deeds of arms. Unsurprisingly, criticism was most vociferous after a defeat. In England venom dripped from the pen of the monk and chronicler Thomas Walsingham following the military reversals of the last quarter of the fourteenth century. 'It is so awful,' he said, in an entry for 1383:

The land that once bore and gave birth to men who were respected by all who dwelt nearby and feared by those who lived far off, now spews forth weaklings who are laughed at by our enemies and a subject for gossip among our people. For seldom or never is one of our knights found to be a man who devotes himself to his country, or labours for the good of its citizens.57

In a similar fashion the chivalry of France was condemned after Crécy, Agincourt, and Poitiers most especially—for there its members 'abandoned' their king to captivity and dishonour.58 The consequences were not restricted to literary attacks. The social and political upheaval caused by the defeat at Poitiers in 1356, the disruption caused by soldiers of all sorts and the humiliating failure of the military aristocracy to fulfil their responsibilities to the king and nation resulted in a major revolt—the Jacquerie.

CHAPTER 2

The Peasantry

VOX POPULI

1358

In these days all wars are directed against the poor labouring people and against their goods and chattels.1 Honore Bonet, The Tree of Battles

Although it lasted just two weeks, the Jacquerie of 1358 is the best-known uprising in French history before the Revolution of 1789. It was not only the defeat and capture of Jean II at Poitiers in September 1356 that caused his subjects to rebel in such numbers and so violently, but the revolt of the Jacquerie certainly exploded out of the tumult of the Hundred Years War. The failure of the French nobility in battle, the inability of the government to restrain the depredations of the mercenary companies and increasing demands for taxation all played their part in bringing about the rising. So too did the increasing price of grain, which had been a continual concern since the Great Famine (1317–22) had devastated much of Europe. The final straw was the behaviour of the royal troops tasked with blockading Paris and commandeering food and supplies in and around the city. Requisitioning without payment had been declared illegal in a royal ordinance of the previous year, and these sorts of exactions were resented even more than taxation. The revolt was also characterised by a growing sense of class consciousness. Jean de Venette tells us:

In the summer of ... 1358, the peasants living near Saint-Leu-d'Esserent and Clermont in the diocese of Beauvais, seeing the wrongs and oppression inflicted on them every side and seeing the nobles gave them no protection but rather oppressed them as heavily as the enemy, rose and took up arms against the nobles of France.2
If the chronicler was correct, it is not surprising that the peasants rose in anger on 28 May 1358 in the Beauvaisis, Île de France, Picardy, Brie and Champagne. Although primarily a rural phenomenon, the actions of the *Jacques* also galvanized revolts in such cities as Amiens, Caen, Rouen, Montdidier and Meaux. While the peasants’ demands were not clearly articulated, the rising was, undoubtedly, a social as well as a political protest. Carefully planned, with elected village leaders, and shaped by anti-clerical as well as anti-aristocratic feeling, it reflected the distrust and disgust of many of the peasantry with the nobility that could not or would not protect them from the miseries of warfare, and, indeed, perpetrated some of its horrors. In this regard the Jacquerie has much in common with the English revolts of 1381 (the Peasants’ Revolt) and 1450 (Cade’s Rebellion).

Following the success of the Crécy–Calaís expeditions, the terrible intervention of the Black Death (1347–50) had prevented the English from taking further action. Campaigning only recommenced in earnest in 1355 when Edward the Black Prince led a raid from Bordeaux to Narbonne and back, devastating a great swath of southern France. In the following year he marched north into the Valois heartlands. The political and personal affront to the French monarch had to be answered and Jean II needed to put an end to the disruption and destruction that threatened his authority and compromised his tax revenues. On 19 September 1356 he led an army against the Anglo-Gascons in battle outside Poitiers. There, once again, English military tactics triumphed. Ten years before, Philippe VI had been humbled at Crécy, but the political capital of this new victory was far greater for the English since Jean himself was captured.

The dauphin Charles (later Charles V) struggled to maintain even a vestige of control as mercenary companies pillaged the countryside, and the political tide even ran against him in the capital. There, in the Estates General, Etienne Marcel, the provost of Paris, sought to limit the powers of the monarchy and to reform the regency council. When King Jean forbade the resulting Great Ordinance of 1357, Marcel took up arms against the dauphin and allied with Charles ‘the Bad’ of Navarre, who took the opportunity to exploit the chaos in France to further his own political ambitions. What developed was little short of anarchy, and the breakdown of central authority seemed complete when a peasant revolt known as the Jacquerie (named after Jacques Bonhomme, the supposed leader of the peasant rebels) broke out in May 1358.

The two-week revolt was, by all accounts, appallingly violent. Jean Froissart provides an especially vivid description of the uprising, one that suggests the peasantry had become so brutal they were barely human:

They [the peasants] said that the nobility of France, knights and squires, were disgracing and betraying the realm ... They had no leaders [and] pillaged and burned everything and violated and killed all the ladies and girls without mercy like mad dogs. Their barbarous acts were worse than anything that ever took place between Christians and Saracens ... They killed a knight, put him on a spit, and turned him at the fire before the lady and her children. After about a dozen of them had violated the lady, they tried to force her and the children to eat the knight's flesh before putting them cruelly to death.

Such extreme accounts—and there were others—may well have been distorted for aristocratic and clerical audiences aghast at the implications of social upheaval. This is something common to many if not all of the revolts that wrecked Europe in the later fourteenth century. As a consequence, it is difficult to find an authentic 'voice of the people' in these periods of acute social and political tension. The peasants themselves left few written records and almost all the accounts of revolts such as the Jacquerie were written by those virulently opposed to the rebels' objectives. The picture is complicated further because the lot of the peasantry has been used by successive historians as a cipher for the political concerns of their own times. This is particularly the case in France. For Jules Michelet, one of the most celebrated of nineteenth-century French historians, the leaders of the Jacquerie, like Joan of Arc subsequently, embodied the innate character of the French people who would eventually seize political power in the Revolution of 1789 and so give birth to a new nation. Then, in more recent times, a number of the *Annalistes* (members of the Annales School of historians), and others writing during and in the aftermath of the Second World War, described the raiding and occupation of Mother France in the Hundred Years War in terms scarred by and deeply reminiscent of more recent attacks. Descriptions of the peasantry, therefore, during the war and subsequently, tend to be shaped by distinctive agendas. Nonetheless, there is much that can be learned about their experience during the Hundred Years War. The conflict saw this lowest section of society undergoing enormous change. While, undoubtedly, a horrific time for peasants who were deliberately targeted for attack, the war gave the group a new sense of identity and political awareness, and their position in the hierarchies of both France and England altered radically.
Even if the accounts of Froissart and his fellow chroniclers were exaggerated, there is little doubt that the various peasant revolts that took place during the Hundred Years War were often terrible (and terribly violent) episodes, and it is tempting to imagine the French peasantry as completely brutalised by the experience of such a long conflict. There is no doubt whatsoever that the French peasant and his fellows suffered greatly after 1337. As the target of deliberate English raiding tactics (the chevauchée – the English blitzkrieg), and subject to ever-higher levels of taxation, the war heaped great privations on a group that had barely recovered from the Great Famine when war began, and its members were soon subjected to the inexplicable terrors and unprecedented mortality of the Black Death (1347–50, 1360–61, with further outbreaks thereafter). Unlike accounts of peasant revolts, a number of authors recorded the impact of these events sympathetically. Writers as diverse as Jean de Venette, Hohoré Bonei, Alain Chartier and Jean Gerson also lamented the depredations that troops on both sides inflicted in the Hundred Years War. Christine de Pizan declared furiously:

The soldiers should not pillage and despoil the country like they do in France nowadays [c.1406] when in other countries they dare not do so. It is a great mischief and perversion of law when those who are intended for the defence of the people, pillage, rob, and so cruelly, that truly short of killing them or setting their houses on fire, their enemies could do no worse.8

Their enemies, of course, could and did do worse; killing and burning became terrifyingly mundane. Fear, devastation, raiding, looting and perhaps rape had been and remained commonplace weapons of war, despite spiritual and chivalric injunctions and those ordinances successive English kings promulgated to restrain their armies’ excesses. Military decrees of this sort were issued throughout the Hundred Years War, beginning in Edward III’s reign, and they took on a detailed form in 1385. They aimed, primarily, to safeguard church property and stop acts of sacrilege, but some also afforded at least theoretical protection to certain non-combatants such as clergymen (unless they had weapons), women, children, and sometimes unarmed male labourers. Some attempts were also made to regulate the theft of foodstuffs from the native population and to ban the burning and wasting of an area.9

In some (rare) circumstances such efforts did reduce levels of brutality – after all it might be considered impolitic to devastate the land and property of those whose loyalty one courted. More often, however, the peasantry suffered, and their suffering was a matter of policy and planning. The Black Prince, Henry V and others among the most celebrated examples of English chivalry made their reputations through just such acts of calculated devastation. The Black Prince, blooded in the devastation of the raid before Crécy, orchestrated the hugely effective and calamitous Grande chevauchée of 1355. And while Henry V tried to restrict looting from churches – famously, he had an English soldier executed for stealing a psy (a container for the consecrated host) – he clearly recognised the military value of burning, looting, and the widespread destruction of property.10

Given such circumstances it is not surprising that a French peasant might feel aggrieved when his lord, to whom he offered service in return for land, security and justice, could not or would not protect him. The series of revolts that shook Europe in the fourteenth century show the peasantry’s growing willingness to take direct action against those they believed had failed in their duties. In both France and England, on several occasions throughout the war, the wrath of the peasantry was directed against those they believed had failed militarily. The Jacquerie was one such response, while the Peasants’ Revolt was directed at those seen as mismanaging the English war effort in 1381; and Cade’s Rebellion reflected the disgust of some of the peasantry with the humiliating debacle of the loss of Normandy (1450). Together such revolts indicate the changing complexion, attitudes and expectations of the peasantry shaped by more than a century of near constant warfare.

The impact of the Hundred Years War on the peasantry was direct and often shattering. The consequences of war, however, were far from uniform. Inevitably, the peasantry did not all experience the war alike: its members were so numerous and lived in such diverse circumstances. The French peasantry bore the brunt of the struggle – sieges, burning, raiding, etc. – although those in England who lived on the south coast, the Scottish border and, for a brief time, along the Welsh Marches also suffered. The peasantry’s experience of war also varied as the struggle unfolded: military pressures increased in some areas and waned in others, differing widely between regions and nations.

