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# REASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE ABBÉ IN ENLIGHTENMENT PARIS

Jeffrey D. Burson

The bishops, university professors, and clergy of Old Regime France participated in similar theological and philosophical education, and they shared common social connections with other enlightenment authors.<sup>1</sup> The reality of this common social milieu has focused the attention of some historians of religion and Enlightenment in pre-Rev-

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bergin, *Crown, Church, and Episcopate under Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 81–115; Bernard Plongeron, *La vie quotidienne du clergé français au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1974), 195, 197; R. R. Palmer, *Catholics and Unbelievers in Eighteenth Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939); recent studies of the evolution of anti-philosophie or “Counter-Enlightenment” have made much the same point about the pluralistic origins of Counter-Enlightenment publicists and the many Catholic Enlightenment writers who adapted much of the emphasis on moral improvement, social utility, Lockean sensationalism, or limited monarchy from the very same sources as those against whom they argued like Helvétius, Diderot, and D’Holbach. See Dider Masseau, *Les Ennemis des philosophes: l’antiphilosophie au temps des lumières* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 2000), 1–26, 57, 63, 419–21; Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–48; also Arnoux Straudo, “L’abbé Gauchat: un apologiste des lumières,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 277–88; Martine Jacques, “L.-A. Caraccioli et son oeuvre: la mesure d’une avancée de la pensée chrétienne vers les lumières,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 289–302.

olutionary France upon various categories of beneficed and non-beneficed clergy known by the title, “abbé.” As John McManners noted in the first volume of his monumental *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France*, the title “abbé” had little instrumental or functional clarity even in its day. The implications of McManners’s statement have not been fully explored, nor have their implications for the field of Enlightenment literary, social, and cultural history in pre-Revolutionary France.

The term, “abbé” was originally cognate to the English word for “abbot,” and in effect, our own English word derived from a common Middle French usage. Nonetheless, by the eighteenth-century, the French honorific, “abbé,” extended to any of a host of different clerical posts that required no direct care of souls (for example, benefices such as priories or chaplaincies). The term continued to broaden as the *siècle des lumières* evolved, and ultimately it came to mean, both non-beneficed clergy and beneficed clergy who lived on revenues from such benefices yet still fulfilled no clerical functions. Accordingly, as McManners argues, “abbé” came to be applied analogically to canons, curés, Sorbonne faculty, and often highly ranked clergy who were not bishops, monks, or friars. As though these etymological confusions were not enough, it was also common by the mid-eighteenth century to refer to those who had joined certain regular orders (such as Jesuits or Oratorians) but had abandoned their vocation before ordination, as “abbés.” Because of this breadth of the discursive field surrounding the semantically ambiguous term “abbé” in eighteenth-century records, the historian must often rely upon literary stereotypes, secondhand reporting, and inferences from individual case studies when attempting to evaluate the role of “abbés” in the Enlightenment. Indeed, many abbés frequently operated on the margins between secular and sacred occupations, inasmuch as some served nominally as clerics, but just as commonly as writers, intellectuals, tutors, and courtiers.<sup>2</sup> Among other things, the abbés were, as McManners summarizes, “a sort of fluctuating artificial aristocracy at the summit of the republic of letters,” which included everyone from professors of the University of Paris, to the outright spendthrift offspring of wealthy bourgeoisie or nobles who were considered to be passing their leisure in corruptive idleness. So pervasive was this latter stereotype, in fact, that, “whenever a secular cleric came to notice by a crime or folly, he was commonly reported as an ‘abbé’ without reference to his station as, say, a canon or vicaire.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1:647–55.

<sup>3</sup> McManners, *Church and Society*, 653–55.

Accordingly, this article intends to use police records from the Archives Nationales in Paris to develop the implications of McManners's suggestion that the social category of the abbé has little functional specificity. It is here further argued that, contrary to several decades of historical scholarship, the category of "abbé" has historical utility neither as a distinction in the church's administrative hierarchy, nor as a concept that would afford practical guidance for determining the role of abbés in the evolution of the French Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> Many historians, including McManners, continue to assert that "[o]ne day it may be possible to hazard a generalization about their multifarious writings, detecting a contribution of a specific kind to the thought of the Enlightenment, [and] one corresponding to their ambiguous station between Church and world."<sup>5</sup> More delimited generalizations may indeed be made, but perhaps historians of the eighteenth century should seek to pursue such generalizations, as McManners himself implies, as aspects of the historical evolution of literary tropes or cultural stereotypes, rather than as meaningful sociocultural categories. As argued in what follows, very clear discourses and stereotypes were coming to define the "abbé" by the middle eighteenth century—discourses and stereotypes lacking any social specificity as a constellation of church offices, but rather, as symbols that encapsulate the anxieties of *dévots*, Jansenists, and Crown officials over the literary and social-nonconformism endemic within Paris. Authorities feared the seemingly parasitic nature of so many nominal clergy, some of whom apparently held little regard for their vocation, while pursuing true occupations as writers, playwrights, tutors, and sometimes, outright countercultural drifters. As such, police surveillance records from the early 1750s (housed in the Archives Nationales) and discussed more specifically in what follows, may be one preliminary barometer, first, of the construction of the "abbé" typology from the perspective of Old Regime institutions; and second, of the significance of this identity construction for the process of defining the boundaries that separated the "profile" of the suspect writer on the one hand, and the ideal of clerical behavior in late eighteenth-century France, on the other.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Robert Frail, *Realism in Samuel Richardson and the Abbé Prévost*, Studies in Comparative Literature 65 (Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), chapter 9; Robert Darnton, "Policing Writers in Paris circa 1750," *Representations* 5 (Winter 1984): 1–3.

<sup>5</sup> McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France*, 1:661.

<sup>6</sup> For a recent history of the evolution of the French police (especially the careers and activities of the *commissionnaires*) from the Old Regime to the Napoleonic Era and after, see the foundational work of John Merriman, *Police Stories: Building the French State, 1815–1851* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).



As McManners's argument strongly implies, and as this article more specifically argues, the "abbé" can be taken as a sociopolitical category, neither for Enlightenment studies, nor for the history of the Gallican Church. The term is a nebulous honorific that does reveal something about the evolution of an eighteenth-century cultural stereotype, on the one hand, and official anxieties about the rising "fourth estate" of hack writers and philosophes, on the other.

### ✱ Context of the Surveillance of Paris Clergy ✱

Yet, the immediate context of these surveillance records was two-fold: first, the sociopolitical *mêlée* over refusal of the sacraments and the enforcement of *billets de confession* on Jansenists and suspected Jansenists; second, the imbroglio caused by the censure of the abbé Jean-Martin de Prades, a clerical colleague of Diderot for a suspect theology thesis at the Sorbonne.

