

Accepted manuscript

Published as: Glauco Schettini, “18th-Century Crusaders: The War against France and the Catholic Counterrevolution, 1789–99,” in Matthijs Lok, Friedemann Pestel, and Juliette Reboul, eds., *Cosmopolitan Conservatism: Countering Revolution in Transnational Networks, Ideas, and Movements, c.1700–1930* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 152–171.

This is the accepted manuscript (post-peer-review author version). The Version of Record is available from the publisher: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004446731_007.

Eighteenth-Century Crusaders: The War against France and the Catholic Counterrevolution, 1789-99

Glauco Schettini (Fordham University)

“Today is the day”, an alarmed Dionigi Strocchi wrote on 17 September 1796 to his friend Francesco Conti in Faenza. In Rome, where Strocchi worked as a secretary of the College of Cardinals, “everyone [was] murmuring about a holy war, a war of religion” soon to be waged against France. Its consequences, Strocchi anticipated, would be ruinous.¹ Strocchi’s fears were not misplaced. After Bonaparte’s invasion of the Papal States in June, an armistice had been signed in Bologna between the French and the papal emissaries, but negotiations for a peace treaty, which had started in Florence early in September, were stalling. The prefect of the Index, Cardinal Stefano Borgia, who had once argued for a policy of appeasement toward revolutionary France, was now adamant that declaring a war of religion was necessary.² Even the populace of Rome, Cardinal vicar Giulio Maria della Somaglia informed the papal delegate in Florence, Lorenzo Caleppi, “longed to see [Caleppi] come back with an overt declaration of a war of religion.”³ And the Spanish plenipotentiary in Rome, José Nicolás de Azara, who had been deployed to Florence as a mediator, notified prime minister Manuel Godoy, with unusual desolation, that pope Pius VI was soon going to declare a crusade against France—with which Godoy had concluded a peace treaty in Basel the year before.⁴

¹ Giovanni Ghinassi (ed.), *Lettere edite ed inedite del cavaliere Dionigi Strocchi ed altre inedite a lui scritte da uomini illustri*, vol. 1 (Faenza: 1868), 55. All translations are mine.

² Vatican City, AVS, *Segreteria di Stato*, Epoca napoleonica, Italia, 11/1, fasc. 4, no. 11, 7 September 1796.

³ Lajos Pásztor, “Un capitolo della storia della diplomazia pontificia: La missione di Giuseppe Albani a Vienna prima del trattato di Tolentino,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 1 (1963): 295-383, at 300.

⁴ José Nicolás de Azara, *Epistolario (1784-1804)*, ed. María Dolores Gimeno Puyol (Madrid: 2010), no. 310.

The day that Strocchi feared and Azara wished so desperately to avoid never came. And yet, the prospect of a crusade against France was more than the late-summer dream of a papal Curia suddenly realizing that Rome was no longer safe from the dangers of war. Catholic thinkers across Europe had long been pondering over the best way to react against the Revolution, and especially against the secularizing thrust that they regarded as the most frightful feature of the post-revolutionary world. The idea of a counterrevolutionary crusade, which was born out of transnational intellectual exchanges, signaled the emergence of a new understanding of the ongoing struggle. The war the French were fighting for the exportation of Revolution, as Catholic intellectuals saw it, was a new kind of war aimed at replacing a traditional world order with a new one that left little room for established religions. It was an ideological war and a war of annihilation—a total war, as we would say in current parlance.⁵ In the eyes of its promoters, the project of a counterrevolutionary crusade was a fitting response to this kind of war. It also announced some of the main features of nineteenth-century Catholicism. On the one hand, such a project relied on the identification of a model of society that could be opposed to the secularized world of the revolutionaries. This was the model, however idealized, of medieval Christendom, in which all Christian powers cooperated to achieve a goal set by the highest religious authority, the pope. On the other hand, appeals for a crusade also pointed to the need to embrace a key aspect of the new politics engendered by the French Revolution—the active involvement of popular masses onto the political scene. No crusade was ever launched against France, but the wider fight for the re-Christianization of the post-revolutionary world—one that would profoundly impact nineteenth-century Europe and conservative cultures at large—would build upon the efforts of eighteenth-century crusaders.

First, this chapter looks at the ways Catholic intellectuals in France and beyond conceptualized their fight against the French Revolution in the early 1790s. It then shifts to the Spain of the War of the Pyrenees (1793-95), where clerics extensively used the vocabulary of holy war to build a rationale for the fight against the French. Finally, it turns to the Papal States, where intellectuals openly called for a counterrevolutionary crusade.

The Revolution against Catholicism

The word “crusade” did not take long to enter the vocabulary of the Revolution. In a debate on the necessity of war held at the Jacobin Club in December 1791, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the leader of the Girondins, famously called for “a crusade of universal liberty” against reactionary powers.⁶ Although the voice guiding eighteenth-century crusaders should be the voice of reason, not that of the pope, Brissot’s crusade, as a war uniting all the peoples of Europe and animated by an unwavering ideological commitment, had actually much to share with its medieval predecessors.

⁵ See David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: 2007).

⁶ Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *Second discours sur la nécessité de faire la guerre aux princes allemands* (Paris: 1791), 27.

