastical Oath was groundbreaking and remains the most authoritative work on the subject. *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture* (1986) reveals that there was a wide variety of factors that led clerics and lay people to accept or reject the Civil Constitution and the oath.⁵ Thanks to this study we know a great deal about regional patterns of acceptance and rejection of the oath, including how they relate to pre- and post-revolutionary trends. The scholarship of Tackett and others has also revealed the ever-shifting relationship between the revolutionary state and the Constitutional Church and the diverse ways non-juring clergy were policed on a local level.⁶ Rather than focusing on attempts to control the behavior of the clergy, this article focuses on attempts to mold the beliefs and behavior of the laity. Due to the changing position of Constitutional Church under different revolutionary regimes and the immense variety of local circumstances, this article focuses on a relatively short period of time – between the passing of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in July 1790 and the National Convention’s start in September 1792 – and on a narrow set of sources: pamphlets and periodicals dedicated to convincing the people of the countryside to support the Constitutional Church.⁷ Although some of

³ The papal condemnation of the oath, combined in many regions with the disapproval of the local faithful, led an estimated six to ten percent of juring clerics to retract their oath between May 1791 and autumn 1792. For an overview of clerical oath-taking, see Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 34–56.

⁴ On the challenges faced by the juring clergy, see especially Joseph F. Byrnes, *Priests of the French Revolution: Saints and Renegades in a New Political Era* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 82–87; Nigel Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780–1804* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 206–7.

⁵ Catholic villagers were most likely to reject the oath in regions where Protestantism was common and Catholics were anxious about the future of Catholicism, or where a comfortable *modus vivendi* had been reached between Tridentine Catholicism and popular religious practices. For an overview of regional trends, see Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 287–89.

⁶ On the Constitutional Church, see Byrnes, *Priests of the French Revolution*; and Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 140–62, 196–219. On the actions and attempted suppression of the refractory clergy, see Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 271–83; and Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 165–95, 220–43.

⁷ Although the refractory clergy were slightly less prominent in the countryside than in towns, it was the people of the countryside who seemed beyond the reach of the law and conflicts here were especially difficult to police. There seems to have been a general perception on the part of the authors discussed below that tensions between jurors and non-jurors were most intense in the countryside. This is despite the fact that the percentage of juring priests was lowest in larger towns, with the exception of the capital. On percentages of jurors in town and country, see Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 49–51.

these pamphlets were published anonymously, those authors who can be identified were often involved with local, national, or church governance, and included lawyers, local officials, and elected representatives. The place of publication also varied from Paris to smaller cities of the south and west, such as Orange and Cherbourg. Regardless of vocation or region, each author expressed strikingly similar concerns about the failure of the rural laity to receive the sacraments from the constitutional clergy and about the inescapable psychological hold – real or imagined – that the refractory clergy had over their parishioners, especially women. Their goal was to remove the laity from the control of these clever, deceptive, priests and to convince readers and their families that the nature and spiritual significance of sacred rites were, for all intents and purposes, unchanged. These polemical works focused only minimally on religious or political education. Instead the weight of these authors' polemics rested on an issue they believed would literally hit much closer to home: divisions within the family, divisions they insisted were created by non-jurors.

Like the clergy under the *Ancien Régime*, constitutional priests served a variety of spiritual and administrative functions for the community. Some of these functions were difficult to fulfill, particularly when locals rejected their authority and services. In August 1791, Bishop Nagaret of the Lozère wrote to the President of the National Assembly's Ecclesiastical Committee to report that he received no local support from average citizens or local officials and that he was "booted and insulted publicly."⁸ The belief that the sacraments of jurors were not valid led to widespread refusal to receive the sacraments in many regions. At first glance, it would appear that the Mass and other sacred rites remained unchanged. Early in the Revolution, some called for a simplification of religious services, including the elimination of organ music, children's choirs, bells, and elaborate funeral processions.⁹ Despite calls such as this, there is little evidence of significant changes to regular religious services in most regions.¹⁰ This fact lent weight to the claims of authors who tried to convince readers that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had not altered religious practice in France.

In order to ensure the Constitutional Church's success in the countryside, it was crucial that the faithful believe the most important sacred rites the Church offered, the sacraments, were not only ostensibly, but also in essence, unchanged. In *Protection against Fanaticism* (1792), the author,

⁸ Quoted in Aston, *Religion and Revolution*, 207.