Peasants comprised the vast majority of the populations of France and England – about 90 per cent in both cases. Accurate population figures are in short supply and difficult to interpret when available; however, it appears that on the eve of the Black Death, France was home to about 16–20 million people spread among some forty thousand rural communities. This
is a particularly high total considering that the number had only returned to a comparable level by the early nineteenth century (26.5 million souls lived in rural France in 1846), and it was more than three times the total population of England and Wales in about 1347 (approximately 4 million people).¹¹

Within France, the experience of war was determined chiefly by one’s location. Geographically and topographically the country divided into four main zones. The first and most populous of these (containing approximately 30 per cent of the population) lay in northern France, between the River Loire and Flanders (south to north), and upper Normandy and Burgundy (west to east). It was open country (the Plat Pays), dominated economically by Paris and agriculturally by wheat production with some viticulture. The second zone, in the west, consisted of lower Normandy, Brittany, Anjou and Maine – accounting for about 25 per cent of the population. This was hillier country, less fertile and dotted with isolated hamlets and small villages. Mediterranean France (Languedoc, Provence and Gascony) formed the third zone, which was nearly as heavily populated as the Parisian Basin. The climate with its hot, dry summers meant grapes, olives and fruit could be grown, but little wheat. The fourth zone consisted of large areas ill-suited to permanent cultivation and occupation, including mountainous regions such as the Pyrenees and the Alps, but which could be used, in some parts, for pasture or forestry. These regions were populated only temporarily and subject to regular cycles of migration.¹²

France did not only have clear regional distinctions, it was also a country of astonishing social, cultural and political diversity. Indeed, the striking lack of uniformity in later medieval France determined Valois policy. The French monarchy fought the Hundred Years War, in part, to enforce a greater measure of consistency, governmental and cultural, over its disparate territories. Internal divisions as well as ENGLISH territorial interests led to inherent tensions and conflicting loyalties. Cultural diversity was particularly apparent with regard to language: there were wide variations in regional dialects and also a broad distinction between the langue d’oc, spoken in the south, and the northern langue d’oil.¹³ Legal traditions also varied widely throughout the country, as did seigneurial rights and demands. Rents differed considerably, as did the conditions by which land was held and leased. These conditions shifted over the period of the war, as did the status of the peasants themselves, many of whom gradually freed themselves from traditional manorial restrictions.

In England there were similar disparities: the country was divided between urban and rural areas, and upland and lowland zones. Upland zones, typically, were characterised by rough pasture and woodland with dispersed and isolated settlements. Lowland England was home to nucleated villages surrounded by open fields. There was also considerable disparity between the people who lived and farmed in late medieval England: unfree villein tenants who owed labour services to their lord of two to four days a week worked alongside hired freemen. In the late thirteenth century unfree villeins constituted about three-fifths of the rural population. At that time, as in France, when the population was at its height the most important distinction was not between free and unfree but simply between those who had sufficient land for subsistence and those who did not. In England serfdom became increasingly rare after the Black Death. Endemic plague encouraged its decline, although relations between lords and peasants remained strained. For much of the period of the Hundred Years War both sides were locked in a cold and not-so-cold war over working conditions and tenurial obligations.¹⁴

In France, serfdom also remained predominantly a rural phenomenon characterised by the requirement to perform various labour services for a lord who exercised a high degree of social and legal authority over his peasants. He could, for example, control his serfs’ marriages, and he had the right to dispose of their property as he saw fit if no heir existed. To be a serf in France also meant that one bore a heavy burden of taxation. However, by the time the Hundred Years War began serfdom had already disappeared from many parts of the country. Increasingly lords sold charters of freedom to their serfs in an effort to deal with changing economic conditions and maintain their own diminishing incomes.¹⁵

The Black Death encouraged this process: alongside the Hundred Years War, plague caused something of a social and economic revolution that bettered the lot of many of those peasants who survived it. The structure, economic prospects and social status of the peasantry were reshaped, improving conditions over the long term, broadly speaking. In addition, a much keener political awareness developed among the group, brought about by a closer engagement with national issues of which war was the most important. Such developments meant that those who survived war and plague usually found themselves in a somewhat easier situation than their predecessors. During the war, however, there were more immediate priorities — military depredations, the breakdown of law and order, the depopulation of towns and villages, the desecration and desertion of
religious communities. The descriptions of such events fill the pages of French and English chronicles. Jean de Venette felt deeply for the plight of the peasantry and was clearly appalled by the horrific impact of the war. In 1358 he described conditions in the following terms:

Losses and injuries were inflicted by friend and foe alike upon the rural population and upon monasteries standing in the open country. Everyone robbed them of their goods and there was no one to defend them. For this reason many men and women, both secular and religious were compelled on all sides to leave their abode and seek out the city... there was not a monastery in the neighbourhood of Paris, however near, that was not driven by fear of freebooters to enter the city or some other fortification, abandoning their buildings and, 'Woe is me!' leaving the divine offices unsung. This tribulation increased in volume, not only around Paris but also in the neighbourhood of Orléans, Tours, Nantes in Brittany, Chartres, and Le Mans, in an amazing way. Villages were burned and their population plundered. Men hastened to the cities with their carts and their goods, their wives and their children, in lamentable fashion.16

This litany of devastation was not mere hyperbole on the author's part. Petrarch, Honoré Bonet, Thomas Basin and many others wrote sometimes in anger, sometimes in despair, about the terrible effects of the war. Letters of remission and taxation accounts provide stark evidence of a country ravaged by English chevauchées, mercenary attacks and destroyed by a predatory aristocracy. But the impact of the war was far from uniform. While chevauchées could be very wide-ranging, other forms of military action tended to be regional and restricted. Some parts of France suffered repeated assault, others were attacked only rarely, and there might be considerable variation within a small area. Consequently, while the impact of war was felt keenly, for example in the plains of northern and northwestern France and in the Agenais and Quercy, Béarn in the Pyrenees and Alsace in the east were virtually unharmed.17 Nonetheless, because of the political complexity of the period, which saw disputes not only between France and England, but also between the houses of Valois, Navarre and Brittany, Armagnac and Foix, Orléans and Burgundy, few areas were completely untouched and the results were often horrendous. About eight years after the war ended, Thomas Basin noted:

From the Loire to the Seine, and from there to the River Somme, nearly all the fields were left for a long time, for many years, not merely untended but without people to cultivate them, except for rare patches of land, because the peasants had been killed or fled.18

Such comprehensive destruction threatened not only the peasantry directly but the institutional support systems that Church and State traditionally provided and on which the people relied. At times almsgiving, trade, and the economy almost completely collapsed and they were often severely compromised. Refugees became a common sight, seeking protection in towns and cities; others took to brigandage, preying on their neighbours as they themselves had been preyed upon.19 This social and economic dislocation was a chief aim of English military policy in the years leading to the Jacquerie. A succession of English chevauchées during Edward III's reign was designed to undermine the legitimacy of the Valois monarchy by proving Philippe VI and Jean II could not protect their people, while at the same time preventing them from doing so by reducing their ability to raise troops and taxes.

As this suggests, the peasantry played a direct role in sustaining the war effort, which was another reason its members were targeted specifically. Because of the connection between taxation (paid chiefly by the peasantry in France) and military defence, the status of 'non-combatants' became very uncertain. By attacking taxpayers the English attacked French military resources. In the same way attacks on the French clergy struck at the spiritual and sometimes material support they provided for the war effort. Furthermore, as the war became a consciously 'national' struggle there were fewer reasons why non-combatants should be immune from its effects.20

This policy and its brutally sophisticated implementation are clear from a letter written in 1355 by Sir John Wingfield, who held the office of 'governor of the prince's business' - he was responsible for the finances of Edward the Black Prince:

It seems certain that since the war against the French king began, there has never been such destruction in a region as in this raid. For the countryside and towns which have been destroyed... produced more revenue for the king of France in aid of his war than half his kingdom... as I could prove from authentic documents found in various towns in the tax-collectors' houses.21
Wingfield wrote in the aftermath of the so-called grande chevauchée. In the course of a single raid, an army of around 6,000 soldiers destroyed 500 settlements of various sorts – villages, castles, towns, hamlets – and devastated up to 18,000 square kilometres of territory. The Black Prince was not content, however, merely to witness the destruction; he wished to assess the extent of the financial damage precisely, and so he brought officials such as Wingfield with him to calculate the exact cost to the French Treasury.

The psychological cost of this sort of raiding, the fear and insecurity it surely engendered, is (and was) more difficult to measure. In France as the war drew on, the ringing of church bells might as easily mean an impending attack as a call to prayer. The conflict affected daily lives and working practices almost constantly in some areas. According to Thomas Basly, during the 1430s, when the mercenaries known as escheurs (literally skinners or fencers) were at their most pernicious, farm labourers had to work in an area within earshot of a trumpeter placed on a lookout point so they could run to safety if necessary. Such a measure was one of many responses to a potential assault. When soldiers of whatever sort approached a settlement, some communities would flee almost in their entirety. They might seek refuge in woods or caves, perhaps where a site had been prepared. These might just involve makeshift huts and were only a short-term solution. Others were much more substantial dwellings. Some were subterranean, some extended into quarries; others were tunneled beneath villages. Many of these were constructed in the chaotic period after the battle of Poitiers in 1356. Some were extremely extensive and highly defensible. The typical sousterrains-refuge consisted of a long central corridor, approximately two and a half metres high and wide with chambers radiating from it. The refuge beneath the village of Naours (Somme) was remarkable and consisted of 2,000 metres of corridor with 300 chambers and six ventilation shafts running to the surface. Alternatively one might flee to a royal or seigneurial castle, perhaps bringing along goods and livestock. This, however, was rarely a viable option for an extended period of time as refugees placed great pressure on space and supplies. Such actions also meant abandoning one’s crops, which could prove fatal in the longer term or when winter arrived.

In order to stay close to home many communities fortified their villages: some built walls, others used a monastery, mill or, most commonly, the parish church as a centre of defence. A church offered various advantages as a defensive structure. It was, typically, a stout building, and it benefited from protection by canon law: to attack it was an act of sacrilege, although this rarely served as an effective deterrent. A church might also have a bell-tower, which allowed the villagers to keep a look-out and warn of approaching soldiers. Sometimes churches were fortified with a lord’s assistance, sometimes villagers acted independently.

The situation at Vitry is representative of many communities. In August 1354 the town’s parishioners petitioned the captain-general of Auxerre for the right to fortify their church. They had, they said, been reduced to ‘wretched poverty by the wars of the king of England and by the enemies who daily come and go through [their] village robbing, injuring and laying waste’. They had also been forced to pay pasis (protection money) to one William Starkey, the captain of Ligny-le-Châtelet, and they had been plundered by French garrisons, including those from Auxerre. When granted permission they fortified the church with four towers, a curtain-wall and two moats, which allowed them to beat off a mercenary attack in 1369.