References to the crusades were even more frequent in the writings of pro-revolutionary authors intent on decrying counterrevolutionary resistance, especially when motivated by religious reasons. These authors relied on a longer tradition of Enlightenment works that were critical of the crusades. Throughout the eighteenth century, historians like Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, and Robertson had repeatedly represented the medieval expeditions to the Holy Land as the apex of fanaticism and superstition, and had raised questions on their results from both a geopolitical and an economic perspective.⁷ Even some Catholic historians, such as Claude Fleury, agreed upon such a narrative.⁸ Unsurprisingly, then, counterrevolutionaries could easily be ridiculed as would-be crusaders—the modern-day imitators of the most quintessential manifestation of unenlightened religion. In Germany, Karl Gottlieb Daniel von Clauer published in 1791 a speech titled *Der Kreuzzug gegen die Franken*, in which he tried to talk the German princes out of their warlike intentions by lampooning the idea that religion could provide an acceptable rationale for fighting against the Revolution.⁹ And in an anonymous French satirical pamphlet probably published after 10 August 1792, an unlikely Pius VI, who qualified himself as the “king of kings”, invited all Catholic powers to wage a crusade against France in order to reestablish “the blissful kingdom of fanaticism” all over Europe.¹⁰

It took counterrevolutionary thinkers slightly longer before they actually came to describe their struggle as a religious war. The awareness that the fight against the Revolution was not just a battle of ideas, to be sure, emerged rapidly. Edmund Burke, for one, made it clear in his *Reflections* (1790) that the system the National Assembly was setting up posed a radical ideological alternative to every other, and already in 1791, in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly*, he expressed the need for a pan-European military coalition. However, not until 1793 did he clearly qualify the war against the Revolution as a “religious war”.¹¹ On the opposite shore of the Channel, François Dominique de Montlosier was among the earliest critics

⁷ Christopher Tyerman, *The Debate on the Crusades* (Manchester: 2011), 67-94. See also Alicia C. Montoya, *Medievalist Enlightenment: From Charles Perrault to Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Woodbridge: 2013).

⁸ Robert Favre, “Critiques chrétiennes des croisades et de l’intolérance,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 131-136; Tyerman, *Debate*, 54-56.

⁹ Karl Gottlieb Daniel von Clauer, *Der Kreuzzug gegen die Franken: Eine patriotische Rede, welche in der deutschen Reichs-Versammlung gehalten werden könnte* (Germanien [i.e. Brunswick]: 1791). The pamphlet was republished in German in 1792 and 1796 and rapidly translated into French as *La croisade contre les français: Discours patriotique qui pourrait se tenir à la diète de l’empire* (s.l.: 1791).

¹⁰ *Manifeste du pape à toutes les puissances catholiques pour former une croisade contre la France*, 14.

¹¹ Edmund Burke, *Remarks on the Policy of the Allies*, in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (London: 1887), 449. On Burke’s evolving conceptualization of the war against France, see Jennifer M. Welsh, *Edmund Burke and International Relations: The Commonwealth of Europe and the Crusade against the French Revolution*. Burke would eventually refer to the war as a “new crusade” in 1796 in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (Indianapolis: 1999), 157.

of France's new constitution, which he lambasted in 1791 in his *De la nécessité d'une contre-révolution en France*.¹² Shortly thereafter, in a second pamphlet, *Des moyens d'opérer la contre-révolution*, he clearly argued in favor of a military intervention against the newly formed Legislative Assembly. However, he stopped short of suggesting that the upcoming conflict should be legitimized as a religious struggle.¹³

It was among Catholic intellectuals that such an idea was first sketched and swiftly caught on. Catholic Counter-Enlightenment thinkers had long been accustomed to regard eighteenth-century culture as disruptive of traditional beliefs—as well as of the existing political order and of social stability, which, they argued, were both dependent upon religion.¹⁴ The offensive against Catholicism, many of them claimed, was the result of a plot hatched by a diverse set of enemies—ranging from the *philosophes* to freemasons and Jansenists. When the Revolution came, its Catholic opponents, both within and without France, only had to graft their criticisms of the National Assembly onto the tradition of Counter-Enlightenment thought. This process was smoothed by provisions that curtailed the Catholic church's legal privileges and by Pius VI's condemnation of the Civil constitution of the clergy in 1791, which widened the gap between the Revolution and much of the Catholic world. For the many French priests who refused to take an oath to the Civil constitution, as much as for Catholic observers abroad who grew increasingly concerned with the Assembly's religious policies, opposing the Revolution soon became synonymous with defending Catholicism.¹⁵ But even before the passing of the Civil constitution and the subsequent schism in the French clergy, Catholic authors had started to ramp up their counterrevolutionary rhetoric. Already in 1789, for example, Jean-Baptiste Duvoisin, who would become the bishop of Nantes in 1802 and one of Napoleon's most trusted advisors for religious affairs, ranted that the *philosophes* and their epigones, the members of the National Assembly, were using "every means of war" in their onslaught on Catholicism. Religion, he proclaimed, desperately needed "soldiers" ready to fight in its defense.¹⁶

This need became all the more urgent when military conflict broke out. Religion provided an effective rallying cry for those who opposed the Revolution. Counterrevolutionary insurgents

¹² François Dominique de Montlosier, *De la nécessité d'une contre-révolution en France, pour rétablir les finances, la religion, les mœurs, la monarchie et la liberté* (s.l.: 1791). On Montlosier, see Carolina Armenteros, "Royalist Medievalisms in the Age of Revolution: From Robert de Lézardière to Chateaubriand, 1792-1831," *Relief* 8 (2014): 20-47.

¹³ François Dominique de Montlosier, *Des moyens d'opérer la contre-révolution, pour servir de suite à son ouvrage intitulé De la nécessité d'une contre-révolution* (Paris: 1791).