The *parti janséniste* had, against all odds, lodged itself on the side of piety against the decadence of Louis XV, on the side of fiscal accountability in the face of the Crown's pressing financial difficulties after the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), and on the side of traditional rights and Gallican Liberties against the escalating enforcement of royal and papal prerogatives. Yet, Jean-François Boyer, Bishop of Mirepoix, who was the darling of the pro-Unigenitus, anti-Jansenist dévots, succeeded Cardinal Fleury in acquiring control of the *feuille des bénéfices* in 1746. Mirepoix soon became Confessor to the Dauphin and a favorite of Louis XV's very devout Polish queen; his control over ecclesiastical patronage acquired by possession of the *feuille* gave him tremendous leverage over policy. To an extent even far surpassing Cardinal Fleury, royal favorite since 1743, Mirepoix had few scruples about packing the episcopacy and universities with clients who were as intensely pro-bull as himself. Mirepoix's most famous appointment was Christophe de Beaumont, named Archbishop of Paris in 1747 with the death of M. de Vintimille his predecessor. By early 1749, under considerable pressure from Mirepoix, Beaumont began supporting M. Bouettin, the curé of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, in a campaign of refusing the sacrament of extreme unction (last rights) to dying and often revered clergy who once were either appellants of the papal bull *Unigenitus* or Jansenists.<sup>7</sup> Last rights were to

<sup>7</sup> Jean Haechler, *L'Encyclopédie: les combats et les hommes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), 52–56, 116–35; Beaumont may have been influenced by any number of the Jesuits closest to him. Aside from his familiarity with Guillaume-François Berthier, editor-in-chief of the

be administered only if *billets de confession* (sometimes exacted under duress at the point of death) were signed and demonstrated full adherence to *Unigenitus*, both as a rule of personal faith and orthodox Catholic practice, and as the law of the realm.<sup>8</sup> The policy of sacrament refusal was applied with unprecedented callousness by Bouettin who had the support of both Mirepoix and the new Archbishop Beaumont. Unsurprisingly, the already tense situation that prevailed in Paris after 1748 only worsened. Initially, the *parlement* of Paris had reacted with moderation, but the tide was rapidly turning by November 1749 when Charles Coffin, the crypto-Jansenist principal of the Collège de Beauvais and rector of the University of Paris, died without absolution at the hands of the curé of Saint-Etienne-du-Mont. At the behest of Coffin's nephew (who filed an *appel comme d'abus* from the clerical courts to the *parlement*) the *parlement* of Paris became much more assertively a champion of the persecuted Jansenist cause. Regrettably, however, Louis XV reprimanded the *parlement* for interfering with the sacral jurisdiction of Saint Etienne-du-Mont (and by implication, the archbishop of Paris) to administer sacraments without interference from secular courts. Relations between the court, the archbishop, and the *parlement* further intensified when Archbishop Beaumont tried to eradicate Jansenism from the Hôpital général. The extension of the sacrament refusal policies to a religious institution that was widely respected for its piety, offended the sensibilities of many Parisians, and Beaumont's campaign of sacrament refusal to the Hôpital général resulted in the *parlement's* temporary suspension of ordinary judicial functions.<sup>9</sup> Starting 25 November 1751, the *parlement* of Paris refused to be dismissed, but it also ceased regular judicial activities in protest.<sup>10</sup>

The *parlement* of Paris had only just resumed its regular functions when the concerns arose over the growing restiveness of suspect writers in Paris reached a fever pitch owing to the scandal of the abbé de Prades. As I have argued extensively in my book, *The Rise and Fall of Theological*

*Journal de Trévoux*, and Father Castel, the pro-Newtonian friend of Montesquieu and Diderot, Beaumont was close to several of the Jesuits who were the confessors to the Dauphin (Fathers Crouste, Beauvais, and Dumas). See "La surveillance du clergé à Paris: Informations obtenues du 1-12 mai 1752 par les 'observateurs' que le lieutenant général de police Berrier avait placés auprès des membres du clergé, instancer l'archevêque de Paris: 11 mai 1752," Archives Nationales, Paris (hereafter abbreviated AN), AB XIX/3192 dossier 7.

<sup>8</sup> McManners, *Church and Society*, 2:481-82, 486; Dale K. Van Kley, *The Damians Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien Régime, 1750-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 107-11.

<sup>9</sup> See René Louis de Vayer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, *Journal et Mémoires*, ed. J. B. Rathery (Paris: Mme. Ve. Jules Renouard, 1865), 28 juillet 1753; McManners, *Church and Society*, 2:494.

<sup>10</sup> McManners, *Church and Society*, 2:494-95; Argenson, *Mémoires*, 25-26 novembre 1751.

*Enlightenment*, the doctoral thesis of the abbé Jean-Martin de Prades defended before the Sorbonne faculty on 18 November 1752 created a crisis for lay and ecclesiastical partisans of the early Enlightenment in France.<sup>11</sup> The controversial thesis left the abbé de Prades vulnerable to accusations by Jansenists and a handful of more Augustinian Sorbonne faculty that the young abbé had plagiarized Diderot, d'Alembert, and Voltaire for the threefold purpose of using Lockean epistemology to deny the intrinsic divinity of Jesus's miracles, to question the spirituality of the soul, and to deny the validity of revealed religion—all of which were gross misreadings of the theological orientation of Prades. For Prades was, in fact, quite close to what many Jesuits and even Sorbonne faculty had comfortably argued throughout the 1730s to 1750s about the liaison of Cartesianism, Aristotelianism, and even Lockeanism in particular—about the synthetic possibilities of Catholic Enlightenment in France. Nevertheless, the Jesuits saw their influence over faculty and institutional patronage at the Sorbonne (dating back to approximately 1730 when Cardinal Fleury had leaned on the Jesuits and Sulpicians in a sort of faculty purge) threatened by Prades's affiliation with Diderot as a contributor to the forthcoming second volume of the *Encyclopédie*. For strong within the Sorbonne throughout the 1740s and 1750s were many theologians who were clients of either the archbishop of Paris or the king's Jesuit confessor and keeper of the *feuille des benefices*, Bishop Mirepoix. These Jesuit or Jesuit clients among the episcopacy who owed their careers to Beaumont and Mirepoix supported sacral jurisdiction over the administration of the sacraments, and the unquestioned enforcement of the anti-Jansenist bull *Unigenitus*; if they were left vulnerable to Jansenist attacks against their doctrinal orthodoxy and their effective stewardship over one of France's most ancient and venerable medieval faculties of theology, the popular implications as of 1752 could have been disastrous. Certainly not all Jesuits, secular clergy, and University of Paris professors agreed theologically or philosophically concerning the use of Enlightenment political or religious discourses. What united many of them, after news of the Prades thesis leaked, however, was their shared concern with the *parlement* of Paris.<sup>12</sup> Supported by its own Jansenist element, on the other hand,