This sort of community action did, however, acquire dangerous connotations after the revolt of the Jacquerie in 1358, and it might be opposed, for other reasons, by ecclesiastical authorities, the local aristocracy and the French Crown, which sought to maintain a monopoly on the right to construct fortresses. Objections were raised about the ‘profane’ role churches were required to play as well as to the diversion of manpower from the protection of seigneurial castles. Few fortifications were demolished, however, even though fines were often demanded when they had been constructed without licence.

In some cases the peasantry were given an alternative to flight or assault. Communities might choose, if given the opportunity, to pay pasis to mercenary forces or regular troops (French, English and Armagnac and Burgundian during the civil war). This, in theory, allowed daily life and farming to continue without too much disruption. During the Agincourt campaign, Henry V demanded ransoms from small villages as he rode from Harfleur to what proved to be the battlefield: if payment was not forthcoming they were ‘to be set on fire and utterly destroyed’. The scale of appatization in France was very considerable at certain times, especially in those areas, often near political frontiers, where villages and communities could be paying pasis to several different ‘protectors’ simultaneously. In Brittany in the 1340s and 1350s it has been estimated that revenue from pasis paid 85 per cent of the costs of the principal English garrisons. Even large communities were not safe. The city of Reims was compelled to pay 300 livres tournois to a mercenary company in 1437, so as to be spared the pillaging and robbery which [Captain Guillaume de Flavy and] his men
from Nesles might have carried out upon this city and the surrounding countryside during the months of July, August and September 1437.\textsuperscript{29}

Those who did not or could not find shelter or buy off their assailants were particularly vulnerable to attack and their plight was recounted in various works. The *pastourelle*, for example, was a literary form often used in this period to rail against war by showing its terrible impact on rural people. Some of these, known as *bergerie*, focus specifically on shepherds and shepherdesses often because of their biblical and classical connotations. One such work, the *Pastorellet*, written soon after 1422 by an author known only as Bucarius, describes the devastation inflicted during the Armagnac-Burgundian civil war. In this allegorical and rabidly anti-Burgundian work, France, which should have been a bucolic paradise, becomes, instead, reminiscent of Hell - shepherds are raped, the countryside is desecrated and shepherds are slaughtered. 'There in the dung, without a bed, were the dead sleeping, one on top of the other, in piles... Many noble shepherdesses were left alone without their lovers... So many heads cut off, so many feet, fists, so many arms without hands. I think there never was so much shedding of human blood nor a slaughter more cruel.'\textsuperscript{30}

When English strategy changed in the fifteenth century and raiding was replaced, in part at least, by a programme of direct conquest, the French people had to face different challenges. Sieges, of course, had been far from unknown in earlier stages of the war; in many ways they serve as a leitmotif of the struggle: Calais (1346-7), Reims (1359) and Limoges (1370) were particularly noteworthy for political reasons. The Black Prince's siege (sack) of Limoges has also become, in some circles, a byword for violence disproportionate even by the lax standards of the fourteenth century. The event took place after the resumption of the war in 1369 when the city renounced its allegiance to England and Edward III. His response is said to have been excessively brutal, although such a conclusion depends, almost exclusively, on Froissart's account of the event. He wrote that after mining the town walls the Prince's Anglo-Gascon army entered the city in a mood to wreak havoc and do murder, killing indiscriminately, for those were their orders. There were pitiful scenes. Men, women and children flung themselves on their knees before the Prince, crying: 'Have mercy on us gentle sir! But he was so inflamed with anger [at their treachery] that he would not listen. Neither man nor woman was heeded, but all who could be found were put to the sword.\textsuperscript{31}

Froissart suggested that three thousand were killed in the ensuing massacre, but the lack of comment from local chroniclers implies the sack was not unusually savage.\textsuperscript{32}

Whatever really took place at Limoges, the increasing frequency of sieges, brought about by changes in military strategy and advances in gunpowder artillery, had terrible implications for non-combatants, both those in a besieged town and those who lived in its vicinity. During a siege the line differentiating combatants from non-combatants became even more blurred than usual. If one assisted by dowsing fires, or bringing food, water or supplies to the garrison, and so helped to defend a town, was one really a non-combatant? Furthermore, the 'laws of war', based in part on biblical authorities, decreed that if a town or city resisted attack but eventually fell to a besieging army, then the defenders had no rights to mercy.\textsuperscript{33} Deuteronomy 20:10-154 was unequivocal in its instructions to military commanders:

When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace.
If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labour and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the Lord your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves.

Given this, when Harfleur was captured in September 1415 after a month's siege, Henry V could be said to have acted with considerable restraint. As at Caen later, he merely expelled the inhabitants. Because he claimed to be king of France he could not treat the French people as if they were his enemy; however, from his perspective, in resisting their true lord the people of Harfleur were rebels who had to be punished with the confiscation of property and expulsion from the city.\textsuperscript{34} As one would expect, English accounts of the event focus on the king's mercy:

The king of England entered Harfleur on 21 September [1415] and emptied it of all women, children and priests of the town, and had each of them given 10 sous parisis, and had it cried by sound of the trumpet that at the king's command no one should do anything to women or to the others under pain of death. But as soon as the women were some way from the town the French pillaged them and violated them to a great degree.\textsuperscript{35}
French accounts, by contrast, dwell on the humanitarian tragedy:

Also driven out of the town were a large number of women with their children. They were left with only five sous and some of their clothing. It was such a piteous thing to see the sorrow and lamentations... All the priests and men of the church were also dismissed. 36

If the situation at Harfleur was piteous, then what unfolded at Rouen during the siege of 1418–19 was horrific and a clear demonstration of the vile possibilities of siege warfare. By the time King Henry reached the city it was filled with refugees who had fled before the advancing English army. Many of these then tried to escape when it became clear the city would be besieged. Henry, however, sealed Rouen completely. Partly to keep people in and partly to protect his army from attack the king had a bank, ditch and other defences constructed. He barricaded the River Seine to prevent supplies reaching the city while using it himself to bring in provisions and reinforcements. Within Rouen the blockade soon began to bite: food became scarce, many died, disease spread. Then, as supplies became ever more limited, the town's authorities took the painful decision to expel the old, infirm and others who could not contribute to the defence. They were driven out of the city, into the no-mans-land between the walls and the English defences. Henry would not let them pass, the townsfolk would not let them return. The events were described in verse by an English soldier, John Page:

Then with yn a lystyle space,
The poore pepyle of that place,
At every gate they were put oute
Many a hundred in a route;
That hyt was mytte hem to see
Wemme[n] come knelyng on hyr kne,
With hyr chylkrym in hyr armys,
To socoure them from harmys;
Olde men knelynge them by
And made z dolfulle cry.
And alle they sayden at onys thenne,
'Have marcy uppon us, ye Englyshe men.'

The people of Rouen could not feed them; nor would the English. Most starved, slowly.

As the siege entered the new year, conditions within Rouen deteriorated still further. Prices had long been exorbitant; now there was hardly anything left to buy and the people were forced to eat vermin. Page reported: 'They are up dogs, they are up cats, they are up mice, horses and rats.' A cat cost two nobles, a mouse sixpence, a rat 30 pennies. There was talk of cannibalism:

They ette deeggs, they ette cattys;
They ette mysse, horse and ratys.
For an hors quarter, lenc or fatte,
At C s. hyt was atte.
A horse hedde for halfe a pound;
A dogge for [th]e same mony round;
For xxd. went a ratte.
For ij noblys went a catte.
For vj d. went a mous.

Henry V offered the people of Rouen a stark choice — death or surrender. When it became clear that they could expect no help from outside, the citizens of the town chose to live; they agreed to pay a fine of £50,000 and handed over 80 hostages. Henry entered the Norman capital on 19 January 1419, when the news reached England there was singing and dancing in the streets of London. 37

The atrocities of war were, therefore, brought home to urban and rural communities in France with horrible regularity. The English peasantry was subjected to far less frequent assault, but even so, attacks, real or merely threatened, sometimes engendered almost palpable tension. In 1336, before the war even began formally, a naval raid on the Isle of Wight raised fears of invasion and led to the widespread implementation of defensive measures. Coastal attacks by French vessels then began in earnest: in March 1338 Portsmouth was plundered and burned — only the parish church remained standing; the Channel Islands were raided in the same year; then in October, French, Genoese and Castilian galleys attacked Southampton in a raid that destroyed between 40 and 50 per cent of the town's buildings. French and French-allied assaults on English coastal towns continued throughout much of the fourteenth century: in 1340 the Isle of Wight and the Dorset coast came under attack; Portsmouth was raided once more in 1342, and again in 1351 and 1370; in 1360 the French turned on Winchester; and in 1377 they besieged Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. Then
in 1385–86 terror gripped the country as the French admiral Jean de Vienne mustered an invasion force: ‘rumours spread . . . greatly alarming the inhabitants . . . All over the country . . . religious processions were instituted . . . and observed in a spirit of deep devotion and contrition. Prayers were offered to God to deliver them from this peril.98 It appeared that there was no hope of safety, all began to be afraid, not only the common people but also the knights themselves who had been brave, trained soldiers full of spirit but were now timid, womanly and spiritless. And they began to talk not about resistance and fighting but about escape and surrender.99

As it proved, on this occasion the main threat to the peasantry came not from the French but from their own soldiers. Troops, mustered to protect against the invasion, plundered the countryside when their pay ran out. Henry Knighton recounted an event in Leicestershire when a farmer beat a soldier who had tried to steal one of his horses. The soldier returned, Knighton said, with 140 of his companions – Cheshire archers – who intended to kill the farmer and burn the village. The inhabitants were forced to pay them £10 to make them leave. It was, essentially, a demand for patis made by English soldiers, exploiting the English peasantry.100

The Hundred Years War was, therefore, generally a dreadful time for the peasantry, however, the period also witnessed a transformation in the legal and social status of peasants that was far from negative. War was not the only factor that brought about this change: natural disasters – climatic, agricultural and biological – contributed to and compounded earlier and ongoing developments in social, tenurial, political and seigneurial structures. Somewhat perversely, misery was the catalyst for an improvement in the peasantry’s way of life. A series of agricultural crises in the early years of the fourteenth century, which led to the Great Famine, accelerated the process. Climatic pressures returned in England in the 1330s and 1340s when flooding seems to have been a constant problem, and a hugely destructive tidal surge of the Wash took place in 1338. Marginal land was abandoned, and cereal production declined significantly, although the reduction in population size meant the price of many agricultural products fell. After 1337 endemic warfare added new burdens in the form of assault and taxation. Agricultural decline and the limited success of Edward III’s first campaign meant that tax collectors in 1340–41 faced a deluge of complaints.101 Then, in an event that seemed to foreshadow the Apocalypse, the Black Death struck, first in 1347–50 and again at irregular intervals, albeit less virulently for the rest of the century and beyond.