¹⁴ Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (New York: 2001).

¹⁵ Javier Herrero, *Los orígenes del pensamiento reaccionario español* (Madrid: 1973); Daniele Menozzi, *La Chiesa cattolica e la secolarizzazione* (Turin: 1993), 15-71; Luciano Guerici, *Uno spettacolo non mai più veduto nel mondo: La Rivoluzione francese come unicità e rovesciamento negli scrittori controrivoluzionari italiani, 1789-1799* (Turin: 2008).

¹⁶ Jean-Baptiste Duvoisin, *La France chrétienne, juste et vraiment libre* (s.l.: 1789), 3 and 55.

in western France rebranded themselves the Catholic and Royal Army, adopted the Sacred Heart as their symbol, and explicitly included “the reestablishment of the Catholic religion” among their goals.¹⁷ Outside of France, too, prelates and priests actively supported the military efforts of their compatriots. In February 1793, the Capuchin Albert Komploier, a preacher in Bolzano, a city under imperial control, exhorted his audience to “detest this feverish and contagious plague”, the Revolution, and to fight it “until death”.¹⁸ In June 1794, the bishop of Parma, Adeodato Turchi, encouraged the faithful “not to be afraid to die” as martyrs “in defense of the altars”—a sacrifice that would grant them eternal salvation.¹⁹ The year before, while Savoy was under French occupation, a Piedmontese Franciscan, Filippo da Rimella, had authored an extensive oration devoted to the crusade launched in 1307 against the heretic Fra Dolcino.²⁰ Although Rimella stopped short of openly calling for a new crusade against revolutionary France, his intentions were easily intelligible to his readers.²¹ And the refractory archbishop of Cambrai, prince Ferdinand de Rohan, who had fled his diocese in 1792 to seek shelter in Belgium, was even less cautious. In a pastoral letter he wrote in November 1793, he claimed that the war against France was “the war of religion against impiety”. “Is a war that religion and humanity require”, he went on, “less holy of a war than the crusades?”²² Such utterances, though, generally failed to coagulate into a cohesive narrative. Rohan, after all, left his question unanswered, and the Belgian episcopacy proved somewhat reluctant to adopt such a militant rhetoric. In their pastoral letters, they condemned the French as impious and qualified the ongoing war against the Revolution as just, but they generally refrained from using religion as a tool to stir up the resistance.²³ Things, though, were about to change.

For God and the country: Spain’s war against the Revolution

In June 1793, the Spanish ex-Jesuit Juan de Osuna, who had found shelter in Cesena, in the Papal States, after the Jesuits’ expulsion from Spain, described the French invasion of his homeland as “hell’s ultimate, most critical, and decisive attempt to strip the Omnipotent of his

¹⁷ *Manifeste de l’armée chrétienne et royale au peuple français* (s.l.: 1793), 4.

¹⁸ [Albert Komploier], *Albero della iniqua libertà francese: Tradotto dal tedesco in italiano idioma* (Assisi, 1793), 5 and 46.

¹⁹ Adeodato Turchi, *Omelia recitata al popolo nel giorno di Pentecoste dell’anno 1794: Sopra le orazioni pubbliche che si fanno attualmente* (Parma: 1794), 20.

²⁰ Filippo da Rimella, *Orazione sopra la sacra lega de’ Valsesiani contro l’eretico Dulcino e seguaci, con tre appendici e con riflessioni analoghe agli errori ed ai bisogni dei correnti tempi* (Vercelli: 1793).

²¹ *Giornale ecclesiastico di Roma*, 27 September 1794, 151-52.

²² Maurice Chartier, “Une lettre pastorale de l’archevêque insermenté de Cambrai en 1793,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 28 (1956): 211-213, at 213.

²³ Horst Carl, “Religion and the Experience of War: A Comparative Approach to Belgium, the Netherlands and the Rhineland,” in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Jane Rendall (eds.), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820* (Basingstoke: 2009), 222-242, at 224-225.

scepter”. But the French would soon discover, he proclaimed, “that it is hard to fight against God”.²⁴ It was in Spain, indeed, that the claim that the ongoing conflict was a war of religion was most thoroughly elaborated upon. When France opened hostilities against its former ally in March 1793, the understanding of the Revolution as an anti-religious conspiracy had already made inroads south of the Pyrenees. Spanish clerics, who willingly accepted the crown’s appeal to support military mobilization, seized upon existing counterrevolutionary tropes and weaved them into a coherent religious rationale for war. For almost two years, sermons and pastoral letters served as a sounding board for its propagation. French émigrés, too, lent their assistance, galvanizing the Spaniards with accounts of the persecutions they had endured.²⁵

In the works of Spanish clerics, the French were invariably portrayed as the enemies of religion. Tomás de Lorenzana y Butrón, the bishop of Girona, explained that beyond the Pyrenees the French had already “abolished every sacred ceremony and ruined churches and altars, without any reverence for God”, and Mariano de Perea, the rector of the University of Orihuela, labeled them as “apostates”.²⁶ Spain, thus, was now in danger. The Augustinian friar Gregorio Galán described the French as “impatient to spread their errors throughout the globe”, and Nicolás Chornet y Año, a Carmelite, warned his compatriots that the National Convention had “sworn to tear off their holy faith from Spain”.²⁷ The source of France’s corruption, of course, was the thought of the *philosophes*—“the false philosophy of this century”, according to Francisco Aguiriano y Gómez, bishop of Calahorra.²⁸ An anonymous pamphlet by a French émigré railed against “the much-praised *filósofos*”, especially “the most impure Voltaire”, and Joseph López de la Fuente, canon of Mondoñedo, denounced that it was the fault of the Enlightenment if France, once “a cultured nation”, was now venerating a number of “idols mistaken as gods”.²⁹ Such accusations became all the more frequent as dechristianization

²⁴ Juan de Osuna, *Orazione parenetica recitata per implorare dall’altissimo la celeste benedizione sulle armi cattoliche nella guerra intrapresa contro l’anarchia francese* (Cesena: 1793), 20 and 23.