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey D. Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment: Jean-Martin de Prades and Ideological Polarization in Eighteenth-Century France* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> John Spink, "L'Affaire de J.-M. de Prades," *Dix-huitième siècle* 3 (1971): 150–80; Spink, "The Clandestine Book Trade in 1752: The Publication of the *Apologie de l'abbé de Prades*," in *Studies in*

the *parlement's* jurists now argued (with enhanced popularity in Paris itself) for greater oversight of the Sorbonne, censorship, and sacrament administration. As such, the feud that was begun between Diderot as editor of the *Encyclopédie* and the Jesuits of the *Journal de Trévoux* became increasingly the cause of the Jansenists in *parlement* by the middle 1750s once Jansenists and Crypto-Jansenists within the *parlement* of Paris accused the more liberal Jesuits, and their partisans within the Sorbonne who had been influenced by the syntheses of Enlightenment ideas from Locke, Malebranche, and Molinism, of being partisans of "unbelief" alongside Diderot, Prades, and the *Encyclopédie*. Thus, in order to protect themselves, Jesuits, the archbishop, Mirepoix, and the Sorbonne closed ranks in a campaign against the *Encyclopédie*, on the one hand, and opponents of *Unigenitus*, on the other.<sup>13</sup> On 26 January 1752, the Sorbonne caved to Jesuit pressure and the popular disgust stirred up by Jansenist writings and condemned Prades's thesis while also revoking his degrees. Not to be outdone, the *parlement* of Paris issued arrêts against the *Encyclopédie*, and a *pris de corps* against the abbé de Prades, who had already secured passage into Prussia.<sup>14</sup>

*Eighteenth-Century Literature Presented to Robert Niklaus*, ed. J. H. Fox, M. H. Waddicor, and D. A. Watts (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1975), 243–256.

<sup>13</sup> My book on the abbé de Prades and the theological origins of Enlightenment studies, for the first time, the intellectual sociability and the works of the abbé Jean-Martin de Prades in the context of larger movements of Theological Enlightenment within the Church. See Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment*. I am also working on a manuscript that studies the work of Prades's so-called "accomplice," the abbé Claude Yvon. See Jean-Martin de Prades, "Jerusalem coelesti, Quis est ille, cujus in faciem Deus inspiravit spiraculum vitae? (A la Jerusalem céleste, Quel est celui, sur la face duquel Dieu a répandu le soufflé de vie?): Thèse soutenue en Sorbonne le 18 novembre 1751," in *Apologie du Monsieur l'abbé de Prades*, I (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1752); Jean-François Combes, "La singulière destinée de l'abbé Jean-Martin de Prades," *Journal d'études: Jean-Martin de Prades, 1782–1782* (1982): 87–93; Jean-François Combes-Malavialle, "L'abbé de Prades hier et aujourd'hui," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique du Tarn-et-Garonne*, 113 (1988): 97–114; Combes-Malavialle, "Vues nouvelles sur l'abbé de Paris," *Dix-huitième siècle* 20 (1988): 377–97; Jean-Claude David, "L'affaire de Prades en 1751–1752 d'après deux rapports de police," in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 245 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institute, 1986), 359–71; Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 850–62, similarly addresses the importance of the Affaire de Prades, though he exaggerates the extent of Prades's own indebtedness to Locke and Newton, neglects to consider the nuanced and compromised position of the Sorbonne vis-à-vis the Jesuits, and fails to consider the philosophical depth of the Jesuits' own engagement with Locke, Malebranche, and much of what he defines earlier as the Radical Enlightenment itself.

<sup>14</sup> Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 814–62.

The atmosphere in Paris only intensified during the week of Prades's defense; as Jansenist agitation grew, Lieutenant General of Police Berruyer stepped up police surveillance and night patrols as the authorities braced for popular uprisings.<sup>15</sup> In the immediate aftermath of Prades's condemnation, the *parlement* acted even more boldly, strongarming the Sorbonne over its own privileges of censorship, issuing remonstrances against the *billets de confession*, and public statements arguing that those deprived of the sacrament "are entitled to resort to secular authorities whose responsibility it is...to put an end to the scandal and public defamation."<sup>16</sup> Though the king rebuffed the *parlement's* remonstrances and passively allowed the refusal of the sacraments to continue, one action of the *parlement* of Paris remained—the extension of an investigation of suspect writers in Paris to include both beneficed and non-beneficed clergy residing in Paris after March 1752.<sup>17</sup>

The police records housed at the Archives Nationales reflect several interlocking concerns from several interconnected institutions. On the one hand, the investigation reflects the effort of the *parlement* to keep an eye on the clergy of all stripes, including the General Assembly and even the archbishop of Paris himself.<sup>18</sup> Extreme anxiety pervaded the Parlementaire jurists about the ability of bishops to endanger the public order by persecuting Jansenism and other suspect writers.<sup>19</sup> In another sense, as Robert Darnton argued, this

<sup>15</sup> Argenson, *Mémoires*, 27 novembre 1751.

<sup>16</sup> See quoted portions in McManners, *Church and Society*, 2:492–94.

<sup>17</sup> The above paragraph, unless otherwise cited, derives from Van Kley, *Damiens Affair*, 100–101, 108–11; also McManners, *Church and Society*, 2:492–94; also John Rogister, *Louis XV and the Parlement of Paris, 1737–1755* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 92–99, 115–16; Peter R. Campbell, *Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720–1745* (London: Routledge, 1996), 214–18; Dominique Julia, "L'affaiblissement de l'église gallicane," in *Du Roi Très Chrétien à la laïcité républicaine (XVIIIe–XIXe siècle)*, vol. 3, *Histoire de la France religieuse*, ed. Philippe Joutard (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 38; Catherine Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la Nation: le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 48; for a good historiographical overview of the literature on the *parlement* of Paris, see William Doyle, "The Parlements," in *The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 157–67; Keith Michael Baker, "Politics and Public Opinion under the Old Regime: Some Reflections," in *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France*, ed. Jack R. Censor and Jeremy D. Popkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 133–68, 204–46.

<sup>18</sup> See "La surveillance du clergé à Paris: Informations obtenues du 1–12 mai 1752 par les 'observateurs' que le lieutenant général de police Berrier avait placés auprès des membres du clergé, instancer l'archevêque de Paris: 11 mai 1752," AN, AB XIX/3192 dossier 7.