It is likely that the populations of England and France fell by about 50 per cent in the years between 1300 and 1400. However, the consequences of this series of natural and man-made disasters were not entirely negative. Depopulation meant that the coercive powers of landlords diminished, villeinage declined further and the demand for labour services reduced. As traditional seigneurial powers decayed, wage rates escalated and prices fell. Landlords undertook less direct management of their land and rented out larger areas to the peasantry.102 This led to a redistribution of wealth and what was for some an uncomfortable blurring of social boundaries. In 1422 Alain Chartier blustered, but with real concern, that the wealth of the common people

is as a cistern which hath gathered and still gathers the waters of all the riches of this realm [France], for the coffer of the nobles and of the clergy are greatly diminished through the continuing of the war . . . [Daily] they [the peasantry] heap up riches and now they have in their possession our chattels and goods. And yet they cry against us and blame us that we do not fight at any time, they would not fear to put into hazard without reason and order all the nobility of the realm. For they would have noble blood given up cheaply, and when all is lost, then will they weep later.103

Similarly, towards the end of the war, in 1445, Jean Juvenal des Ursins (1588–1473) wrote: ‘No one is poor nowadays except the clergy and the gentlemen.’104 This, of course, was a great exaggeration, but those who survived famine, plague and war did gain something: their scarcity in a new world made them valuable. Legislation introduced in England in an almost immediate response to the Black Death is indicative of the ruling class’s fear of the implications of the great mortality. The Ordinance (1349) and statute (1351) of Labourers were desperate attempts to buttress the socio-economic status quo, because as early as 1348 peasants were leaving their manors and offering their services to the highest bidder. The 1351 statute was designed to prevent this wilful disruption of the proper order and what the Crown described as the ‘malice of servants’.105 However, at the same time as the ‘life chances’ of these malicious peasants were being restricted, they were also being called upon to support king and country perhaps in battle and certainly with taxation. As the targets of propaganda they became, in a sense, investors in national policy and, as a result, increasingly ‘politicked’.
Consequently, as the war evolved so too did the political awareness of the English peasantry. Peasants became acutely aware of the government's political failings, especially its failures in the war, and they demanded redress for these. Similarly in France, the failure of the nobility in battle caused outrage and there was considerable opposition to demands for taxation. This continued even when the political tide had clearly turned in the Valois' favour: the obligation to provide money, let alone food and lodging for soldiers, caused a great deal of resentment and often violence. Resistance was particularly virulent in the 1440s to the taxes demanded to support Charles VII's compagnies d'ordonnance.  

The combination of growing political awareness, dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on social mobility, governmental and aristocratic corruption (or perceived corruption), and, in particular, the growing tax burden, often led to violence and in some notable cases to outright revolt. In both France and England the economic pressures brought by military action, especially when it was unsuccessful, were deeply unpopular. The requisitioning of goods was particularly loathed. In England purveyance, particularly for the royal household, had long been a cause of disaffection and it grew to new heights when the Hundred Years War began. Although peasants could expect to be compensated for their goods, payment was rarely swift and it tended to be set at an arbitrarily low level.

As in France, the Hundred Years War caused the most significant and dangerous peasant revolt of the Middle Ages in England. When the treaty of Brétigny (1360) failed and the war reopened in 1369, the English position collapsed and a series of poll taxes was demanded to raise the revenue needed to defend Gascony and the English coast. The combination of military humiliation, factionalism at court, socio-economic disruption – a legacy of endemic plague – the fear of Franco-Castilian raiding and the political vacuum created by Richard II's minority formed a lethal cocktail. The poll tax demands were deeply provocative but also entirely understandable. Population movement and decline after 1348 meant that few communities could pay the traditional lay subsidy that had last been assessed in 1334. Consequently, in an attempt to raise money the chancellor, Lord Scrope instigated the first poll tax in 1377. Initially this was charged on everyone over the age of 14 at a rate of 4d. Then, in 1379, the age was raised to 16 and the tax applied on a sliding scale. The tax levied in 1380 (but collected in 1381) demanded 12d. from everyone over 15, but within each village the rich were encouraged to help the poor. The tax is a clear indication that the labour legislation had failed to control wage rises and that it was felt that everyone should contribute to the national war effort: the tax was bitterly resented, especially by those who had to pay for the first time.

In addition to the (perceived) iniquity of the poll taxes, the collectors were less than gentle in carrying out their duties. The peasants' response was a remarkably well coordinated campaign centred on the counties of Kent and Essex. The rebels marched on London in June 1381, many fewer than the sixty thousand the Anonyme chronicler suggested but still in very considerable numbers. The citizens of the capital who shared their grievances opened the city gates, and for a few days in 1381 it appeared that the rebels would take control of the city and the government. The revolt is an indication not only of the increasing politicisation of the peasantry and their hatred of certain socio-economic burdens, but also of their greater awareness of whom to blame for those burdens and for the military and political failures that had engendered them. The propaganda machine of the English state had, in some ways, done its job too well. From the beginning of the war, the English Crown had stressed the threat to the nation's political and ecclesiastical hierarchy: in 1381 that threat was genuine and it came from within the nation. The rebels' demands, articulated by their leader, Wat Tyler, were truly revolutionary: there were, as one would expect, demands concerning wages, rents and land ownership, but much more remarkable was a call for the disendowment of the Church – all ecclesiastical property was to be handed over to the people; there was to be an end to serfdom; and, most extraordinarily, an end to all lordship save that of the king.

The revolt failed, mainly because of the actions of the young Richard II who defused the potentially disastrous tension in a series of famous meetings with the rebels, and then reneged on his agreements with them. But the rebels did execute, gruesomely, a number of eminent figures, including Simon Sudbury, the archbishop of Canterbury. John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy, was burned. The rebels also broke into the Tower of London and, according to Thomas Walsingham, into the bedchamber of the king's mother Joan of Kent. There they were said to have jumped up and down on her bed and waved what the chronicler coyly described as 'their filthy sticks' at her. Although a minor incident, it shows the complete breakdown of central authority and of the barriers between social classes.

There were similarly egalitarian impulses behind various revolts in France that followed the Jacquerie. The Tuchinerie, a revolt that began in the late 1360s in the upper Auvergne, spread throughout the Midi in the early 1380s. (The term derived from tue-chiens or 'killers of dogs', the revolt
being comprised of men brought so low they would kill and eat dogs.) In this instance ‘class’ hatred combined with political instability, brigandage, military oppression from garrisons and, again, increasing taxation. Groups of peasants, soldiers and townsfolk sought to exploit the situation to their best advantage, until they were crushed by forces under the command of Jean the Magnificent, Duke of Berry, in 1384.51

The political awareness of the peasantry is also evident in the Cabochian revolt, which began in Paris on 28 April 1413. Named after one of the leaders, Simon Caboc, it started with a mass demonstration outside the Bastille and the capture and imprisonment of several leading government figures. Although primarily a rising of the urban peasantry, it was also encouraged by Jean the Fearless of Burgundy as part of his campaign to capture the capital from the Armagnac faction during the civil war. In Normandy the peasantry took similar action in 1434–36 when the English regime faced an outbreak of popular brigandage. And even when the fortunes of war had clearly shifted in Charles VII’s favour, revolt remained a possibility. The Lyons Revolt of 1436 was caused, like so many similar events, by taxation and what was seen as government corruption and heavy-handedness. Lyons had suffered considerably in recent years, having experienced rationing, food scarcity, unemployment and a sharp rise in the cost of living. The Peace of Arras (21 September 1435) had resulted in renewed mercenary activity (roaming bands of écroueurs) and an increasing tax burden, both taille and aides — the latter was levied on commodities and so affected everyone.52

The final English revolt of the war broke out in May 1450. Cade’s Rebellion took the form of a protest against Henry VI’s government, unfair taxes and national and local corruption which, the rebels said, had led to territorial losses in France. Since the summer of 1449 the French had retaken English-held lands in northern France with humiliating ease, and by the end of 1450 all Normandy had capitulated.53 The rebellion initially took the form of a mass petition in June called the ‘Proclamation of Jack Cade’ or ‘The Complaint of the Poor Commons of Kent’. It declared:

We believe the king our sovereign lord, by the inatiable, covetous, malicious persons that daily and nightly are about his highness, and daily inform him that good is evil and evil is good. They say that at his pleasure our sovereign is above his laws, and he may make them or break them as he pleases ... The contrary is true ... The king’s false council has lost his law, his merchandise is lost, his common people are destroyed, the sea is lost, France is lost [my emphasis], the king himself is so placed that he may not pay for his meat and drink, and he owes more than ever any King of England ought ... We desire that all extortions be laid low; [the Statute of Labourers, be outlawed as well as the] taking of wheat and other grains, beef, mutton and other victuals, which is an intolerable burden on the commons.54

The rebels were mostly peasants but their numbers were swelled by members of the lesser gentry, yeomen and husbandmen, and hundreds if not thousands of defeated and disillusioned soldiers recently returned from France. These men who felt they had lost their livelihoods and property because of corruption or who feared the possibility of a French attack.55

There was widespread violence in Kent, and demands for the arrest of certain ‘public traitors’. Henry VI complied — James Fiennes, Lord Saye (c.1390–1450), who had recently been appointed Lord Treasurer, was placed in the Tower of London. In early July, Cade crossed London Bridge and in a desperate attempt at appeasement the king had Saye and another hated figure, William Cromer, sheriff of Kent, executed. Negotiations between the rebels and a delegation of churchmen, the archbishops of Canterbury (John Stafford) and York (John Kempe), and William Waynflete, bishop of Winchester, took place in St Margaret’s Church, Southwark. They were presented with the rebels’ petitions and offered free royal charters of pardon in return. As in 1381 this proved sufficient to mollify the rebels. A week after the forces disbanded, however, Cade learned that the government still regarded him as a traitor and had issued a reward for him dead or alive. Soon after he was mortally wounded in a skirmish near Heathfield, East Sussex (12 July 1450); his body was taken to London and quartered to be displayed in different cities, his preserved head set up on a pike on London Bridge (along with those of the other leaders of the rebellion).

Cade’s Rebellion is a further indication of the increasing politicisation of the peasantry which the Hundred Years War brought about. The peasant rebel became an icon of late medieval life, reviled by some, adored by others. It is no coincidence that this period saw the first written evidence of the Robin Hood legend. Robin emerged over the course of the Hundred Years War not only as a new sort of hero but as a hero for a new and large social group, the yeomanry of England.56 Robin, the yeoman forester, reflected one aspect of a new social order that arose out of the confusion of war and plague; he stood on the border between the common folk and the gentry.
The changing balance of economic power had narrowed the boundaries between classes, especially between the upper echelons of the peasantry and the lowest ranks of the aristocracy. This period of extraordinary social unrest is reflected in the fact that the years between 1350 and 1500 were the only time before the modern era in English culture that a commoner, not a nobleman, was a major literary hero. Robin rejected the traditional hierarchy; he stood outside the law and so represented the aspirations of many of the 1381 and 1450 rebels. And, of course, he was armed with a longbow, the weapon that was overturning military hierarchies on the battlefield.