²⁵ Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton: 1958), 297-315; Scott Eastman, *Preaching Spanish Nationalism across the Hispanic Atlantic, 1759-1823* (Baton Rouge: 2012), 17-44; Gregorio Alonso, *La nación en capilla: Ciudadanía católica y cuestión religiosa en España, 1793-1874* (Granada: 2014), 23-31. On the circulation of counterrevolutionary ideas between France and Spain, see also Jean-Philippe Luis’s chapter in this book.

²⁶ “Edicto del ilustrísimo señor obispo de Gerona,” *Semanario de Salamanca*, 16 December 1794, 178; Mariano de Perea, *Oración con que exhortó al servicio voluntario de las armas los jóvenes* (Orihuela: 1793), 25.

²⁷ Gregorio Galán, *Sermón en la rogativa a Nuestra Señora del Rosario* (Madrid: 1793), 2; Nicolás Chornet y Año, *Medio seguro para triunfar de la Francia: Oración deprecatoria y ascética* (Valencia: 1794), 2.

²⁸ “Carta pastoral del ilustrísimo señor don Francisco Mateo Aguiriano y Gómez,” *Semanario de Salamanca*, 8 November 1794, 82.

²⁹ *Clamores de un francés católico en la desolación de su patria* (s.l.: s.d.), 7; Joseph López de la Fuente, *Sermón que predicó el día 30 de junio de 1793* (s.l.: 1793), 35.

spiraled in the winter of 1793-94 and the new revolutionary cults of Reason and the Supreme Being were created. Revolution and war, thus, could be interpreted as God's punishments for the sin of apostasy. God, explained the bishop of Tarragona, Francisco Armañá, "chastises the peoples' rebellion".³⁰ His wrath, Chornet remarked, "spills onto our crimes".³¹ And if the whole revolutionary crisis was of God's making, concluded López de la Fuente, it required an appropriate remedy: "the lack of faith is the cause of all the evil France has experienced; faith alone will protect us Spaniards".³²

Such a remedy, however, did not consist just in the cultivation of faith, but in an actual religious war. After demonstrating that a conflict for the defense of religion was necessarily a just war, Galán proclaimed that Spain had to "brandish a double-edged sword, the word of Jesus Christ, and protect itself with the shield of faith".³³ And as he celebrated a Spanish victory in July 1793, Friar Pedro Pont observed that "this triumph [was] the work of [God's] right hand".³⁴ Invocations of the Lord of Hosts were countless. Antonio Despuig y Dameto, the bishop of Orihuela, reassured the faithful that "the God of Hosts will fight alongside us and send his exterminating angel against a nation of reprobates, who deserve to be loathed by the righteous for declaring themselves against God."³⁵ Even Chornet, who had no doubt that the current "sufferings" would end "when we decide to seek the kingdom of God and his justice before all other things", conceded that fighting was necessary, and that the ongoing war was "a holy war, a war of religion, which can be described with the sacred name of war of God".³⁶

This war could draw strength from Spain's long-established Catholic tradition, and especially from its tradition of religious warfare, which preachers ceaselessly recalled to shore up their appeals. Among others, Despuig urged Spaniards to fight in the name of the faith "that our fathers received from Saint James the Great, protector of this kingdom".³⁷ Lorenzana reminded his flock that "any time the enemies of the faith had tried to ... introduce their errors among us", relics and the blood of martyrs had "defended us from any infection", and they would certainly allow Spaniards to "destroy and annihilate the enemies of our holy law" once again.³⁸ Even more numerous were specific references to the *Reconquista*, the multisecular war against the Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, which was increasingly seen as the foundational moment of Spanish

³⁰ Francisco Armañá, "Pastoral con motivo de la guerra contra la nación francesa en el estado infeliz de su anarquía," in *Pastorales del ilustrísimo señor d. fr. Francisco Armañá*, vol. 2 (Tarragona: 1794), 103.

³¹ Chornet y Año, *Medio seguro*, 11.

³² López de la Fuente, *Sermón*, 11.

³³ Galán, *Sermón*, 42.

³⁴ Pedro Pont, *La soberbia francesa humillada y la humildad española exaltada: Sermón* (Barcelona: 1793), 24.

³⁵ "Carta del ilustrísimo señor don Antonio de Espuig y Dameto," *Correo de Murcia*, 14 December 1793, 236.

³⁶ Chornet y Año, *Medio seguro*, 25 and 30.

³⁷ "Carta del ilustrísimo señor don Antonio de Espuig y Dameto," 235.