<sup>19</sup> At least throughout the first eight years of the 1750s, these concerned appeared more than sensible to many Jurists and Jansenists. In effect, with the outbreak of the Seven Years' War in 1754, the king's financial situation grew even more perilous. With the *parlement* of

surveillance of the clergy was part of a larger, longer, and more systematic effort to acquire familiarity with the population of "masterless men"—the writers, playwrights, and freelance authors in Paris at the time. Indeed, the provenance and the description of these records at the Archives Nationales appears to reflect this. Each document provides a meticulous description of an individual clergy, his education, demeanor, his likely whereabouts, residential history, previous suspect activity, and even his physiognomy. Quite a number of these were nominally clergy, held decent benefices but preferred to live in Paris with the revenues from their benefice; most answered to the honorific title, "abbé," and at least a small number of them were students of various colleges of the University of Paris. Some had stirred up trouble and been incarcerated in the Bastille as early as 1748 for circulating suspect verses attributed to Pierre Sigorgne, a popular pro-Newtonian professor at Collège du Plessis.<sup>20</sup> After the first attempt to crackdown on the *Encyclopédie*, the effort to acquire a profile of suspect writers in Paris received the additional mandate of tracking activities and associations of the clergy, who were now all the more suspected of collaboration with Diderot and other so-called *phi-*

Paris effectively on strike from 1753–1754 and continually recalcitrant throughout 1755–1756, Louis XV had little choice but to secure badly needed revenue by accepting a free gift from the General Assembly of the Clergy convened in 1755. In exchange for the timely generosity of the bishops, the bishops were granted full exemption from the *vingtième* (income tax) and a final settlement of the sacrament controversy. The General Assembly of the Clergy not only rallied behind Beaumont, therefore; it championed clerical censorship of philosophic works against the similar rights claimed by the secular jurisdiction. Because the 1755 General Assembly effectively bailed out the king's finances while *parlement* was on strike, clerical immunities were secured, and it looked as though doctrine and censorship would continue to dance to a beat set by more ultramontane bishops instead of the often pro-Jansenist *parlement* of Paris. See Van Kley, *The Damiens Affair*, 126–40; McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, 2:499–500; Rogister, *Louis XV and the Parlement of Paris*, 176–80; Pierre de Nolhac, *Versailles et la Cour de France: Madame de Pompadour et la Politique* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1930), 51–59; Charles Jourdain, *Histoire de l'Université de Paris au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Bruxelles: Impression Anastaltique Culture et Civilization, 1960), 394–95.

<sup>20</sup> L. W. B. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 188–90; Joseph Delort, *Histoire de la détention des philosophes et des gens des lettres à la Bastille et à Vincennes précédée de celle de Fouquet de Pellisson et de Laön avec tous les documents authentiques et inédits* (Paris, 1829; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1967), 2:190–93, 201; André Tuilier, *Histoire de l'Université de Paris et de la Sorbonne* (Paris: Nouvelle librairie de France, 1994), 2:151–52; also Verger et. al., *Histoire des Universités en France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1986), 218–19; the course of the abbé Sigorgne was published in 1747: see Review of [Pierre] Sigorgne, *Institutions Newtonniens, ou Introduction à la philosophie de Newton*, 2 vols. in 8 (Paris, 1747), in *Mercure* (August 1747), 97–100.



*losophes*.<sup>21</sup> However, this police surveillance of Parisian clergy reflects an urge shared by philosophes, Jesuit *dévots*, as well as theological and parlementaire Jansenists alike, namely, the urge to clean up clerical corruption—a common theme of Catholic Enlightenment across confessional European dynastic states in the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

Also, as Vincent Denis has recently reminded us, these police records are but one facet of a long-term process of institutional rationalization designed to count, indentify, and monitor the population of the Bourbon realm under Louis XV in order to react more efficaciously to potential threats from vagrants, criminals, and in this instance, suspect writers and clerics.<sup>23</sup>

### ✱ Prosopography of Clergy Resident in Paris ✱

Some twenty-one of these profiles concern clergy between the ages of forty and fifty-nine; eleven of them are twenty to thirty-nine years of age, and nine are over sixty. Interestingly enough, the majority of the resident clergy surveyed were not native to Paris, nor were they even from Northern France, which may further reflect an official desire to oversee the growing population of theological students and clergy from elsewhere in the Bourbon realms. Three of the clergy derive from Toulouse, one heralds from Languedoc, two are Lyonnais, two are Avignoneuse, and at least two were from Montauban. Most striking is that a full sixteen of the extant records pertain to clergy from Provence. The presence and behavior of the Provençal abbés within the capital appears at times to be an overriding preoccupation of the Parisian police for reasons that continue to warrant further investigation. Indeed, some records even directly attribute the corruption of the priests in question to their having been exposed to Provence for too long. Father Michon, for example, supposedly “applied himself to the duties of his estate,” until he moved to Provence

<sup>21</sup> Robert Darnton, “Policing Writers in Paris circa 1750,” 1–31; also Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Ulrich L. Lehner, “What Is Catholic Enlightenment?,” in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 11–16, 34–40.

<sup>23</sup> Vincent Denis, *Une histoire de l'identité: France, 1715–1815* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2008).

where he corrupted himself.<sup>24</sup> Father Paul, another priest from Provence, was a doctor of theology from the Sorbonne, but "he looked only to his own amusement" and "his dominant passion was for women."<sup>25</sup> One explanation for the inordinate concern for the presence of these southern clergy residing in Paris might concern institutional and local prejudices enhanced by a relative increase in theological students, especially those from the south, who moved to Paris in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In fact, the proportion of Sorbonne students who originated south of the Loire River rose sharply in the latter half the eighteenth century—a full fifty percent increase over the population recorded in the first half of the century.<sup>26</sup>

Socially, as one would expect, many of the clergy surveyed were either of noble ancestry or from the elite members of the third estate. Most striking, however, is the fact that the number of suspect clergy whose family were non-noble but solidly bourgeois upbringing—that is, sons of wealthy merchants, *férmiers*, *négociants*, *avocats*, or *officiers*—was at least as high as the proportion of those heralding from the families of artisans and day laborers.

Concerning the occupations pursued by the suspect clergy, themselves, forty of these men held positions as *grand vicaires*, *vicaires*, *soudiâcres*, canons, former members of religious orders or abbots, royal confessors, bachelors of theology, or more prominent members of the Sorbonne who served as faculty censors. Only fourteen clergy held posts traditionally considered secular (*aumoniers* or private chaplains, tutors, or playwrights), and in truth, the vast majority of these records show that most Parisian abbés, often casually described by historians as non-beneficed priests, actually held benefices, and had served in several occupations, both lay and clerical. The only common theme that shines forth throughout these records is the frequency with which these suspect clergy were, at one time or another, banished from their diocese, defrocked, or dismissed from their spiritual charge on account of reputed moral infractions, some of which had already brought them to the attention of the Paris authorities, and may in fact explain why these police profiles were collected in the first place. As evinced by the documents, themselves, many of these abbés were already known or suspected of impropriety in word and deed, and

<sup>24</sup> "M. Michon, prêtre" (21 avril 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>25</sup> "M. Paul, prêtre" (26 novembre 1751), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>26</sup> See discussion of these estimates in Brockliss, *French Higher Education*, 18.



many of the profiles serve as a summaries of past testimony by or about these clergy gathered in conjunction with previous investigations, censures, or *arrêts*.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, only a tiny handful of surviving profiles describe abbés with any Jansenist proclivities—a fact that suggests the bias of the police chief, M. Berruyer himself, who was closely connected to Joly de Fleury, the *procureur général* of the *parlement* of Paris when the latter royal court was heavily influenced by clerical and legal Jansenists, and as such, just as interested in spying on the anti-Jansenist bishops and archbishops when they arrived for the General Assembly of the Clergy in 1752 and 1755—institutions that pursued anti-Jansenist policies, Jesuit initiatives at court, and ecclesiastical immunity from the *vingtième*.<sup>28</sup> In effect, the relative paucity of Jansenist or crypto-Jansenist abbés in these records appears to reveal that an investigation of resident clergy in Paris designed with the twin goals of identifying suspect Jansenist authors during the Refusal of Sacraments controversies and monitoring all suspect writers in Paris, expanded (thanks to M. Berruyer) to include various resident abbés who were, if anything, anti-Jansenist.