Cade's Rebellion also reflected the fragility of English power in France as well as the extent to which the nation as a whole had become invested in the Hundred Years War. Nearly a century earlier, the revolt of the Jacquerie had revealed similar forces at work across the Channel. That uprising had marked a particularly low point in Valois fortunes, one on which Edward III sought to capitalise, but his campaign of 1359–60 failed in its objective to capture Reims, the French coronation city. Instead, he brokered a truce at Brétigny that held, in some form, until 1369. But conditions changed in the intervening years. Charles V acceded to the French throne and proved to be an immensely shrewd leader. When hostilities resumed, he swiftly oversaw the reconquest of the lands surrendered in 1360. Pressure began to mount on English Gascony and raiding resumed on the south coast of England, building towards a proposed invasion in 1385. But the deaths of Charles the Wise and his constable, Bertrand du Guesclin, in 1380 slowed the French advance. A change of policy followed and the pressure declined. By this time, however, the Hundred Years War was being fought on yet another battleground.

CHAPTER 3

The Church and the Clergy

VOICES FROM THE PULPIT

1378

On 26 March [1378] came the death of Pope Gregory [XI]. He was a particularly good and just man, who had been greatly troubled by the losses suffered by the kingdoms of both England and France and had worked hard to bring about peace between them... He was succeeded by Bartholomew, archbishop of Bari, who suffered many tribulations.¹

Thomas Walsingham, Chronica Maiora

In his description of the pontificate of Urban VI (the former archbishop of Bari), Thomas Walsingham was, for once, rather restrained. The ‘tribulations’ he described were to do with nothing less than the Great Schism (1378–1417), a disastrous rift that divided the Western Church, caused by a struggle for the papal throne. With one claimant resident in Rome and his rival at Avignon the secular European powers – France and England chief among them – sought to gain advantage in their own conflicts by securing the papacy for their respective candidates. Consequently, like the Hundred Years War with which it became linked, the Schism polarised Western Christendom and, because of it, churches throughout Europe became bound increasingly tightly to their respective nations and to issues of national politics. War and the Schism acted together to place great pressure on the institutional fabric of the Church and on relations within Christendom. Churchmen found themselves in an invidious position, torn between the demands of the ‘universal’ Church and those of their royal masters.

Churchmen had, of course, always been closely involved in national and local government, but during the Hundred Years War members of the monastic and secular clergy played increasingly important roles in
diplomacy, tax collection, military planning, local defence and the distribution of information. This growing involvement had a considerable impact on those men and women, on ecclesiastical institutions and on attitudes towards the Church, much of it negative. The reputation of many of the clergy suffered and its members faced escalating criticism of their involvement in and failure to heal both the Schism and the Anglo-French conflict. Consequently, the Hundred Years War and the ecclesiastical disruption that accompanied it increased scrutiny of the Church and its members, and some were found wanting; others, however, saw their reputations enhanced. Communities still looked to their parish priest for guidance — spiritual and temporal; people continued to go on pilgrimage, and the fifteenth century saw a huge resurgence in church-building. So, whereas some monastic and mendicant orders were subjected to biting criticism, others were praised for their religious commitment.

The Hundred Years War also had much more direct consequences for clergymen and members of religious communities: many suffered terribly during the conflict and faced brutal assaults with fire and sword. This shaped not only the clergy’s wartime experience but also the impressions of the war which they left to posterity, because despite the disruption to daily life they continued to write accounts that coloured contemporary and later attitudes to the conflict. Their involvement in the distribution of propaganda helped form popular opinion, and the records they left — administrative, legal, literary and historiographical — continue to inform modern views of the war. Hence, although an increasing number of laymen and some very notable women began writing their accounts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ecclesiastical authors offer some of the most telling perspectives on the Hundred Years War. Through their works they immersed themselves directly in the war effort. Clerical writings and sermons provided a mouthpiece for royal policy and a vehicle for propaganda, and they also armed each side with a range of additional intellectual and spiritual weapons. In this fashion the clergy played a central role in the prosecution of the Hundred Years War. The academic exchange between the French and English clergy mirrored the physical exchange between the French and English armies — it is entirely appropriate that a 

debat
(an intellectual debate) can also be translated as a battle.

The war began with a flurry of bulletins, broadsides and manifestos: both sides placed great value on winning the propaganda war at home and abroad, and the Church provided the main conduit for that propaganda. In England, as Edward I had done, Edward III mobilised the Church. Every

parish and monastic church gave the Crown a direct link to the population — from the centre to the periphery — and a means of accessing local communities. It was through prayers and other liturgical practices on behalf of the war effort that the king’s ambition was presented to the English people. Prayers for king and kingdom were supplemented with bell-ringing, processions and other ceremonial events. Sermon collections were distributed containing model prayers so that priests might exhort their congregations to beseech God to aid their king in his just cause. Sermons, of course, were delivered in the vernacular and so they provided an ideal way of transmitting information about the political, military and economic issues confronting the kingdom — or at least those about which the Crown wished the people to be informed. Such actions were considered vital in guaranteeing tax revenue and encouraging general support for the war. They were not, however, merely propagandists; they were believed to have real spiritual value. In the religious climate of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was thought they might even tip the balance in a battle.

Edward III issued writs de orando pro rege (prayers for the realm and its good government) almost annually from the late 1330s to the mid-1350s. He also called on the preaching talents of the English clergy to explain his reasons for going to war, the legitimacy of his claim to the French Crown and to emphasise the remarkable patience he had shown before he had been compelled to take up arms. The friars were particularly important in delivering these messages. The Dominicans were required to present the king’s claim in ‘public and private sermons’ and to emphasise his restraint, his desperate attempts to keep the peace in the face of the duplicity of ‘Sir Philip de Valois’ (Philippe VI), who ‘calls himself king of France’ and who ‘by force and against justice’ had usurped the French throne, seized Gascony, stirred up the Scots and conspired even to subvert the English language.

The use of the Church for these purposes continued throughout the war. Richard II ordered the clergy to stage masses and processions for Bishop Henry Despenser’s ‘crusade’ against the Flemings in 1383, to pray on behalf of the earl of Arundel’s expedition to the continent in 1386 and to support his own Irish campaign of 1394. During Henry V’s reign lavish processions and ceremonies were organised to thank God for the remarkable triumph of Agincourt. When the king returned to London in 1415 he was greeted on route to St Paul’s Cathedral by 12 bishops wearing mitres, who led him to the high altar before he rode through the city to Westminster, where the monks and abbot escorted him into the abbey church so the king
to be compiled in the twelfth century no English royal historical writing centre existed, and although monarchs did try to influence the contents of individual chronicles there appears to have been no comparable production line of official historiography during the war.

There was, however, no shortage of English chronicles in the later Middle Ages composed by monastic authors, clerks and, increasingly, laymen. A number of those clerical authors were closely associated with the royal court. Adam Usk (c.1350–1430), for example, was a Crown lawyer, while the anonymous author of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* (written 1416–17) was almost certainly a chaplain in Henry V's household. Other monastic writers had fewer direct connections to the centre of power but were still well informed. Henry Knighton (d. c.1396), an Augustinian canon from St Mary of the Meadows, Leicester, wrote extensively on the prosecution of the war and fearfully of John Wyclif (c.1320–84) and the threat posed by England's first heresy. Knighton had close links to the Lancastrian households of Henry of Grosmont, John of Gaunt and Henry Bolingbroke. Thomas Walsingham (c.1340–c.1422), a monk from St Albans, also had links to the court—although he was far from favourably disposed to Gaunt. Walsingham continued the monastic chronicle tradition championed by Matthew Paris and produced a series of remarkably detailed and extraordinarily vituperative works on a wide variety of subjects during Richard II's reign and those of the early Lancastrians. His comments on the poverty of the English war effort after 1369 are particularly scathing. For Walsingham '[t]he land that once bore and gave birth to men who were respected by all who dwelt nearby and feared by those who lived far off, now spews forth weaklings who are laughed at by our enemies and a subject for gossip among our people.'

In France, in addition to those writing the *Grandes Chroniques* and other official records, there were a number of other important ecclesiastical authors. The Carmelite friar Jean de Venette (c.1307–c.1370) expressed his deep concern for the lot of the French peasantry and blamed a vain, avaricious and venal knighthood for many of the early disasters in the war. Jean Gerson (1363–1429), chancellor of the University of Paris, provided fascinating insights regarding the conciliar movement (the series of church councils which sought a resolution to the Great Schism), and on the career and reputation of Joan of Arc. He argued that the French were a chosen people, and that because their king's power was divine everyone should offer him obedience. The royal notary and secretary Jean de Montreuil (1354–1418), a writer deeply influenced by Italian humanism, was another
who promoted Salic law, especially in his *Traité contre les Anglais*, in order to repudiate English pretensions to the French throne. Jean Juvénal des Ursins (1388–1473) drew heavily on Montreuil's work and discussed similar themes in *Audite celis* (1435) and *Tres eresien, tres bault, tres puisant roy* (1446). Alain Chartier (c.1385–1430) wrote of *Mère France* (Mother France) in *Le quadrilogue invectif* (c.1422), a work designed to unite the people of France in the service of the dauphin (Charles VII). Noel de Fribois (fl.1423–67/88), *sécretaire du roi*, who presented Charles VII with his *Abrégé des Crônicas* in 1459, considered the changing political landscape of France at the end of the Hundred Years War and the growth of royal power. By no means do all these accounts, French or English, provide first-hand experiences of war and many are exaggerated, formulaic and driven by personal and political impulses. Some clerical authors wrote to encourage moral reform and saw conflict as evidence of social and spiritual decay; they are, nonetheless, vital for an understanding of English and French *mentalités* during the Hundred Years War.

Churchmen and clerics were not, however, the unthinking tools of kings — many criticised royal policy and personnel. In a number of sermons Thomas Brinton, bishop of Rochester from 1373 to 1389, censured both Edward III and Richard II: 'Armies go to war,' he said, 'not with the prayers of the people behind them but with the curses of many; for they march not at the king's expense or their own, but at the expense of churches and the poor, whom they spoil in their path.' Jacques Legrand, an Augustinian preacher, is well known for condemning the vices of Charles VI's court and particularly what he saw as Queen Isabeau's excesses. Thomas Basin, bishop of Lisieux (1447–75), chronicled the reign of Charles VII and detailed the misery of the French people. He was certainly no royal apologist: Charles, he argued, 'allow[ed] his English enemies to bleed and dismember his people like fierce beasts, [and] he even in a certain fashion participated himself, since he had to know that these cruelties were perpetrated not only by the enemy but also by his own men'.