⁹ *Abus du clergé, dénoncés à l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris: Bleuet, 1790). Some of these concerns stemmed from the Jansenist tradition – although the author denied the connection – while others were distinctly linked to the revolutionary goal of equality.

¹⁰ Some proposed changes, such as the reduction of feast days, were not new. Several *cahiers de doléances* called for a reduction in the number of holidays, particularly the *fêtes chômées* that interrupted work schedules. There was also a petition addressed to the National Assembly calling for fewer feast days. Despite this, the National Assembly never addressed the issue. Noah Shusterman, *The French Revolution: Faith, Desire, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 126–7. Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 259–60. Changes that were made were local initiatives, such as the removal of Lenten fasting or the abolition of Lent altogether. Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gobel, *Mandement de M. L'évêque de Paris, portant abolition du Carême et prorogation du Carnaval* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.). Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time*, 126.

Aubanel, member of the local assembly in Marseille, presented his argument about the validity of sacraments in the form of a dialogue between a peasant and a schoolmaster. The peasant had heard that some priests refused to take the oath because the Civil Constitution had fundamentally altered his religion, that the sacraments of non-juring priests were invalid, and that “all those who assist in their masses and receive the sacraments from them are damned.”¹¹ The schoolmaster insisted that this priest was clearly misleading him by telling him that the sacraments administered by the Constitutional clergy were not valid. After all, anyone could see that juring priests said the Mass, preached the same morals, and gave the sacraments the same way as before. Taking the oath simply made priests better citizens and servants of the people.¹² Authors who targeted rural, lay audiences seemed to believe that their readers could be best convinced by appealing to their simplistic understanding of what made the sacraments valid: the motions and words themselves. For example, in response to those who claimed that “it would be better that a baby die in its mother’s womb than be baptized by a juring priest” because “it would be a little devil” the patriotic authors of another pamphlet, *Address to the Inhabitants of the Countryside on the Civil Constitution of the Clergy* (1791), insisted that any baptism “administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” was valid.¹³

Still, it is clear that many believed the external similitude betrayed a spiritual reality: the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had fundamentally altered, even invalidated, the sacraments. Those priests who had taken the oath and maintained it, despite the official denunciation of Pope Pius VI in early 1791, had lost their privileged access to God. This access had been granted to them through the sacrament of ordination but invalidated by the oath. Many authors were convinced that a more sophisticated understanding of sacerdotal authority could only have stemmed from the invectives of refractory priests. There is anecdotal evidence from the period to support the idea that some priests were, in fact, trying to convince their parishioners that the sacraments of juring priests were not sanctioned by God. For example, on October 9, 1791, one Girondin deputy, Armand Genonné, reported to the Legislative Assembly that refractory priests were warning women in their churches that if they were married by juring priests, their children would be born illegitimate.¹⁴ Those who tried to combat the influence of refractories clearly did not believe that theological arguments, even simplistic ones, would suffice to bring their audience around to their side. Fearing that theological arguments were insufficiently powerful to break the bond between parishioner and

¹¹ Aubanel, *Préservatif contre le fanatisme, en forme de Dialogue entre un Agriculteur d’un Village aux environs de Marseille, et le Maître d’Ecole du même Village*, par M. Aubanel, *Membre de l’Assemblée Patriotique de Marseille, présenté à la même Assemblée et imprimé par son ordre* (Marseille : De l’imprimerie de Rochebrun et Mazet, 1792), 4. The author regularly quotes Cérutti, the editor of the *Feuille villageoise*. This and the nature of the dialogue suggest that his target audience was intended to be rural.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4–17.

¹³ Vernadet, Combry, Beraud, *Adresse aux habitans de la Campagne, sur la Constitution civile du Clergé* (n.p. : n.p., [1791]), 24. Records at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France date this work to 1790. Although no date of publication is listed on the pamphlet, the focus on the Ecclesiastical Oath throughout suggests that the work dates from 1791 at the earliest.

¹⁴ Shusterman, *Faith, Desire, and Politics*, 107. Across France, refractory priests reportedly warned the laity that taking sacraments from a juring priest would lead to their damnation. Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 160–1.

priest, the bulk of works that targeted rural audiences focused on the divisive machinations of refractory priests.