Beyond nuancing and significantly questioning the utility and coherence of the category of “abbé” in the history of either Catholic or Secular Enlightenment in Paris, then, the evidence addressed in what follows suggests two related points that may serve as avenues for further investigation. First, insofar as the clashing agendas of the Crown, the archbishop of Paris, the *parlement* of Paris, and M. Berruyer are evinced in the collection and preservation of these documents, these police records demonstrate the manner in which confessional cleavages in Old Regime France (pro-Jesuit and pro-Jansenist perspectives especially) could affect the development of police powers in municipalites like Paris. Second, and as I have argued elsewhere, these records demonstrate that not all abbés associated with the Enlightenment held Jansenist proclivities.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See one notorious example, “M. Journu, prêtre” (29 octobre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>28</sup> Julian Swann, “Politics: Louis XV,” in *Old Regime France, 1648–1788*, ed. William Doyle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 207–11; McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France*, 1:141–43; 2: 503.

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey D. Burson, “The Catholic Enlightenment in France from the *Fin de Siècle* Crisis of Consciousness to the Revolution, 1650–1789,” in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010); also Burson, *Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment*.

✱ Eighteenth-Century Profiles of the Abbé ✱

Having gathered some general conclusions and implications from the collection of police records as a whole, the remainder of this article highlights individual profiles in order to show two interlocking processes. First, by focusing on particular abbés, I hope to show the sheer diversity of eighteenth-century personalities known to officials of Old Regime France as “abbés.” In so doing, I will problematize the notion of “abbé” as a utilitarian category for literary or historical analysis in Old Regime France. Second, and paradoxically by means of the very same case studies, what follows shows the manner in which these official profiles inherited the biases of their various authors and informants; taken together, the police records reflect certain metanarratives about the ideals of the *bon curé* versus the libertine abbé—in short, they are one of a number of primary sources from which the monolithic historical typology of the Enlightenment abbé that still appears in eighteenth-century scholarship derives.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the stereotype of the “abbé” that still appears in modern Enlightenment scholarship is rooted in contemporary typologies that veritably leap from the pages of these police records. The abbé Aurillon, for example, is described as “un vray abbé”—that is, one who preaches a Christian morality he never followed. Aurillon held an “extraordinary penchant for women,” and though the bishop of Evreux appointed him as his *grand vicaire* in 1714, he was finally forced to return to Paris after 1733 when his scandals and womanizing caught up with him. From Paris, the abbé Aurillon traveled to Strasbourg, from whence he sojourned in the Electorate of Cologne before returning to Paris where he resided in “beaucoup d’amitié” with Mme. Guehard and had scarcely “never missed a play.”<sup>31</sup>

Other abbés were private chaplains or tutors to nobles or wealthy Parisian bourgeoisie, and they often frequented the opera, the theaters, and the salons of the early Enlightenment era. Most famously in this latter respect is the abbé Oudet, the old chaplain to the Count of Clermont from 1733–35. The Duchess de Condé first introduced Oudet to the Count of Clermont,

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, many of these stereotypes of the libertine abbé were venerably ancient literary stereotypes that can be found to refer to the sexual debauchery and intemperance of the clergy even in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. See, inter alia, Desiderius Erasmus, *Encomium Moriae Stultitiae laus (Eloge de la Folie)*, trans. Claude Blum, in *Oeuvres d’Erasmus*, ed. Claude Blum, André Godin, Jean-Claude Margolin, Daniel Ménager (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1992), 1–100.

<sup>31</sup> “L’abbé Aurillon” (15 décembre 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

and in the latter's service, Oudet was "very much à la mode"—very much the "libertine," and one who was known even to Fénélon, himself. Oudet earned some 600 livres in rent from various benefices which accrued to him thanks to the patronage of the Count of Clermont. But, the abbé Oudet then repaid the Count by having an affair with one of his chambermaids.<sup>32</sup>

Like Oudet, other abbés seem to have been very successful courtiers, and their high sociopolitical profile may, in fact, explain why these abbés were of such great interest to the Parisian authorities. Father Villeneuve, for example, was a relative of the ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, and had used his family connections to great effect after 1725 by courting Cardinal Fleury. As a result, he obtained the Abbey of Saint Gildas du Ruis in the Diocese du Vannes, worth 6,000 livres. The combined total from his other benefices and family holdings provided 12,000 livres per year in rent. With that sum, Father Villeneuve "sought only after his pleasures."<sup>33</sup> The abbé Martin, brother of a former Canon of Nôtre Dame de Paris, was secretary to M. de Vintimille, archbishop of Paris. By 1752, the forty-five-year-old abbé Martin enjoyed 80,000 livres worth of annual rent from his various benefices—an income that helped him defray the cost of several mistresses simultaneously, according to his profile.<sup>34</sup>

Far from being simple *littérateurs* for hire, and very far from being mere non-beneficed clergy, it seems clear that the Parisian "abbé" emerges from police reports of the middle-eighteenth century as the embodiment of hypocrisy. These were clergy whose benefices were acquired through lavish patronage, whose pastoral commitment was virtually nonexistent, and whose *raison d'être* was elsewhere: the theater, womanizing, urban sociability, or writing (and this was true with or without benefices that involved care of souls). The abbé Bauldry, for example, was a canon of the Cathedral of Amiens, and a former clerical counselor to the *parlement* of Paris, yet he is described as well-cultivated intellectually and "instructed solely by "par l'usage du monde." Although Bauldry affected "some appearance of modesty" in order to procure "a number of lucrative benefices," he was really the very picture of an "hon-