Despite these exceptions, both sides were generally able to use the Church to justify the war and their respective aims. The English also employed clerics to legitimise territorial conquests. Once he had recaptured Normandy (1417–19), Henry V took steps to ensure the French clergy were well treated. This was not only for the good of his soul; Henry was keen that he should be accepted as *de jure*, not just *de facto*, ruler of the duchy. The Church could help with this since it played a key role in determining political and social attitudes; it served as a stabilising force in local communities where priests tended to be influential. Additionally, the new regime made extensive use of the clergy as administrators. Henry encouraged churchmen to cooperate with the new government by offering patronage and/or threatening to remove it. In the initial phase of the reconquest of Normandy many clergymen fled before the invaders; Henry urged them to return and while they could easily be replaced if they did not, their absence could result in considerable upheaval just at the time when the fledgling administration required stability. There was also some outright resistance; a number of clergymen were deeply involved in plots against the English administration. For example, the canons of Sées in Normandy contacted the Armagnacs in 1421 offering them access to the fortress through the cathedral treasury. The plot was discovered while workmen were digging a hole through the treasury wall, but the Armagnacs were able to capture the town nonetheless and it remained under their control for eight weeks. Elsewhere defiance often did not extend beyond a refusal to offer prayers for the new regime, and many clergymen decided that the English, although not entirely welcome, did at least offer the possibility of political and economic security.

In Paris, the Church also played an important role in shaping political attitudes in the 1420s and 1430s. There was considerable support for the Burgundians in the capital: in 1418, 227 priests, ranging from important figures in the hierarchy of Notre Dame to (some impoverished) men without benefices, swore an oath of allegiance. This level of support would prove vital in sustaining the English and their allies in the French capital after the treaty of Troyes in May 1420. During that period of occupation oaths of allegiance and spiritual sanctions were used extensively to try to control political behaviour. Indeed, this was the case throughout the French civil war: both sides deployed a variety of weapons from the religious arsenal. Images of saints were decorated with 'party' symbols, and Armagnacs and Burgundians excommunicated each other with vehement frequency, bringing the spiritual power of the Church to bear on their own struggle.

Churchmen were also involved in a variety of other aspects of the war effort. Although clerics no longer held a monopoly on governmental office, they represented a significant proportion in both administrations. A number were, of course, hugely significant in the Hundred Years War, such as Cardinal Henry Beaufort (1375–1447) who served the Lancastrian kings in numerous offices and often bankrolled their military efforts. Pierre de la Forêt, chancellor of France from 1349, rose through the ecclesiastical ranks to become archbishop of Rouen in 1352 and then cardinal. He was
closely involved in diplomatic activities within France and in negotiations with England. Men such as these, at the apex of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, were supported in great numbers by less eminent clergy who paid taxes and sometimes collected them; some of them had duties in local defence, and others, like the extraordinarily martial Bishop Henry Despenser (c.1341–1406), even led campaigns. Indeed, ecclesiastical influences meant that the Hundred Years War gained some crusading characteristics in both England and France. Such attitudes were not difficult to inculcate when the enemy, often described as all but heathen, attacked churches, abbeys and monasteries, some of which had been converted to defend parishioners against assault. As the Parisian Bourgeois (the anonymous author of a chronicle composed in the French capital) wrote in an entry for 1419: ‘Alas, never, I think, since the days of Clovis the first Christian king, has France been as desolate and divided as it is today. The Dauphin and his people do nothing day and night but lay waste all his father’s land with fire and sword and the English on the other side do as much harm as Saracens.’

Such attacks, perpetrated by both sides on ecclesiastical property and non-combatants alike, were very frequent in France and not unknown in England despite the prohibitions of military ordinances and spiritual dictat. They imply that although the Church remained wealthy and highly influential, certain aspects of its authority declined in this period, and there is a good deal of evidence to suggest this was the case. If so it happened for several reasons. Of these the most important were the relocation of the papacy in 1309 to Avignon (soon denigrated as a ‘Babylonish Captivity’) and the Great Schism of 1378–1417. These events brought the Church into disrepute and firmly within the grubby orbit of Anglo-French politics. The Church had never been apolitical but, as a result of these events and because of the Hundred Years War, its ‘universal’ character was diminished. It was symptomatic of this decline that soldiers on both sides could raid churches and monasteries with impunity and impetuously, and ecclesiastics were often looked on with suspicion.

As a consequence, slowly and partially over the period of the Hundred Years War, the English Church became divided from the rest of the Continent. This influenced the character of worship and the political and spiritual orientation of the clergy in England: churchmen were forced to decide where their priorities and loyalties lay — with the king or the pope. In France, too, national loyalties began to influence attitudes to the Church and papacy detrimentally. Throughout the period of the war increasing French royal control over the Church, a process known as ‘Gallicanism’, saw the Crown gain greater influence over ecclesiastical resources, appointments and policies. This began in the years leading up to the relocation to Avignon when the vicious dispute between King Philippe IV (r.1285–1314) and Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303) placed Franco-papal relations under enormous strain. However, once the papacy had taken up residence near the southern border of the French kingdom the Capetians and their Valois successors sought to take advantage of its proximity. The association also improved on account of the nationality of the Avignon popes — all were French. Valois influence waned, however, when Gregory XI (1370–78) returned to Rome in 1378, at which point French cardinals, at the instigation of Charles V, helped engineer the Great Schism.

As Philippe de Mézières noted in 1395, the political division between England and France became mirrored in the division of the papacy. This intensified an ongoing process of ecclesiastical politicisation and ensured that the Church itself became a subject of contention. De Mézières wrote: ‘This accursed wound…is the mortal schism in Holy Church, the mother of these two sons of St Louis. And, what is worse, each of our two kings has taken to himself one half of his said mother, claiming to heal her sickness, while abandoning the other to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey.’

Prior to 1378 churches, monasteries and clerics were attacked, churchmen raised money for the war effort, preaching on behalf of their respective king’s campaigns, and successive popes made determined but forlorn efforts to resolve the struggle. But in 1378, with the election of Antipope Clement VII (1378–94) as a rival to the recently installed Urban VI (1378–89), the institutional Church itself also became a battleground for the Anglo-French conflict; and because of the Hundred Years War the ramifications of the Schism would be felt deep into the fifteenth century and perhaps until the Reformation.

The Schism divided Europe as it divided the Church and further compromised the authority of the papacy. This had been in decline for some time. Over the course of the thirteenth century, conflicts with European rulers, first the German emperors and later the French and to a lesser extent English kings, had seen the Papal Monarchy fall from the position of apparent political and spiritual impregnability it had acquired during the pontificate of Innocent III (1198–1216). The clearest indicator of this decline was the relocation of the papal curia from Rome to Avignon in 1309. There were good reasons for doing this, not least Rome’s disruptive political climate and uncomfortable (and often unhealthy) summer weather. Indeed, because of such considerations it had not been uncommon
for the papal curia to reside outside the Eternal City for extended periods, although it tended to remain in the Papal States. Pope Clement V (1305–14), however, never even managed to get to Rome after his election. Poor health, a fondness for his home in southern France and the political chaos of northern Italy were among the reasons that led to the papal curia taking on a somewhat peripatetic existence until 1309 when it became fixed, more or less, in Avignon.

Located in the Comtat Venaissin, Avignon was possession of the Church on the borders of, but not technically within, the Capetian kingdom. However, especially in those countries that opposed France, this soon came to be seen as a 'Babylonish Captivity', which did nothing to strengthen the papacy's increasingly fragile spiritual authority. Even before 1305, when the papacy left Rome, Anglo-papal relations had been strained, but thereafter many in England believed, not without some justification, that the Holy Father was little better than a French pawn. Clement V, the first of the Avignon popes, had been archbishop of Bordeaux (as Bertrand de Got) and as such he tended to be well disposed to England, but there is little doubt that for much of the fourteenth century the Avignon papacy favoured – and was seen to favour – the French monarchy. As a consequence it came to be widely felt in England, certainly by the time of the pontificate of Clement VI (1342–52), that whereas Christ Jesus was, unquestionably, English, his vicar was unapologetically French. Clement, perhaps the most overtly Francophile of the Avignon popes, was a product of the French court and former keeper of the seals in Paris, whose pontificate has been characterised by its 'subservience to French interests'. Because of this the papacy could not play its traditional role as an arbiter in European affairs effectively, and certainly not in those disputes involving England and France. The English became increasingly and instinctively wary of any measures originating from Avignon that sought to bring a peaceful resolution to the war.

Although its spiritual authority was compromised, in other spheres the papacy gained a great deal from the 'Babylonish Captivity'. The seven Avignon popes sought and, in the early fourteenth century, gained greater control over patronage and appointments to benefices throughout Europe. This provided the papacy with political leverage but did nothing to improve its popularity. In addition, the machinery of papal government improved very considerably during the Avignon period, and the Holy See used that administrative efficiency to raise the very considerable sums of money needed to build and expand the extraordinary papal palace at Avignon and to wage a number of military campaigns in Italy to re-establish its authority. Although this was a tribute to the organisational ability of various members of the papal curia and perhaps financially necessary, because the papacy had been cut off from many of its traditional Italian revenues, it too proved deeply unpopular.

In part because of the papacy's attempts to increase its income and influence over ecclesiastical appointments, by the middle years of the fourteenth century relations between Avignon and England had deteriorated markedly. Then, in the 1360s, matters became even worse when, under pressure from Charles V, Pope Urban V (1362–70) refused a dispensation for a marriage between Edmund of Langley (Edward III's fourth surviving son) and Margaret of Flanders – this was needed because they were related within the prohibited degree. It proved to be a decision of enormous significance because, as one of the richest heiresses in Christendom, Margaret's eventual marriage to Philippe de Burgundy provided the foundations for the development of the Burgundian state. Edward III, furious at being thwarted in his attempt to extend English influence in the Low Countries, stymied a programme of ecclesiastical reform which Urban wished to implement in England. Widespread anti-papal feeling coupled with a substantial dose of political expediency had already led to the Statutes of Provisors (1351, 1365) and Praemunire (1353, 1365), which Richard II reissued in 1390 and 1393 respectively. This legislation replaced papal with royal provision to many ecclesiastical benefices in England and, as a result, the Crown began to exercise increasing authority over ecclesiastical affairs. It became common to promote king's clerks into the ranks of the episcopacy. Simon Islip, for example, became archbishop of Canterbury (1349–66) having served as keeper of the seal (1347–50). In this period, when the state sought to maximise and exploit all the resources at its disposal, it is no surprise that attempts were made to extend secular administrative control over the Church.