For example, the authors of the *Address to the Inhabitants of the Countryside* condemned those priests who reportedly encouraged their parishioners to “split with your relatives, your children, your spouse, if you must.”¹⁵ In a particularly prescient statement, the authors insisted that “these internal struggles within households, these bitter disputes within parishes” would soon, perhaps, turn into “civil wars.”¹⁶ However, for the rural inhabitants of France, these authors argued, their most immediate concern had to be their families. Chastising non-jurors for sowing discontent between family members, they claimed “you break the sweetest link in the eyes of nature, the most durable in the eyes of religion, and the most necessary for society!”¹⁷ “Inhabitants of the countryside,” they continued, “rebel priests mislead you. Thus, submit yourself to those who are aligned with your interests by the most noble oath.”¹⁸ These authors argued that the only way to maintain unity within families was to reject the influence of refractories and to receive the sacraments within the Constitutional Church.

As quarrels over the Civil Constitution raged on, some authors became concerned about the long-term effects of religious upheaval in the countryside. In November 1791, in a *Popular Address to the Inhabitants of the Countryside* published in the *Journal des Laboueurs*, the editor, Joseph Marie Lequinio, member of the Legislative Assembly, insisted that the faithful should have their children baptized by the priest in their local parish, regardless of whether or not he had taken the oath. Referring to the traditional practice of midwives administering the sacraments to newborns, he reminded them that baptism is “a sacrament that can be conferred by everyone, even by women.”¹⁹ He impressed upon readers the potentially unforeseen consequences of taking their baby to a faraway parish to be baptized by a refractory priest. Family records would be lost. Similarly, he warned them that if one was to have their relatives taken outside the parish for last rites and burial, family lineages would be difficult to trace for future generations.²⁰ Most importantly, Lequinio insisted, “it is infinitely important to the living that they are not deprived of the succession of deaths, which is, however, almost inevitable if the acts of death are not recorded or if they are not on the register of the parish where the deceased lived.”²¹ He ended his appeal to country folk by reminding them that God “commanded you to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s” and that they were obligated by both temporal and divine authority to obey the laws of the state.²² In an attempt both to encourage obedience and to quell anxiety surrounding the binding

¹⁵ Vernadet, Combray, Beraud, *Adresse aux habitans de la Campagne*, 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ J.M. le Quinio, ed., *Extrait du journal des laboueurs, Adresse populaire aux habitans des campagnes*, no. 30 (Paris, 6 November 1791), 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11–12. He also noted that people had grown so resistant to having their loved ones buried by local priests that they were allowing their loved ones to be buried in graves with inadequate protection from animals.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

force of religious rituals, he appealed to the rural population's desire to maintain familial unity and their ancestral lineage.

Calls for religious unity in the countryside most often focused on the harmful influence refractory priests could have on women and patriarchal order within the family. In *Anti-Fanaticism* by Bon-Marin Duval (1757–1808), lawyer and member of the general council of Manche, the author tried to convince readers of the countryside that refractories could not be tolerated because they purposely drove wedges between family members, especially husbands and wives. The work was designed as a dialogue between a peasant and a refractory priest. Unlike most dialogues of the period in which the peasant was instructed by an enlightened patriot, here the author used the peasant's naïve understanding of the Civil Constitution and the Ecclesiastical Oath to portray the refractory priest as a dogmatic fool. The peasant noted, for example, how strange it was that although his new, juring priest, did and taught the exact same things as the former, refractory priest, he was told that the sacraments of the new priest had no value.²³ After a lengthy, civil discourse, the conversation between the peasant and the priest grew heated once the priest brought up the importance of family. The peasant accused the refractory priest of deliberately sowing discontent within families. Although he confessed that he did not understand the subtleties of theology or legal theory, in his experience, the actions of refractory priests spoke for themselves. He claimed, "You divide the most respectable and peaceful families. You have torn me from my own. The tenderness and friendship of my best friends, my close relatives. Cruel, you have thrown the bone of contention into the heart of my family. Tremble, evil doer, the vengeance of Heaven approaches you."²⁴ The peasant then commanded the refractory priest to "put an end to your intrigues. Return these wives to their husbands, to their children, to their household."²⁵

This dialogue included several tropes that were common in pamphlets that defended the Constitutional Church. It included a confused peasant, torn between a slighted priest he had long respected and a Church that appeared identical to the one he long attended. It also represented the refractory clergy as disruptive and divisive. These selfish priests held on to theological minutia that were irrelevant to the people of the countryside to justify their opposition to the Constitutional Church. They used their social position to convince the laity that their rejection of the Civil Constitution was justified. In this, they were most successful in attracting women, whom they tore from their families. The message was clear: beware, country dwellers, the refractory priests will come for your wives.