<sup>32</sup> "L'abbé Oudet" (29 decembre 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>33</sup> "M. de Villeneuve, prêtre" (22 septembre 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7; some priests such as Father Gromod were not so successful but are criticized in the police records as no less ambitious. "[I]l n'est rien qu'il n'aye tenté pour avoir quelque bénéfice, mais toutes ses entreprises ont echoé à cet égard..." See "M. Grimod, prêtre" (16 avril 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>34</sup> L'abbé Martin" (9 juin 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

orable man debauched" ("honnête débauché") who spends most of his time in Paris despite his benefice in Amiens. Bauldry is additionally described as "sparing nothing to satisfy his taste, his patrimony," and his passions for "the fairer sex" and "young boys" with "the revenues of his benefices."<sup>35</sup>

As noted above, one of the major complaints cited against these abbés was their having been dismissed from a previous benefice or diocese for suspect moral behavior. In this connection, their taste for Paris figures prominently, and often as cause or long-term consequence of their absenteeism, libertine tendencies, or taste for sociability and suspect writings. The abbé de Blaces for example had been *grand vicaire* to the bishop of Chartres and canon of the Cathedral of Marseilles. Yet, a trip to Paris with Blaces's patron, the bishop of Chartres, when the abbé was only sixteen, proved a turning point in the young man's life. Abbé de Blaces thenceforth lived a "life of such scandalous dissipation, to such a grand extent, for some four years, until finally the rest of the chapter insisted that the bishop of Chartres relieve him of his responsibilities." After wandering then from Chartres to Marseilles, Blaces was driven again from town, and it was from Marseilles that at last the young abbé found his way back to Paris where he resided successively in several places, and was known by May 1752 to frequent several "persons of distinction" as well as several Parisian "mauvaises places."<sup>36</sup> Father Deshais, though a resumptive doctor of theology from the Sorbonne and a censor of theses for the city of Paris, found himself "chased" from several benefices (including a Grand Vicarage) for a string of misconduct. As of 1752, Father Deshais was reputed to be residing with his mistress of twenty years and their daughter. Worse still were reports that Father Deshais was acting in an "excessively free and familiar manner" even with his own daughter, such that both "mother and daughter were used for his infamous pleasures."<sup>37</sup>

Another of the most common critiques that emerge from these police reports concerns the number of Parisian abbés who were engaging in hypocrisy of another kind: wholesale absenteeism and womanizing. Many, such as the abbé de Bragelone are demonized for using their benefices solely as a source of revenue meant to defray the costs of their amorous exploits. Bragelone, a priest who was brother to a captain of the grenadiers in the *Gardes françaises*,

<sup>35</sup> "Baudry" (19 mai 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; see also "l'abbé de Blaces," AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also "M. Fourbin d'Oppède" (16 janvier 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>36</sup> "L'abbé de Braces" (8 septembre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>37</sup> "Deshais, prêtre" (17 mars 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

and was himself nominally grand vicaire to the bishop of Beauvais, gathered some 8,000 livres of rent from his benefice. This lucrative income Bragelone supplemented by drifting from mistress to mistress, bilking all the way. After attaching himself to several, including Mme. Meraut, the wife of the *procureur général* of the *grand conseil* of the *parlement* of Paris, Bragelone found himself compelled to buy off the families of two young women of his native Beauvais whom he had impregnated.<sup>38</sup>

Much like the abbé de Bragelone, the abbé de Brancas (though the brother of a royal chaplain and a canon of Sainte Chapelle) is described as the very "enemy of work" whose prestigious place as canon of Chartres Cathedral he never bothered to fulfill. Indeed, Brancas is described as a womanizer possessing "a species of horror about all ecclesiastical functions."<sup>39</sup> Another native of Chartres, the abbé D'Alinval, journeyed to Paris to make his living as a playwright. After a financially ruinous liaison to DuBreuil of the Comédie française, he had some success as a playwright for the Comédie italienne in 1726 and after. However, after the early 1730s, D'Alinval accepted a clerical benefice, and ceased to attend plays regularly. Still, the police report adds, this was all a façade, for Abbé d'Alinval was still seen regularly with friends from the cafés and theaters of Paris, and was described by informants as utterly "demolished by wine and women."<sup>40</sup>

Hypocrisy of yet a third kind emerges in some accounts (though not by any means a majority). This form of hypocrisy is evinced by abbés who claimed a strident partisanship for or against Jansenism while in effect switching sides as a "véritable caméléon" for the sake of opportunism or careerism. M. Constant, a less than successful parish clergyman from Aix-en-Provence, was described by his neighbors as "impious without religion," and "far removed for a very long time from the functions of his estate." Yet, "successively he had been openly Jansenist, a relapsed Molinist,<sup>41</sup> a consummate libertine,

<sup>38</sup> "L'abbé de Bragelone" (8 septembre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; see also "M. du Bord, prêtre" (18 novembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also M. de Janson (30 janvier 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>39</sup> "L'abbé de Brancas" (30 octobre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>40</sup> "L'abbé d'Alinval" (39 juin 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>41</sup> Though well outside the scope of this article, a working definition of Molinism is in order, in so far as Molinist versus Augustinian theologies of grace are really at the heart of the strictly theological quarrels separating Jesuits from Jansenists. Deriving from the sixteenth-century Neo-Scholastic, Luis de Molina, Molinism held that individual free will to do good works was both possible and necessary to salvation. When an individual truly willed to do a good work, and asked God's grace, God would then grant grace sufficient to its accomplishment such

a perfect deist, [and] an adept hypocrite.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the abbé Pignon was accused of frequenting brothels while “counterfeiting” *dévo*<sup>43</sup> predilections [“était...dans la dévotion”] in order to attract the patronage of Mme. de Lavalette and acquire a lucrative benefice in Normandy worth 12,000 livres.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, even seemingly diligent and incorruptible priests are accused of hypocrisy of still another kind. Rock-steady, rabid Jansenists, like M. Bonardy (the brother of the president of the *parlement* of Provence) for example, are sometimes painted in these police records as the very antithesis of gospel charity. Bonardy had been forced out of Provence because his ecclesiastical superiors could not abide his conduct. After making his way to Paris, he lived off of both family wealth (he was from a distinguished Provençal *robin* family), and 12,000 livres in rent from an unspecified but lucrative benefice in Provence. With these revenues, Bonardy had the luxury of “never abandoning his initial prejudices,” as he conducted himself as a bitter, combative, somewhat reclusive Jansenist polemicist.<sup>45</sup>

Others appear to switch parties within the Gallican Church at will, depending solely upon what may have been the most likely avenue to lucrative benefices. Father Garnier (also from Provence) established his Jansenist cre-

that the deed would be credited to the believer as righteousness. This Molinist position was contested even among Jesuits, but to the Jansenists who clung to Augustine’s notion that all good works required God’s efficacious grace in order to be truly willed and accomplished, the Jesuits were freely demonized as Molinists. Brockliss, *French Higher Education*, 254–55; Jean Ehrard, *L’idée de Nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Génève: Slatkine, 1981), 437–43; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2:135–73.