³⁸ "Edicto," 247.

national identity.³⁹ Agustín García Porrero, a friar and a *calificador* of the Spanish Inquisition, claimed that the “God of Hosts”, who once “shattered the shackles of our slavery” and “exterminated the cruel and lecherous Saracens”, would now guide the Spanish army against the French.⁴⁰ And Agustín de Lezo y Palomeque, the archbishop of Zaragoza, exhorted the Spaniards to fight as their ancestors had “fought to reestablish our sacred religion and our monarchy” when “the Arabs defiled our temples”.⁴¹

Preachers and prelates spent a great deal of time explaining what kind of war the Spaniards were called to fight. By defending their religion, they were also—friar Joaquín Antonio Díez clarified—fighting for “the public order” and for “the good of the state”, as religion was assumed to be the foundation of the existing social and political order.⁴² This thesis, which Counter-Enlightenment thinkers and Catholic apologists had long been putting forward, was now taking on a new meaning, as it was no longer just an argument used by intellectuals of opposite fields while sparring with each other, but also a legitimate reason to call for popular participation in the struggle against the Revolution. This struggle, everyone agreed, was one of unprecedented extent—it required the mobilization of every available resource and was aimed at the total annihilation of the enemy. Driving back the French army, thus, was not enough. The war’s ultimate goal was to stifle the Revolution in its own cradle, and according to Lorenzana, to “bring the flag of our faith back to France”.⁴³ For this purpose, he explained, “everyone is needed.”⁴⁴ Women, according to Díez, were called to exhort their sons to “face up to the enemies and sacrifice their lives”.⁴⁵ And Lezo y Palomeque highlighted that although “not everyone will be able to take up arms, all can participate in the defense” of the country. “The wealthy should use their riches to support the soldiers”, and clerics, he went on, should employ “their revenues, their advice, and their exhortations to encourage the defenders of religion”.⁴⁶

The clergy’s involvement in the war, indeed, was among the points most frequently touched upon by preachers. According to Lorenzana, clerics were called to support and direct the military efforts by being “an example of loyalty and love in serving the king, defending the

³⁹ On the broader connection between war rhetoric, Catholic identity, and nation building in Spain, see Scott Eastman, “Soldiers, Priests and the Nation: From Wars of Religion to Wars of National Independence in Spain and New Spain,” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 22 (2011): 13-32.

⁴⁰ Agustín García Porrero, *Sermón hizo el día 27 de octubre de este año 1793* (Toledo: 1793), 17.

⁴¹ “Carta pastoral del ilustrísimo señor arzobispo de Zaragoza,” *Semanario de Salamanca*, 2 September 1794, 166.

⁴² Joaquín Antonio Díez, *Exhortación al pueblo* (Valencia: 1794), 13 and 34.

⁴³ “Carta del ilustrísimo señor obispo de Gerona,” 247.

⁴⁴ “Edicto,” 179.

⁴⁵ Díez, *Exhortación*, 35.

⁴⁶ “Carta pastoral del ilustrísimo señor arzobispo de Zaragoza,” 167.

country, and preserving our sacred religion.”⁴⁷ While conceding that priests “should not take up arms”, Armañá insisted that they were not “useless for the state, not even in a time of war”, as they were uniquely suited to wield their “spiritual weapons”, as opposed to the “physical and earthly weapons” of the soldiers.⁴⁸ Aguiriano y Gómez consented that priests could even escort fighters to the front, although he reminded them that they were not supposed to get directly involved in military operations—a caveat that some had apparently forgotten.⁴⁹ It is the sheer number of orations and pastoral letters published in support of the war, however, that bears witness to the extent of the clergy’s involvement in the general mobilization. This involvement was certainly the product of sheer concern, as clerics were sincerely horrified by the news coming from France and by the accounts of French émigrés. But they were also seizing a chance to reassert their hold on civil society and their capacity for moral and political leadership. As they defended religion and made it central to Spain’s war effort, after all, they were also claiming for themselves a directive role in the post-revolutionary world.

The Spanish clergy, thus, extensively described the War of the Pyrenees as war of religion, in which the very survival of Catholicism, and of the country, was at stake. Such a war required the energies of the whole nation and the complete dedication of the soldiers, whom God would certainly reward for their sacrifices. No peace could be signed with the French until the Revolution was completely crushed and Catholicism restored. There was perhaps no work into which all these themes were more fully distilled than *El soldado católico en guerra de religión* by Diego de Cádiz, a Capuchin friar and a preacher of great renown. “Every good son of the holy church”, he wrote, “must take up arms to defend it from its opponents and enemies”.⁵⁰ However, neither Diego nor any other of the many preachers that supported Spain’s war efforts ever went as far as to describe the ongoing war as a crusade. The power to launch a crusade, as they knew, rested with the pope. It was up to someone who could expect to exert a more direct influence on Pius VI to call for an actual crusade against France.

An eighteenth-century crusade

Francisco Gustá was born in Barcelona in 1744.⁵¹ He joined the Society of Jesus as a novice in 1759 and was still a theology student in Valencia in 1767, when the Jesuits were expelled from Spain. After a year spent in Corsica with his fellow exiles, in 1769 he finally reached Ferrara, in the Papal States. There he gradually established his name as a talented

⁴⁷ “Carta del ilustrísimo señor obispo de Gerona en que anima à todos sus diocesanos à la permanencia y constancia en nuestra Santa Fe, y que se opongan à las invasiones y astucias de los ultramontanos,” *Correo de Murcia*, 16 April 1793, 248

⁴⁸ Armañá, “Pastoral con motivo de la guerra,” 111.

⁴⁹ “Carta pastoral del ilustrísimo señor don Francisco Mateo Aguiriano y Gómez,” 84.

⁵⁰ Diego José de Cádiz, *El soldado católico en guerra de religión: Carta instructiva ascetico-historico-politica*, vol. 1 (Ecija: 1794), 7.