It is clear that many authors believed inducing anxiety about losing control over their households was a surefire way to get the attention of rural Frenchmen. The nefarious refractory and the wayward wife were common characters in the stories recounted in the *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels, contenant des instructions contre le fanatisme, dédié aux habitans des campagnes* (1792). In this paper's prospectus, the editor, Paul Capon (1757–1838), lawyer and experienced

²³ Bon-Marin Duval, *L'Anti-Fanatisme. Étrennes aux bonnes gens, pour l'an 4e. de la Liberté, Où l'on trouve un Dialogue entre un Paysan et un Curé Réfractaire. Suivi de quelques réflexions sur les visites du nouvel An et sur les préjugés des Duels et de la Noblesse* (Cherbourg: M.A. Giguet, 1792), 25–28.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

editor of numerous failed papers during the Revolution, stated that the goal of the *Journal des ecclésiastiques* was “to enlighten the people on the true duties of citizens and Christians” and “to unmask the conduct of those who, under the specious veil of religion, seek to mislead it.”²⁶ As a daily periodical published in Orange and “dedicated to the inhabitants of the countryside,” it was intended to be the principle source of religious news for the rural laity of the Bouches-du-Rhône department and beyond.²⁷ Like the publications examined above, the *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels* focused most of its invectives against refractories on the damage they had done to families and it warned readers of the further damage they could inflict if their authority was left unchecked.²⁸ An early issue reinforced this point by publishing a letter to the editor written by a man who experienced the divisive machinations of refractory priests first hand. The anonymous author provided a detailed description of the means by which a local refractory had corrupted his wife. Before the intervention of this priest, he insisted that his relationship with his wife was “so perfect that it seemed to me that nothing could ever change it.”²⁹ Unfortunately, he was forced to go on a trip that kept him away “from a wife that I loved” for the duration of one month. When he returned, he found her “completely changed, refusing to communicate with me if I continued to support the cause of the constitutional priests, to the point that we almost never see each other, even though we live in the same house.”³⁰ Calling her confessor “the demon of discord,” he insisted that this refractory had corrupted his wife, telling her not to hear sermons by or take the sacraments from the local juror. However, he bought his wife the first edition of the *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnelles* and was sure that it was going to bring her around and convince her that the oath “is purely a civil act that carries no attack on religion.”³¹ He happily announced that he had become a dedicated subscriber to the paper because of its ability to move the hearts of those who had been corrupted by malevolent refractories. This was quite a bold statement, given that the letter was published in the third issue of a daily paper. It would seem that either the paper worked very quickly or the letter was contrived for polemical purposes. The editor followed up the letter with the statement: “There is only one method for stopping the dire effects [of fanaticism]; it is to enlighten people, and especially the sex that is amicable, but too weak and credulous to avoid the traps that one does not cease to impose upon its good faith.” The paper will have succeeded, he claimed, “if our instructions dictated by good faith can return this young misled wife and restore the union that formerly reigned in her household.”³² In this case, the distraught husband was convinced that the *Journal des ecclésiastiques* would convince his wife not only to abandon the cause of refractory priests, but also to love him again. The moral of this story was twofold. First, it suggested that refractories would stop at nothing to support their unrighteous cause, even going so far as to destroy family bonds with impunity. Second, it suggested that reading this periodical

²⁶ Paul Capon, ed., *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels, contenant des instructions contre le fanatisme, dédié aux habitans des campagnes, Prospectus* (Orange: Fauchier, n.d.), 1.

²⁷ Orange, the cite of publication, was part of the Bouches-du-Rhône department until 1793, when it became part of the new department of Vaucluse.

²⁸ They were not, however, particular unchecked here. This was one of the few departments to force refractories out of their resident parishes before April 1792. *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 277, 279.

²⁹ *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels*, no. 3 (3 January 1792), 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 10–11.

could actually prevent this fate for families in the future. The editor seems to have been soliciting subscribers and condemning refractories in fell swoop.