<sup>42</sup> “M. Constant, prêtre” (28 janvier 1758), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>43</sup> Many scholars, admittedly following contemporary eighteenth-century sources, employ the term *dévo* rather uncritically to refer pejoratively to bishops, Jesuits, and Jansenists alike. Clearly primary sources (especially after c. 1750) use this term to describe the policies and personnel associated both with Mirepoix and with the Jansenist *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*. One dissertation by Agnes Ravel concerns the *dévo* party. See as cited in Van Kley, “The Religious Origins of the French Revolution,” in *Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. Peter R. Campbell (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 325–28, 328.

<sup>44</sup> “L’abbé Pignon” (15 septembre 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7; see also the description of M. Mottet, who, although “libéartin par inclination, il contrefait l’homme dévo.” See “M. Mottet, ecclésiastique simple tonsure” (4 février 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7; also the account of Father Garnier who “jouit les apparences de la dévotion à un libertinage extrême.” See “M. Garnier, prêtre” (19 mai 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>45</sup> “M. Bonardy, prêtre” (4 février 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also M. d’Espart, prêtre” (29 décembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also “M. de la Moor, prêtre” (25 février 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also “M. de la Ronce, prêtre” (2 décembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.



dentials upon arrival in Paris by ingratiating himself with abbé l'Espart, the Provôt de Toulon, only to abandon the *parti janséniste* in favor of Molinism.<sup>46</sup>

Many of these police reports not only weave an insidious web of hypocrisies incarnate, thus reinforcing the literary typology of the abbé as a stock character for ready use by Catholic and Lay Enlightenment reformers alike. Other reports, however, seemingly defy classification. The abbé du Bois, for example, was confessor of the parish of Saint Marguerite in the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Du Bois rented a room from a local madam who was reported to have pimped out young prostitutes for the surrounding neighborhoods. Du Bois himself was reputed to have been a faithful patron—a distinction du Bois shared with the abbé Fourbin, whose housekeeper pimped her own daughters to service him as chambermaids.<sup>47</sup> More scandalous still is the behavior of the abbé Cartier, who began as a curé in a distant parish in the diocese of Nevers. In this capacity, Cartier served as tutor to a young woman with whom he conceived a child. Forced out of his first post as consequence of the scandal, Cartier repeated the same affair with the daughter of his next employer before the parishioners finally complained to the bishop of Nevers. Having been released from his benefice by the bishop, then, Cartier relocated to Paris and tutored a student at the Jesuit College of Louis-le-Grand; here again, however, the local bishop (the old, Jansenist bishop d'Auxerre) banished Cartier from the Parish. Forced at last to outrun these scandals of his own making, the abbé Cartier frequented the brothels of the rue de Petit Lyon and rue Montorgueil where he contracted an unspecified venereal disease.<sup>48</sup> Several of these abbés were also chased from their benefices or otherwise dogged by womanizing and “a certain predilection for young boys.”<sup>49</sup> The abbé de Marsy, for example, was a native Parisian who had been attached to the Jesuit order for eleven years before “he was obliged to leave the order for having wanted to engage in debauchery with the young Prince de Guimené” (Marsy had been the prince’s prefect at the famous Collège Louis le Grand in Paris).<sup>50</sup>

Among the more humorously idiosyncratic and potentially illuminating to scholars are profiles that describe abbés who were viewed as extortion-

<sup>46</sup> See “M. Garnier, prêtre” (19 mai 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>47</sup> “Du Bois, prêtre” (17 janvier 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7; also “M. Imbert, prêtre” (10 mars 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>48</sup> “L’abbé Cartier” (29 septembre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>49</sup> See Father Payen is described as possessing a “goût détestable pour les garçons.” See “M. Payen, prêtre” (7 mai 1752), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>50</sup> “L’abbé de Marsy” (9 juin 1758), AN, AB XIX/3192, dossier 7.

ists and social leaches. The abbé des Oiliers from Tours, for instance, received his doctorate in theology from the University of Paris, yet his only job was as tutor for M. de la Guillaume, counselor of the *parlement* of Paris. After only five years, Oiliers became bored, moved into other tutoring jobs, and was finally chased out for inappropriate conduct. Oiliers then sponged off the wealth of his father, a "bon bourgeois" of Tours, until he could afford to live only in a local pension that eventually evicted him.<sup>51</sup> Not unlike Oiliers, the abbé de Vry obliterated his father's fortune by living the high-life in Paris. De Vry had been the nephew of the abbé Bignon, Royal Librarian of Louis XV, and it appears that Bignon tried to help his nephew by selling three benefices to pay for his expenses. Even the good graces of De Vry's uncle could not fully defray the cost of his eighteenth-century case of "shopaholism." In the end, Bignon conspired with de Vry's father to force his nephew to become a Prior of L'Hypolite de Vivoin near Le Mans, all the while "obliging the father to remain in fear that [abbé de Vry] might multiply his idiotic activities in Paris again" and bankrupt them both.<sup>52</sup>

Even a doctor in theology and former chaplain to the king of Poland such as Father d'Escors emerges from the police reports as an outright extortionist. Father d'Escors arrived in Paris in 1725, secured his position with the king of Poland, but was released for shady dealings, after which he introduced himself to Mme. d'Epinais. An unsuccessful marriage suit between Mme. d'Epinais and the prince of Montauban forced Father d'Escors to return to Paris, where he was then arrested by Sieur Roussel, then Inspector of the Police. Having bribed a magistrate to let him go, Father d'Escors fled for an additional two to three years before returning to Paris, where he yet again extorted money, this time from Mme. de Nogent. D'Escors was again arrested, and somehow weaseled out of it before finally selling his services to the Count of Sainte Maure, for whom Father d'Escors was paid to concoct a falsified genealogy.<sup>53</sup>

Some of these police reports describe personalities that transcend all likely characterizations of the *bon curé*, the hypocritical Parisian abbé, or the Enlightenment priest. Perhaps the most amusing and idiosyncratic of all are the profiles of variegated hypocrisy and virtuoso debauchery painted by police records for Father Journu and Father de la Barrière. Journu was a Toulousian of

<sup>51</sup> "L'abbé des Oirliers" (29 septembre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>52</sup> "[S]on père l'oblige à rester crainte qu'il ne fasse de nouvelles sotises à Paris..." See "L'abbé de Vry" (8 septembre 1752), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>53</sup> "M. d'Escors, prêtre" (29 decembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.