⁵¹ On his life, see Miguel Batllori, *Francisco Gustá: Apologista y crítico, Barcelona 1744 – Palermo 1816* (Barcelona: 1942).

polemicist and a major figure in the ex-Jesuits' intellectual networks.⁵² His two-volume *Vita di Costantino*, first published in 1786, eventually gave him some wider celebrity. Though a work of history, the book was clearly meant to support an ultramontane political agenda.⁵³ Constantine was presented as a sovereign who, considering “the interests of the state inseparable from those of religion”, had accordingly “set appropriate boundaries between church and empire”. Thus, his example served as a counter-model vis-à-vis “the innovators and philosophers of our time”—by which Gustá meant reforming sovereigns such as Joseph II of Austria and their supporters, most importantly the Jansenists, who called for increasing state control over religious affairs.⁵⁴

Indeed, it was his anti-Jansenist zeal that kept Gustá at work over the following years. In late 1786, a diocesan synod organized in Pistoia, Tuscany, by the local Jansenist bishop, Scipione de' Ricci, and backed by Grand Duke Peter Leopold provided a blueprint for a Jansenist reform of the church.⁵⁵ Although Ricci's provisions were rejected the following year by a general assembly of Tuscan bishops, they resonated widely with reform-minded Catholics throughout Europe, and sparked a virulent reaction from their opponents.⁵⁶ Gustá himself wrote against the dissemination of Jansenist-leaning catechisms and produced an extensive refutation of the works of Italy's leading Jansenist theologian, and the mastermind behind the Synod of Pistoia, Pietro Tamburini.⁵⁷ When Catholic counterrevolutionaries started arguing that the Jansenists were among the conspirators responsible for the outbreak of the French Revolution, Gustá soon joined in. Between 1793 and 1795, he published *Memorie della rivoluzione francese* and *L'antico progetto di Borgo Fontana*, in which he reiterated the thesis of the Jansenist conspiracy.⁵⁸ Most importantly, as he provided a diagnosis of the causes of the Revolution, he

⁵² On these networks, see Niccolò Guasti, *L'esilio italiano dei gesuiti spagnoli: Identità, controllo sociale e pratiche culturali, 1767-1798* (Rome: 2006), 245-93; Antonella Barzazi, “I gesuiti iberici in Italia tra libri e biblioteche,” in Ugo Baldini and Gian Paolo Brizzi (eds.), *La presenza in Italia dei gesuiti iberici espulsi* (Bologna: 2010), 337-53.

⁵³ See Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso: Politica della Ragione e religione del cuore* (Venice: 1999), 288-90.

⁵⁴ Francisco Gustá, *Vita di Costantino il Grande, primo imperador cristiano*, vol. 1 (Foligno, 1786), 2.

⁵⁵ See Shaun Blanchard, *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II: Jansenism and the Struggle for Catholic Reform* (Oxford: 2019).

⁵⁶ On the debate between reform-minded Jansenists and ultramontanes in the 1780s, see Dale K. Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (New Haven: 2018), 243-86.

⁵⁷ Francisco Gustá, *Sui catechismi moderni: Saggio critico-teologico* (Ferrara: 1788); Francisco Gustá, *Gli errori di Pietro Tamburini nelle Prelezioni di etica cristiana* (Foligno: 1791).

⁵⁸ Francisco Gustá, *Memorie della rivoluzione francese tanto politica che ecclesiastica, e della gran parte che vi hanno avuto i giansenisti* (Assisi: 1793), later republished as *Dell'influenza dei giansenisti nella rivoluzione di Francia* (Ferrara: 1794); Francisco Gustá, *L'antico progetto di Borgo Fontana dai moderni giansenisti continuato e compito* (Assisi: 1795).

also set out to explain how to deal with its consequences—and this he did in his *Saggio critico sulle crociate*.

Gustá's *Saggio*, first published in June 1794, offered a historiographical reassessment of medieval crusades and then suggested how to adapt that model to the needs of the modern era.⁵⁹ Its first half was entirely devoted to a rather tendentious reconstruction of the expeditions to the Holy Land, whose merits Gustá vindicated against the charges recently leveled by historians—especially Fleury and Robertson. Medieval Christendom, he argued, had found itself faced with an existential challenge, as the Turks envisioned to “destroy Christianity” and “reduce all Europe to slavery.”⁶⁰ The crusades, according to Gustá, had successfully averted that threat. Most notably, as he defended the usefulness of the crusades, Gustá also praised the system that had made them possible. They were, he explained, the product of the “remarkable agreement of religion and politics”, that is to say, of a period in which religious and political authorities cooperated harmoniously, and it was up to religious figures—and ultimately to the pope—to determine the goals that political powers had to pursue.⁶¹ The goal of a modern crusade would be to resurrect such an arrangement.

Medieval crusades also offered a blueprint for the organization of the war against France. As the Turks before them, the French were trying to eradicate Catholicism and replace it with “new rites and new celebrations of an idolatrous sort”, hence there could be no doubt that the war against Revolution was a religious war.⁶² Gustá referenced works from the Spain of the War of the Pyrenees, but he also emphasized an aspect that had been only alluded to, but not explicitly theorized, by other authors. France's mass levy was entirely unprecedented. The ongoing war, Gustá claimed, was a people's war, and the professional armies of the Old Regime could hardly match the ideological commitment and sheer manpower of the revolutionary armies. The only credible response to the *levée en masse* was a modern crusade in which the masses would enlist out of their profound religious devotion. “Religion”, Gustá argued, “is the most powerful incitement for the peoples to take up arms willingly and courageously”.⁶³ Instead of opposing the sudden irruption of the masses onto the stage of politics, Catholics should welcome it—and direct it. While the management of military operations was the duty of the leaders of this world, it was up to the clergy to employ religious symbols and tropes to stir people to war, and up to the pope to launch an actual crusade. A modern crusade, thus, would allow Catholics to embrace a key aspect of modern politics, its mass dimension, while channeling it toward the renewal of the harmonious cooperation of church and state that had made the crusades possible in the past.