While the disrupted household was a common theme throughout the publication of the *Journal des ecclésiastiques*, the paper also published a wide variety of stories, criminal reports, and letters to the editor that portrayed jurors as a source of peace and unity, and non-jurors as a source of upheaval and divisiveness. On January 3, 1792, the paper reported that a member of the National Guard had been stabbed to death in the village of Villefort by a man described only as a “child of priests.”³³ The same issue reported that a cleric labelled as a “canon, treasurer, aristocrat” was paying people to reject the Constitutional Church.³⁴ To reinforce the idea that refractories were dishonest and deliberately misled the people about the validity of sacraments, the paper published the confession of a non-juring priest who lived in the village of D’Is-sur-Tille near Dijon. After he fell mortally ill in October 1791, he decided that it was time to confess his sins to a juring priest, which included having been part of a conspiracy to mislead the people. The unnamed priest reportedly confessed to his congregation that he aspired to become a grand-vicar and that his ambition “made me do everything to distance you from the instructions of a curé that you chose through the organ of your representatives.”³⁵ He admitted that he wrongly “persuaded you that his masses were sacrilegious ... I am guilty; I am going to appear before God’s tribunal; please forgive me and ask Him to forgive me.”³⁶ He also stressed the magnanimous character of the *intrus* stating that “Your curé tolerated all of my persecutions with only the spirit of gentleness and charity [characteristic] of a true apostle. No one is worthier to be a minister of the religion of Jesus Christ: love him. Listen to him. Respect him. And pray for me.”³⁷ After this public confession, all was set right again: the local laity now loved their constitutional priest and they “[run] in crowds to his sermons where he preaches love of country as one of the essential Christian virtues.”³⁸

The paper regularly stressed that while refractory priests caused disruptions, the constitutional clergy restored peace. For example, the paper recounted the story of a priest from Mornas who “not content to fanaticize the inhabitants of Mornas” decided “to go preach crusades in the countryside.”³⁹ After his arrest, local refractories fled the area and “[s]ince their departure, the greatest tranquility has reigned within families and the majority of women who until then had been seduced by perverse priests returned to the parish church from which these men had distanced them.”⁴⁰ Stories such as these acted as cautionary tales for the people of the countryside, especially men. If they failed to support the constitutional clergy and curb the influence of refractories, they would risk losing control of their households.

The goals, message, and polemical tools of the *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels* are closely aligned with those of the pamphlets examined above. In each of these publications, it is

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.* 9–10.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 66 (13 April 1792), 345.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

much easier to discern the intended audience and message than it is to determine with any degree of certainty who actually read them or how they were received. In the case of the *Journal des ecclésiastiques*, the Civil Constitution was an especially heated issue in its place of publication, a fact that seems to have limited its readership.⁴¹ Although the paper encouraged all citizens, especially constitutional priests, to report anything that would serve the goal of “destroying the errors of fanaticism that villains seek to propagate” they also guaranteed anonymity of informants, recognizing the dangers of reporting on such a contentious issue.⁴² Only two months after the journal’s publication began, reports arrived from subscribers who complained that they were not receiving their subscription. Several shipments of bound issues were reportedly opened, and the journal was found littered with “abominable notes, dictated by fanaticism and aristocracy” in the margins, a ploy the editor was sure had the object of “destroying our paper.”⁴³ These malicious maneuvers were ultimately successful. Having lost faith in the postmaster of Orange, Bouyer, whom he believed incapable of, or perhaps unwilling to, ensure the delivery of the journal, Capon decided to move the publication to Avignon.⁴⁴ This paper’s fate reveals not only how heated the issue of the Civil Constitution was, but more importantly, the lengths to which those invested in the controversy went to reach rural audiences, or to prevent them from being reached.

Despite the paper’s unfortunate fate, the *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels* provides insight into the editor’s assumptions about the mentality and values of the people of the countryside and his suspicions about the actions of refractories, assumptions and suspicions he seems to have shared with the authors discussed above. Each of these works attempted to quell anxiety over the legitimacy of the sacraments by inducing another: anxiety over divisions within the family. Bon-Marin Duval concluded his work, *Anti-Fanaticism*, with the statement,

Is there anything more painful for a sensitive soul, for a friend of humanity, than to see all the associations of society disrupted! The husband rejected by his wife, the father insulted by his son, the daughter abhorrent to her mother, the friend abandoned, betrayed by his friend! And why all these misfortunes? ... For disputes that you understand nothing about, you hate each other.⁴⁵

This statement displays an assumption that is sometimes implicit, often explicit, in works supporting the Civil Constitution: that the people of the countryside failed to understand the subtleties of sacramental theology. Those who opposed the Constitutional Church were easily misled by a deceptive refractory clergy who exploited this ignorance, effortlessly turning the most naïve among them, namely women, against their family members.