It was this desire that also explains royal support for the heresiarch John Wyclif in the 1370s: his call for royal supremacy over the ecclesia Anglicana and the disendowment of church property proved very popular in this febrile climate. For Wyclif the king of England held the same political and spiritual authority as the kings of the Old Testament – he was rex et sacerdos – with the power to appoint, depose and dispossess priests. It was only with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, when any threat to the social or political status quo became tainted with suspicion, that Wyclif truly fell from favour with the royal family. The proposal to take church land into secular control did not disappear, however; it resurfaced in the early years of Henry IV's reign.
when the October Parliament of 1404 suggested the confiscation of church property would alleviate a financial crisis.29

The situation was different in France but not completely reversed. The Avignon Papacy was popular, broadly speaking. But the violent disputes between Philippe IV and Boniface VIII had soured Franco-papal relations at the beginning of the 1300s and Gallicanism became an ever more potent force, as the French monarchy, like the English, sought greater authority over the Church. Over the course of the Hundred Years War Gallicanism developed into a movement that promoted the concept of an independent French Church, free from papal interference while acknowledging it should remain 'Roman' and Catholic. The movement gathered pace during the Avignon period and subsequently when various French theorists such as Nicole Oresme (1320×25–82) and Jean Gerson argued that the French king as rex Christianissimus (the Most Christian King) had the authority to stamp out religious abuses and a duty to restore the Church to spiritual health.30

The Hundred Years War directly contributed to the process by which secular rulers gained greater authority over their 'national' Churches. Numerous attempts were made to establish control over ecclesiastical lands, properties, resources and revenues, and to make the Church subject to secular authority and a part of the state machine. The Great Schism galvanised this. In January 1377, after nearly eighty years in Avignon, Gregory XI returned the papal court to Rome. He died, however, in the following year, and in a reaction against what was widely seen as the extravagance and licentiousness of the papal curia his successor, Urban VI (elected on 8 April 1378 partly because of pressure brought to bear by the Roman mob), instituted major reforms, beginning with the college of cardinals itself. This proved deeply unpopular and Urban was far from diplomatic in his dealings with the cardinals – he is even reported to have punched one of them. Consequently, and with the support of Charles V, on 20 September thirteen disgruntled cardinals, led by Jean de la Grange, the cardinal-bishop of Amiens, elected a new pope, Robert of Geneva (the French king's cousin), who took the title Clement VII and established a rival curia back in Avignon. Each pope immediately excommunicated the other and created his own bureaucracy and college of cardinals. Clement received support from the French Crown and those countries allied to it, including Scotland, Naples, Castile and Aragon. The anti-French powers – England, Scandinavia, Germany, much of Italy, and the eastern European states – supported Urban. The Great Schism was, therefore, shaped by the European political situation which the Hundred Years War had created.31

This led to the most dramatic manifestation of clerical military activity during the Hundred Years War – the Flemish 'crusade' of Henry Despencer, bishop of Norwich. The targets of the campaign were the supporters of the Avignonese pope, Clement VII. The Roman pope, Urban VI, was naturally supportive of the venture as were the English Parliament and aristocracy, since it had clear political and economic advantages which the Church would fund. Plans began to be put in motion in 1381, not long before the Peasants' Revolt, which Despencer brutally suppressed in Norfolk. With his reputation subsequently enhanced (and probably exaggerated), he began a major preaching campaign in 1382 that laid the foundations for a crusade against the schismatics. His message was warmly received. On 17 May 1383 Despencer crossed to Calais with an army of 8,000 soldiers. After some initial success against a Flemish and French force near Dunkirk he besieged Ypres. This proved disastrous and soon had to be abandoned. The bishop then proposed to invade Picardy but was opposed by his lieutenants, including the highly experienced mercenary captain Sir Hugh Calveley (d.1394). Despencer continued in spite of this, but the appearance of a French army led by Charles VI himself forced him to submit to a humiliating settlement at Gravelines. Despencer returned to England to face bitter recriminations and impeachment in Parliament, although he was not imprisoned nor did he lose his episcopacy.32

The political climate that emerged in the following years soon brought changes to Anglo-French diplomacy and their respective relationships with the papacy/papacies. Albeit with opposition from the more hawkish elements at their respective courts, the efforts of Charles VI and Richard II to resolve the Hundred Years War became mirrored in attempts to heal the Schism. Following the deliberations of the First National Council of the French clergy (February 1395) – a meeting that itself indicated the increasingly national focus of the French Church – it became Valois policy to try and end the Schism by securing the abdication of both popes, an approach known as via cessionis. This marked a major change in strategy – from creating the Schism to ending it – and it involved a significant reorganisation of ecclesiastical life throughout France. This intensified in 1398 when, in order to try to compel papal compliance, ecclesiastical obedience was 'subjected' from the papacy – a process given teeth since it involved withholding taxes due to the pope. The French Church instead found itself paying its dues into royal coffers. This policy, drawn up by various members of the University of Paris, amplified wider calls for a General Council of the Church and further encouraged 'Gallican' ideas that were again
expressed in a National Council in 1406. The policy did not, however, succeed.

More than twenty years of failure to heal the rift in the Church was accompanied by the outbreak of heresies in England (Lollardy) and Bohemia (Hussitism), and, in response, demands for a General Council of the Church grew louder. Neither pope, however, would call one. Finally, in 1408, a sufficient number of cardinals from both colleges agreed to summon a council under their own collective authority - this met in Pisa in the following year. There the council deposed both the Avignonese pope (Benedict XIII, 1394–1417) and the Roman pope (Gregory XII, 1406–15), and replaced them with Alexander V (1409–10). However, neither Benedict nor Gregory accepted the legality of the proceedings and each maintained just enough support to cling to office. The first council, therefore, merely compounded the problem - there were now three popes.

The second council met with more success. Primarily the work of Emperor Sigismund, who was eager to heal the Schism so that the Church could turn its attention to the problem of the Hussites in Bohemia, the Council of Constance (1414–18) made much better progress. Gregory XII resigned voluntarily in 1415, and the new Pisan pope who had succeeded Alexander V, John XXIII (1410–15), was deposed and imprisoned. Benedict XIII was able to retain a vestige of power until his death in 1424, but the council's preferred candidate, Martin V (1417–31), became broadly accepted as the Holy Father, with his income, rights and powers much reduced.

In essence the process that led to the resolution of the Great Schism established the principle that the authority of a General Council superseded that of the pope. In token of this, from 1417 onwards the pope was required to summon a council at regular intervals (in five years, again seven years later, and then every ten years thereafter). The first of these meetings had to be postponed because of plague, but in 1431 a council met at Basel that saw a pope, Eugenius IV (1431–47), again in conflict with his cardinals. Once more the papacy found itself dependent on the support of secular rulers to secure its position. It was in this context that Charles VII was able to extend royal control further over the French Church through the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438), which placed still more restrictions on papal rights. Hence, as a consequence of developments during the Hundred Years War, by the start of the sixteenth century at the latest, effective royal control over the Church in France had been achieved.

The struggle within the Church and the battle to establish control over the Church were, therefore, in large part, a consequence of the Hundred Years War. The war itself also had a deeply significant and much more direct impact on churchmen in England and France. As Honoré Bonet said, witheringly, 'the man who does not know how to set places on fire, to rob churches and usurp their right and to imprison the priests is not fit to carry on war'. The Church had tried to provide its members with protection from physical attack for many generations prior to the outbreak of the conflict - those who attacked churchmen and their property had long been subject to dire spiritual sanctions. This tradition stretched back at least as far as the Peace and Truce of God movements in the tenth century and the practice continued in the later Middle Ages. For example, the archbishop of Canterbury threatened excommunication to anyone who plundered church property - a sanction proclaimed twice-yearly, on All Saints' Day and Palm Sunday. English military ordinances also sought to protect churchmen and church property. However, in spite of the dangers to soul and salvation, there was in reality little regard for the belongings and persons of the Church, particularly in France. Attacks on churchmen and ecclesiastical property filled the pages of chronicles and administrative documents. In 1357 Jean de Venette wrote that 'enemies' - he did not distinguish between English soldiers and European mercenaries of various nationalities, some French - 'seized castles and fortresses and captured the men who dwelt around them. Some they held for ransom; some they slaughtered miserably. Nor did they spare the religious. Monks and nuns abandoned their monasteries and took refuge as best they could.'

Froissart, similarly, tells of an English squire who entered a church during mass and stole a chalice from a priest at the very moment of consecration. Such items were clearly valuable and highly prized: Sir John Harleston, captain of Cherbourg and one of Richard II's chamber knights, was witnessed sitting with some companions drinking from the silver chalices they had recently looted from churches.

Such attacks were an implicit if not explicit part of English chevauchée policy in the fourteenth century. As raiders in the past had recognised, churches and monasteries were often storehouses of valuable goods. So, despite military ordinances and spiritual prohibitions designed to protect churchmen and their property, both suffered a great deal. Chronicles and government documents are littered with examples such as that of the curé of Comblain who, during the turmoil that followed the battle of Poitiers in September 1356, was set such an excessive ransom by the Navarrese forces who captured him that he was forced to repay them by singing masses in their fortress. The depredations of mercenary troops meant that even
during so-called periods of truce there was little relief for the clergy. Because of this there was barely a church, monastery or hospital in France which the Hundred Years War did not affect adversely, for if not subjected to direct attack then its revenues and goods, even its ability to give alms, were damaged. Of course, as the conflict wore on the demands on churches mounted because of the trauma suffered by members of their congregations and those others who depended upon them. Ecclesiastical revenues plummeted because of the war. When combined with the effects of depopulation brought on by plague and famine, many religious institutions faced a financial crisis.

The Hundred Years War, therefore, tested, and in some places tore the institutional fabric of the French Church. By the 1370s problems had become acute: in Brittany and Normandy parishes were deserted in the dioceses of Dol and Bayeux; successive English raids devastated Artois and Picardy, and the situation in the Île de France was not much better. Conditions in Champagne — in Troyes, Reims and Châlons-sur-Marne — were also very difficult. In Burgundy a great deal of land and property was laid waste and many villages were deserted. A quarter of the population of Beaune had been lost by 1366 and numbers continued to fall thereafter. Auvergne suffered too, from depopulation brought on by disease, and emigration encouraged by heavy taxation. In Languedoc the three sénéchaussées of Toulouse, Carcassonne and Beaucaire all experienced major population decline. In Quercy that decline is very evident from the time of the first outbreak of the Black Death and it continued after the treaty of Brétigny in 1360 which brought the area under English control. Numerous towns and villages were abandoned. In Figeac more than five hundred wealthy inhabitants felt so impoverished on account of the new administration that they left the town. Cahors may have lost half its population; the outskirts of the town were deserted and so silent, it was said, that not even a cock crowed there. Some of the surrounding areas remained desolate for thirty years afterwards. War, mercenary activity, heavy taxation, plague and famine each devastated whole areas in their turn, and the consequent depopulation impacted heavily on ecclesiastical incomes and on the role the Church could play in people’s everyday lives. Parishes were left without priests.