⁵⁹ Francisco Gustá, *Saggio critico sulle crociate: Se sia giusta la idea invalsa comunemente e se sieno adattabili alle circostanze presenti, fattovi qualche cambiamento* (Ferrara: 1794).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁶¹ Ibid., 33.

⁶² Ibid., 77.

⁶³ Ibid., 100.

The *Saggio* met with some success. Gustá himself promptly sent it out to Godoy and expressed the intention to have copies delivered to all European courts, although there is no evidence that he actually did it.⁶⁴ A second, augmented edition was issued in Foligno in the fall of 1794. In December 1795, Manuel Luengo, a fellow ex-Jesuit exile, jotted down in his diary that Gustá's work, which he had not read, was frequently discussed among ex-Jesuits, and that based on what he had heard, it persuasively demonstrated that the Holy See should adopt a more confrontational stance toward France.⁶⁵ The *Giornale ecclesiastico di Roma*, the unofficial organ of the Curia's influential ultramontane faction, praised the *Saggio* in a long review penned by the editor-in-chief, Luigi Cuccagni.⁶⁶ Most importantly, an increasing number of people began to call for the pope to launch an actual crusade. Whether or not he had read Gustá, Count Joseph de Puisaye, the royalist leader who would later guide the disastrous landing of a British-backed émigré army in Quiberon, wrote from Brittany to Pius VI in November 1794 to ask him to launch "a crusade similar to those for the Holy Land". Puisaye's request was discussed in the Curia, although it was eventually rejected on the premise that after Robespierre's recent fall the National Convention was going to pursue a more moderate course.⁶⁷

The premise, curial prelates would soon discover, was awfully wrong. Crusades, indeed, came back into fashion as Bonaparte invaded the Papal States in 1796. True, as papal emissaries were signing a ceasefire with the French in Bologna, the Holy Office prevented Gustá from publishing two new works,⁶⁸ and negotiations between papal, Neapolitan, and Austrian delegates for the creation of a holy league rapidly came to grief.⁶⁹ But the project of a crusade had won the approval of major diplomats, such as the papal Secretary of State Ignazio Busca, his soon-to-be successor Ercole Consalvi, the Austrian Chancellor Baron von Thugut, and the Neapolitan Marquis of Vasto. Church officials, in particular, viewed the launching of a crusade as a chance to reassert the status of the Holy See as a supranational power, with the right to determine the foreign policy goals of Catholic sovereigns.

⁶⁴ See Batllori, *Gustá*, 123.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁶ *Giornale ecclesiastico di Roma*, 6 September 1794, 137-38; 13 September 1794, 141-43.

⁶⁷ Vatican City, Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Fondo Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, *Francia*, pos. 30, fasc. 16, fols. 22r-29v. On Puisaye, see Maurice Hutt, *Chouannerie and Counter-Revolution: Puisaye, the Princes and the British Government in the 1790s*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: 1983).

⁶⁸ David Armando, "La costruzione di una profezia: Stratificazioni testuali e vicende editoriali del *Trionfo della Santa Sede* di Mauro Cappellari," in Giuseppe Croce and Ugo Fossa (eds.), *L'ordine camaldolese in età moderna e contemporanea, secoli XVI-XX* (Cesena: 2016), 765-90, at 778.

⁶⁹ Benedetto Maresca, *La pace del 1796 tra le Due Sicilie e la Francia studiata sui documenti dell'Archivio di Stato in Napoli* (Naples: 1887); Paul Wittichen, "Briefe Consalvi's aus den Jahren 1795-96 und 1798 mitgeteilt," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 7 (1904): 139-70; Pásztor, "Un capitolo."

Appeals for a crusade grew increasingly frequent also beyond diplomatic circles. A third, clandestine edition of Gustá's *Saggio* was published in 1796 toward the end of the summer, and large excerpts of it were included, with no attribution, in a widely successful pamphlet, *Lo Stato pontificio agli altri incliti co-stati d'Italia*, which called for a general insurrection against the French.⁷⁰ An anonymous *Eccitamento a' popoli della Italia* called Italians to fight in defense of religion and of the rights of the clergy, which the French had trampled upon.⁷¹ The Roman antiquarian Carlo Fea presented the struggle against the Revolution as the continuation of several centuries of religious warfare against the Ottomans,⁷² and repeatedly claimed that papal subjects and Italians at large should rise up to defend Catholicism—although he never explicitly used the word crusade to describe such a war.⁷³ For Bishop Turchi of Parma, “heaven” itself “had spoken”, calling all Italians to actively fight the invasion, and an anonymous pamphlet, *Certa è la vittoria, o religiosi romani*, went as far as to exhort clerics, too, to take up arms and kill the enemies with their own hands.⁷⁴ Still at the beginning of 1797, an anonymous theological advisor to the College of Cardinals argued that Pius VI should call for a crusade to “defend God himself, whom he who defines himself the God of Italy [Bonaparte] and his vast, impious sect want to remove from heaven”.⁷⁵

While eschewing such apocalyptic tones, even a major figure as the curial intellectual Giovanni Marchetti embraced the project of an anti-French crusade. In his *Che importa ai preti*, which was first published toward the end of 1796 and had three more editions in less than two years, Marchetti exhorted the pope to just “acknowledge the truth” and proclaim that the ongoing war was a war of religion. This would “reunite the cause of the state with that of religion”, healing the wound that reforming sovereigns and the Revolution had caused.⁷⁶ Echoing Gustá, whom he duly referenced, Marchetti regarded a crusade not just as the most effective way to counter the Revolution, but also as a means to reassert the international stance of the Holy See and to recreate what he regarded as healthier relationships between church and state.