⁴¹ For example, Bouches-du-Rhône experienced an exceptionally high decline in the number of oath takers in early 1791 (70% to 50%) under the pressure of the pope’s condemnation of the oath. Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 43n.

⁴² *Journal des ecclésiastiques constitutionnels, Prospectus* (n.p.: n.p., n.d), 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, no. 51 (17 March 1792), 205.

⁴⁴ Paul Capon, ed., *Courrier du Midi*, no. 93 (Avignon, 1 May 1792), 373. This new paper, the *Courrier du Midi*, began publication in May 1792. Although Capon insisted that it would have the same goals as the original paper, the editor seems to have become preoccupied with the political situation of the city and much of the content aimed at the countryside disappeared.

⁴⁵ Duval, *L’Anti-Fanatisme*, 81.

There remained one issue that seems to have gone unconsidered by these propagandists: the possibility that the laity were actually making decisions for themselves. Tackett's work has shown that in many locales, the opinion of the laity had a considerable impact on the decision of the local clergy to take or refuse the oath. A trove of anecdotal evidence from the period suggests that the laity, especially women, were often quite resolved in their opposition to the Civil Constitution and that they placed a great deal of pressure on their priests to bend to their will.⁴⁶ Some women attacked juring priests with rocks and brooms, while one woman in La Rochelle told a juring priest that she would eat his heart, if given the opportunity.⁴⁷ What local witnesses described as a "heap of drunken women" in Normandy planned to lynch a local constitutional priest before the National Guard intervened.⁴⁸ While some of this violence may have been inspired or intensified by the influence of refractory priests, it is unlikely that the laity was always acting under their directives. Particularly in regions where connections to Rome were strongest – and the pope was hailed as the ultimate spiritual authority – it is unlikely that the laity failed to recognize the significance of his condemnation of the Civil Constitution: that it might invalidate the most important of sacred rites, that is, the sacraments. Most of these authors, however, seem to have believed that most opposition to the Civil Constitution had no theological basis. Perhaps this explains why these authors tried to convince the people of the countryside to support juring priests for entirely unreligious reasons: to maintain control over and unity within their households.

Finally, although it is clear that women were often avid, even violent, opponents of the Civil Constitution, it is less clear whether this actually caused the familial discord that these authors claimed. In some parts of France, prominent men reported that local households had been disrupted by unruly wives, corrupted by refractories. Although, as Tackett notes, "[i]t is difficult to disentangle reality from suspicion and conjecture in many of these accounts."⁴⁹ For their part, supporters of refractories insisted that these accusations were unjust. For example, the editor of the *Journal ecclésiastique* accused supporters of the Civil Constitution of forging a letter to the National Assembly. In this letter, written in patois, village men complained that refractories had corrupted their wives while they were away.⁵⁰ Although it may not be possible to discern whether or not refractory priests inspired or encouraged familial divisions on a wide scale, it is clear at the very least that the threat of divisions within families had the potential to cause widespread discomfort and anxiety. Scholarship has now well established that the family was, as Suzanne

⁴⁶ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 172–77; Olwen Hufton's work has shown that women were commonly agents of resistance to religious policies during this period. She has shown that religious change affected women especially deeply, and that this inspired resentment and resistance – both passive and active – from women who resented government officials' apparent blindness to their plight. Olwen Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), esp. chapter 3. On women and activism on religious issues, see also Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ Shusterman, *Faith, Desire, and Politics*, 77, 102.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁹ Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 175.

⁵⁰ *Journal ecclésiastique, ou bibliothèque raisonné des sciences ecclésiastiques* (Paris, July 1792), 95.

Desan has written, “an arena of social and political contestation during the French Revolution.”⁵¹ As a central component of daily life, the family also served as a convenient, if not necessarily successful, polemical tool for those hoping to ensure the survival of the Constitutional Church.

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⁵¹ Suzanne Desan, *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 2. See also, Jennifer Ngaire Heuer, *Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France, 1789–1830* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).