Because of its economic, political, social and physical consequences, the war also adversely affected religious discipline and reduced the pastoral activities of both monastic and secular clergy. In 1360 the ‘infestation’ of the diocese of Lyon with mercenary companies forced many communities to abandon their monasteries. In 1375 the Augustinian priory of Sainte-Gulles at Montpellier had its cloister destroyed by the Free Companies and the brethren were forced to beg for food. The Benedictine abbey of Montolieu in the diocese of Carcassonne suffered regular attacks by mercenary forces until, finally, they invaded the property, and stabled their horses in the church, cloisters and even the sanctuary. The divine office ceased to be sung and many monks renounced their vows. Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy was besieged in the winter of 1423. Even Paris suffered: there were regular embargos, and the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Denis-en-France had to pay for protection for its property outside the city and its income was severely reduced. Mercenary activity also affected academic life in the capital: in 1387 the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order deplored the attacks that led to the college of Saint-Bernard in Paris being abandoned by students. Parochial life was also affected even when parishes were defended. The fortification of many parish churches protected congregations from raiding parties but often invited attack from French royal and aristocratic authorities concerned about the unlicensed construction of fortifications. There were also serious consequences for ecclesiastical activities: by compromising the sanctity of the buildings one might compromise the rigour, rhythm and routine of religious life.42

It was not only French churches that were devastated. In 1364 Urban V had to borrow 30,000 florins to improve the defences of Avignon against potential mercenary attack. Anglo-Scottish warfare, meanwhile, put ecclesiastical possessions on both sides of the border in jeopardy. For example, in 1385, partly because of Scottish support for the Avignon pope, Clement VII, English forces burned the abbey of Melrose, Dryburgh, Holyrood and Newbattle. Nor were ecclesiastics in southern England safe. Monastic properties on the coast suffered sporadic assault. Thomas Walsingham described, perhaps in exaggerated terms, a particularly brutal episode in 1379. An English raiding force under the command of Sir John Arundel sought lodging at a nunnery near Southampton, probably Cornworthy, while awaiting a favourable wind to take it across to France. Despite the objections of the mother superior, the soldiers entered the house where they proceeded to assault and rape the sisters. The surrounding countryside was pillaged for food and other supplies. Walsingham even suggests that Arundel and his men kidnapped many of the nuns to take them to France, and then when the weather turned the women were thrown from the ships to lighten them.43

Attacks on ecclesiastics in England also took on a more institutional form. Alien monks, like other foreigners in England, became objects of
suspicion from the outbreak of hostilities. From 1337 until 1360, and then from 1369 onwards, dependent houses of French monasteries, the so-called alien priories, were taken into royal control and exploited financially. The practice of seizing alien priories and ecclesiastical resources was not new; it had a history stretching back to 1208 when Pope Innocent III had placed the realm under Interdict and King John had responded by taking possession of church property. Edward I (in 1295) and Edward II (in 1324–27) had followed suit, although in response to war with France. These alien priories were said to be havens for enemy spies and serve as channels through which money, goods and resources poured in aid of the French war effort. Of these concerns the most serious was money, and the confiscation of the alien priories, which were defined very loosely and inconsistently, proved extremely profitable to the Crown in terms of hard cash as well as ecclesiastical patronage. The Crown granted seized properties to individuals, some as rewards, some in return for an annual payment. The beneficiaries often had little interest in maintaining the fabric of the priories and many caused considerable financial damage through exploitation and lack of care. Many priories were ‘farmed’ (rented) at too high a rate, and so when faced with the Exchequer’s demands, the keepers had two choices, to sell off financial assets and neglect repairs or go into debt to the Crown. From 1375 a stream of commissioners was sent to investigate claims of damage perpetrated by keepers and former keepers.44

While action was taken to prevent excessive exploitation, some priories became so impoverished that they could not continue to exist as religious foundations and were sold as secular manors. Some tried to save themselves by seeking denization and hence ‘becoming English’, whereas others took on a new identity and were used to endow a different house or Order. The Carthusians became particular beneficiaries of this process: Henry V was a keen supporter of the Order, like a number of soldiers before him. Sir Walter Mauny (c.1310–72), for example, founded the London charterhouse in 1371; William, third Lord Zouche (c.1340–96), that at Coventry in 1381–2. Henry V founded a house at Sheen for forty Carthusian monks in 1415, partly to fulfil the penance Gregory XII imposed on his father in 1408 for the execution of Richard Scrope, archbishop of York, who had been implicated in the Percy family rebellions against Henry IV. The charterhouse was to be simple and austere – clothing, bedding and diet were all plain, silence was to be maintained, and individuals lived separately except in choir and chapter. The house was, however, richly endowed with properties confiscated from alien priories.45 Carthusian austerity explains the

patronage and support the Order enjoyed in the later Middle Ages. By comparison with the criticism suffered by some of the larger and wealthier Orders, they were praised and flourished during the Hundred Years War.46

Despite action taken against the alien priories, concern about the activities of foreign ecclesiastics continued to be voiced regularly in Parliament. For example, in 1373 the Commons called for legislation to prevent daughter-houses of French monasteries sending resources and intelligence across the Channel.47 In reality, members of alien priories often supported the English war effort. They included the French-born prior of Lewes in Sussex, who in 1377 defended the town against a raid by his former countrymen.48 This is an indication of the new role demanded of the clergy in this period. For the first time and only time, between 1369 and 1418 the English clergy were arrayed for military service as part of royal policy and were compelled to take up arms to defend against threatened invasion. Stipulations were made regarding the arms and armour with which a clergyman should be equipped. A clerk with a benefice worth between £40 and £100 marks should be armed with chain-mail gloves, plates of armour covering his back and chest, a helmet with visor, and with protection for the stomach, arms, thighs and lower legs. Alternatively he could substitute this expensive plate armour with a leather tunic and shirt of chain mail. He was also to provide a lance, shield, sword, knife and three horses. Those clergy with a larger income were to bring armed retainers with them; those with fewer resources did not have to bring horses; and the poorest merely had to bring a longbow or send an archer in their place. Those unable to serve because of age or infirmity were to contribute towards a replacement.49

These responsibilities were defensive, but clergy were often called on to fulfil them. Haim of Offington, abbot of Battle in Sussex (1364–84), spent a good deal of the latter years of his abbacy defending the south coast against French assault. In response to an attack on Rye in 1377, he prepared a defence plan and fended off an attack on Winchelsea. He was less successful in 1380 when the town was captured and one of the monks captured.50

Hence, despite the fact that clerics were forbidden to shed blood, clergy-men of all ranks participated in the war and many served on campaign. Guillaume de Melun, archbishop of Sens, and the bishop of Châlons were in the French ranks at the battle of Poitiers in 1356, and Richard Courtenay, bishop of Norwich, died of dysentery while serving at the siege of Harfleur in 1415.51 English priests regularly accompanied expeditions to France:
those who did so needed special episcopal licences permitting them to be absent from their parishes. Soldiers, it seems, could find plenty of foreign priests to rob while on campaign, but they did not always trust or understand them sufficiently to look to them for confession or to receive the Eucharist. And perhaps French priests were less than amenable to the idea of caring for the spiritual welfare of soldiers who plundered their churches.  

Campaigning, undoubtedly, was harsh and a difficult experience for those unused to long periods in the saddle, out of doors and under threat of attack. The author of the Gesta Henrici Quinti described the discomfort of the priestly contingent on the 1415 campaign: how they were 'made faint by great weariness', their 'dire need of food', and their fear that caused them to look 'up in bitterness to Heaven, seeking the clemency of Providence'. He and his fellows accompanied the army to celebrate the divine office, hear confessions and pray for success. He described how, during the battle of Agincourt in 1415, he remained with the baggage train, sitting on a horse and praying for the destruction of the enemy, calling on God to 'Destroy their strength and scatter them'. And when the French finally engaged the English and drove them back, having fought through successive volleys of arrows, the anonymous chaplain and his fellows feared the worst: 'And then we who had been assigned to the clerical militia and were watching fell upon our faces in prayer... crying out aloud in bitterness of spirit that God might even yet remember us and the crown of England and, by the grace of His supreme bounty, deliver us from this iron furnace and the terrible death which menaced us.' Henry V and his men may well have believed that their prayers secured the miraculous victory.

The Hundred Years War placed ecclesiastical life under enormous strain. Forms of observance and the character of worship were changed by the experience of war, but spiritual life was not completely stifled. Rather, the struggle helped stimulate a process of reorganisation and revival. Clergymen were not only victims of war; they shaped and directed the conflict. In their literary and diplomatic efforts, they promoted the war and sought resolutions to it. They were victims and instigators of violence, propagandists and peacemakers. The war divided the European Church and the Great Schism made that theoretical division a practical reality. Such divisions were, in part, the product of the Hundred Years War and they ensured that the Church could not play an effective role in resolving the conflict. This was a great pity when the calls for peace resounded in the 1390s.

CHAPTER 4

Making Peace

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

1396

Those who want war and follow the camps and are eager for spoils and thirsting for loot are like the vulture who eats men and follows the camps of war.  

John Gower, Vox Clamantis

After Charles V’s formal confiscation of the principality of Aquitaine in 1369, the reversal of English military and political fortunes was dramatic. Almost everything gained as a consequence of the great victories at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356), which the treaty of Brétigny (1360) had, seemingly, confirmed, was lost by about 1372. But the English hold on southwest France, though weakened, was not entirely broken, and in 1380 Charles V and his principal military commander and constable of France, Bertrand du Guesclin, both died – the successors to these architects of the French revival were not men of the same calibre. The English, however, could not take advantage of this to strike back. The turmoil of the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 rocked Richard II’s minority government and the king himself soon had to face a personal threat from a group of magnates known as the Appellants (1386–87). In such difficult circumstances significant elements at the French and English courts began to seek a peaceful resolution to the Anglo-French war. In particular, although militant voices remained strident in some quarters, both kings wished for peace (at least when Charles VI was sufficiently lucid to express an opinion). But the development of a peace policy was not solely the result of royal initiatives; by the later fourteenth century a social climate had developed in which calls for a diplomatic solution to the Hundred Years War resounded. The conflict had taken a heavy toll in lives and taxation; trade had been