⁷⁰ *Lo Stato pontificio agli altri incliti co-stati d'Italia* (s.l.: 1797). Another edition of the pamphlet appeared almost simultaneously.

⁷¹ *Eccitamento a' popoli della Italia ad armarsi e a difendersi da' francesi, e a detestarne le massime distruttive della religione, de' governi e della società* (Cosmopoli [Rome]: 1796).

⁷² Carlo Fea, *Lo sprone d'oro al patriotismo romano* (s.l.: s.d.); Carlo Fea, *Motivo di conforto agli italiani nel venturo anno MDCCXCVII* (s.l.: 1796). *Motivo di conforto* was also translated into French.

⁷³ Carlo Fea, *Parenesi agli italiani, e specialmente ai popoli dello Stato ecclesiastico e al Popolo romano nelle presenti circostanze* (Petropoli [Rome]: 1796).

⁷⁴ Adeodato Turchi, *Epigrafe all'Italia: Patientia laesa fit furor* (Rome: 1796), 22; *Certa è la vittoria, o religiosi romani: Perché? Verità esposta da un cristiano autore* (Rome: 1796), 5.

⁷⁵ Vatican City, Segreteria di Stato, SRRSS, AAEESS, *Stati ecclesiastici*, pos. 84, fasc. 20, fols. 45r-55v, at 52v.

⁷⁶ Giovanni Marchetti, *Che importa ai preti, ovvero l'interesse della religione cristiana nei grandi avvenimenti di questi tempi: Riflessioni politico-morali di un amico di tutti dirette a un amico solo*, 2nd ed. (Cristianopoli [Rome]: 1797), 178.

Conclusion

In February 1798, the French took Rome. Pius VI, who in 1782 had been the first pope in centuries to travel abroad in order to visit Emperor Joseph II in Vienna, was forced for a second time to leave the Papal States, now turned into the Roman Republic. He would die a prisoner in Valence, France, one year later. In the meantime, calls for a crusade multiplied, once again supported by Austrian and Neapolitan diplomats. Pius VI himself preached caution, and while he was safely sheltered in Tuscany in the summer of 1798, he refused to consecrate the offensive that Naples was preparing against the Roman Republic as a war of religion.⁷⁷ Years of propaganda, however, had gone a long way to disseminate the idea that the struggle against the Revolution was a holy war. As Italians insurgents took up arms against the French in 1799, they had no doubt they were fighting in defense of Catholicism, as French and Spanish counterrevolutionaries had done before. In the Italian South, insurgents branded themselves the Army of the Holy Faith and fought under the guidance of Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo. The perception of the ongoing fight as an epochal confrontation between religion and the forces of evil had become common sense.

Although no crusade was ever launched against the Revolution, the efforts of Gustá and his fellows point to the crucial features of the Catholic Counterrevolution—a diverse and transnational body of thought that fundamentally redesigned the shape of Catholicism in the modern world. The war against France led Catholics to invoke a reframing of the relationships between religion and politics on the model of medieval Christendom. To be sure, this model was highly idealized, but to its supporters, it essentially meant that the legal privileges of the church had to be restored, and that it was up to the ecclesiastical hierarchies to set the goals for the political powers of this world. Spiritual and temporal authorities should cooperate for a greater good that only the church—and ultimately its leader, the pope—could properly identify. The world Catholic counterrevolutionaries dreamed of was a world in which it was possible to overturn the outcomes of revolutionary secularization, enlightened absolutism, and the Protestant Reformation, which had first shattered the unity of Christian Europe and undermined the Holy See's ability to lead the international community. It was a new, modern world, though one that was radically alternative to that of the revolutionaries, and one that contrasted their arguments for progressive change with a conservative vision of history. But calls for a crusade also implied the need to embrace one of the most radical consequences of the Revolution itself—the active participation of the people in politics. The church, Catholic counterrevolutionaries argued, should enlist the masses in its fight, using against the Revolution the very forces conjured up by

⁷⁷ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, R.G.Storia.III.555 (2), *Studio sulle calamitose vicende della Santa Sede nei pontificati di Pio VI e Pio VII*, 135-36 and 234-35; Pietro Baldassarri, *Relazione delle avversità e patimenti del glorioso papa Pio VI*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Modena: 1842), 185-87; Luigi Berra, “Gioacchino Tosi vescovo giurato di Anagni e la relazione della sua visita a Pio VI prigioniero dei francesi nella Certosa di Firenze,” in Berta Maracchi Biagiarelli and Dennis E. Rhodes (eds.), *Studi offerti a Roberto Ridolfi direttore de La Bibliofilia* (Florence: 1973), 147-67.

the sorcerer's apprentices in Paris. Though in an unsystematic and perhaps tentative fashion, the defining characters of nineteenth-century Catholicism—its medievalist ideals and its drive toward the creation of a mass-based Catholic movement—had made one of their first appearances in the writings of eighteenth-century crusaders.