common birth who had earlier distinguished himself through study and joined the Jesuit order. Yet, “a decisive taste for libertinism conducted him to Paris” where “good cheer and pleasure soon exhausted his small fortune.” Two euphemistically described “maladies caused by debauchery” laid him low until he was briefly cured against all odds. For a season, Journu cleaned up his act, and enjoyed “astonishing success as a preacher” in such famous Paris churches as the Monastery of the Cordeliers, the Church of Saint Sulpice, and that of Saint Louis des Invalides. Distinguished dignitaries attended his sermons, including prominent Jesuits and the whole seminary community of Saint Sulpice. The *Académie française* even promised Journu the annual sermon delivered at either the Palais du Louvre or the Tuilleries. At his peak of influence, Journu was even reputed to be a chaplain of the Duc d’Orléans. But then something seems to have snapped, and Journu insisted that he had discovered the cure to both epilepsy and hemorrhoids. After he failed to achieve a royal privilege to publish his cures, Journu relapsed into a life of shysterism, and worked as a marriage broker for several distinguished women including a Mlle. Fel of the Opéra, while moonlighting as a writer of suspect verse.<sup>54</sup> Father de la Barrière, on the other hand, was a seventy-five-year-old priest of “low birth” from Provence who, “under the shadow of devotion, pity, and compassion for the indigent... seduce[d] an infinite number of persons.” Barrière convinced them that “he would communicate with heavenly spirits, from which they would receive a profusion of goods and riches in abundance.” Moreover:

During unseasonable weather, at bad times, and as a result of an infinity of other causes he alleges and exploits so adroitly, he unhappily drags the persons he has seized, year after year, from expense to expense, making them follow him from all parts in order to furnish whatever he suggests to them. And once someone has been caught in these traps, it is nearly impossible for him to wrest himself free before being ruined... [Barrière] achieves for himself such mastery over the minds of people who make his acquaintance that it becomes nearly impossible to reason with them.<sup>55</sup>

So far from making a living by writing, teaching, preaching, tutoring, or even the revenues of absentee benefices, Father de la Barrière seems to have preferred life as a kind of a cult leader. Indeed, the source of the police report is ac-

<sup>54</sup> “M. Journu, prêtre” (29 octobre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>55</sup> “M. de la Barrière” (12 novembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

tually named in this case—she was one Mme. de Roger, the widow of an officer of Louis XV's household, who was "abused for six months by M. de Barrière."<sup>56</sup>

### ✱ Conclusion ✱

According to John McManners, "One day it may be possible to hazard a generalization about [the abbés'] multifarious writings, detecting a contribution of a specific kind to the thought of the Enlightenment, one corresponding to their ambiguous station between Church and world."<sup>57</sup> These police records, however, strongly imply that historians of Enlightenment France—whether they are concerned with the unfolding of Catholic Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, or Radical Enlightenment—may wish to disabuse themselves of any lingering notion that the category of abbé serves a utilitarian, socially descriptive function for the writing of intellectual history. To be fair, John McManners has already suggested the alternative elsewhere, by providing his elaborate etymological analysis, both, the term, "abbé," and of the clerical typologies prevalent in eighteenth-century sources. What we see evinced in the above police reports are cultural constructions, not instrumental categories.<sup>58</sup> In effect, a common affinity exists between the content of the police profiles of these abbés and the many stories and tropes associated with pamphlets, novels, and other genera associated with the eighteenth-century print culture. The task before us, then, is first to analyze in greater depth the way in which these profiles were constructed, and the likely appropriation of common representations of the abbé by these official documents. Second, historians may wish to consider whether police reporting may have contributed to the construction of these cultural typologies that were later written into the popular imagination via literary production? It is a question beyond the scope of the present work, but one most worthy of exploring for literary scholars and historians. Third, scholars of Enlightenment and religion in France should resist the temptation to approach the category of the "abbé" with the tacit assumption that they should be identified too closely with any one of the possible variety of priests, individuals, and writers who answered to the honorific title, "abbé." As McManners reminds us, and these police records further place in relief, is

<sup>56</sup> "M. de la Barrière" (12 novembre 1751), AN, AB/XIX/3192, dossier 7.

<sup>57</sup> McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France*, 1:661.

<sup>58</sup> McManners, *Church and Society*, 1:647–78.

the reality that abbés were at once more and less than unbeneficed clergy, and the *abbé commendataire* or defrocked priest cannot be too hastily identified with crypto-Jansenists, Enlightenment theologians, or secular Enlightenment writers. Rather, we as historians should begin to periodize and construct a genealogy of how different parties within the Gallican Church constructed the notion or literary trope of the “abbé,” and what the construction of such cultural stereotypes reveals about the evolving ideals of Catholic Enlightenment reformism,<sup>59</sup> the social and intellectual history of the French Church,<sup>60</sup> and the related bifurcation of Counter-Enlightenment and Radical Enlightenment tendencies in pre-Revolutionary France.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The relationship of Counter-Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and Radical Enlightenment is a vital part of much recent work on pre-Revolutionary Europe. Though still focused to a large degree on the socioreligious reformism, conciliarist, Gallican, and crypto-Jansenist side of the movement, a lively body of work that considers “Catholic Enlightenment” more globally and comprehensively is arising; see Lehner, “What Is Catholic Enlightenment?,” 1–40; Samuel J. Miller, *Portugal and Rome, c. 1748–1830: An Aspect of the Catholic Enlightenment* (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1978), 1–27; Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 141–81; Jotham Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2004), 4–10, 278–83; also Carlo Fantappiè, *Riforme ecclesiastiche e resistenze sociali: la sperimentazione istituzionale nella diocesi di Prato alla fine dell’antico regime*, ed. Francesco Margiotta Broglio (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1986), 399–403; also Dale K. Van Kley, “Jansenism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits,” in *Enlightenment, Reawakening, Revolution, 1660–1815*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett, *Cambridge History of Christianity* 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–28; Charles C. Noel, “Clerics and Crown in Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808: Jesuits, Jansenists, and Enlightened Reformers,” in *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. James E. Bradley and Dale K. Van Kley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 119–53.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Plongeron, *Conscience religieuse en révolution: regards sur l’historiographie religieuse de la Révolution française* (Paris: A. and J. Picard, 1969); Marie-Hélène Cotoni, *L’Exégèse du Nouveau Testament dans la philosophie française du dix-huitième siècle*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 220, ed. Hayden Mason (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1984); Bernard Cottret, *Le Christ des lumières: Jésus de Newton à Voltaire, 1680–1760* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1990); Monique Cottret, *Jansénisme et Lumières: pour un autre XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1998); Dale Van Kley, “Classical Republicanism in Clerical Garb: Gallican Memories of the Early Church and the Project of Primitivist Reform, 1719–1791,” *Past and Present* 200 (August 2008): 77–120; also Van Kley, “The Estates General as Ecumenical Council: The Constitutionalism of Corporate Consensus and the *Parlement’s* Ruling of September 25, 1788,” *Journal of Modern History* 61 (March 1989): 1–52.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey D. Burson, “The Crystallization of Counter-Enlightenment and Philosophic Identities: Theological Controversy and Catholic Enlightenment in Pre-Revolutionary France,” *Church History* 77 (December 2008): 955–1002.