


9-1993

The Elite and Popular Foundations of German Catholicism in the Age of Confessionalism: The Reichskirche.

Marc R. Forster

Connecticut College, mrfor@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/histfacpub>

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Forster, Marc R. "The Elite And Popular Foundations Of German Catholicism In The Age Of Confessionalism: The Reichskirche." *Central European History (Brill Academic Publishers)* 26.3 (1993): 311-325. Web.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.

The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.

The Elite and Popular Foundations of German Catholicism in the Age of Confessionalism: The Reichskirche.

Keywords

Particularism, theology, christian union, Germany, Catholic

Comments

Initially published in *Central European History*, Sep93, Vol. 26 Issue 3, p311-325.

Copyright © Cambridge University Press 1993

DOI: 10.1017/S0008938900009158

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900009158>

The Elite and Popular Foundations of German Catholicism in the Age of Confessionalism: The *Reichskirche*

Marc R. Forster

THE nature of Catholicism in early modern Central Europe did not result solely from a conflict between elite reform endeavors and popular traditionalism. Instead, the Catholic population and influential elements within the German Imperial church (*Reichskirche*) shared a devotion to particularism, privilege, and local religious traditions. This convergence of popular and elite religious attitudes underscores the local character of German Catholicism and helps explain the failure of Tridentine universalism to capture the German church.¹

The effect of the essentially conservative *Reichskirche* on popular Catholicism also changed during the early modern period. In the years immediately following the Council of Trent, the institutions of the Imperial church, especially monasteries and collegiate chapters, played a negative role, shielding local religion from church reformers. Tridentine reformers, particularly bishops, their officials, parish priests trained in newly founded seminaries and reforming orders like the Jesuits, represented, above all, Catholic universalism. Often educated in the sixteenth century in Rome at the *Collegium Germanicum*, reformers had a "vision of Catholic renewal shaped by the Roman Curia and the Jesuits, namely, that the confessional competition within the empire represented a universal struggle . . . that subsumed all local particularist interest."² These elite churchmen were backed

I would like to thank Jeff H. Lesser and my parents, Elborg and Robert Forster, for their help on earlier versions of this article. Some of the research was funded by the R. Francis Johnson Faculty Development Fund of Connecticut College.

1. Andreas Veit and Ludwig Lenhart, *Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit im Zeitalter des Barock* (Freiburg, 1956) discuss the importance of church institutions. John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe" *Past and Present* 47 (1970) and *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (London, 1985) as well as Jean Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire. A New View of the Counter-Reformation* (London, 1977) emphasize the independence of popular religion.

2. R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* (London, New York, 1989), 46.

up by papal nuncios, and were often highly mobile, serving in various dioceses. Their attitude toward local traditions and institutions was generally hostile and they considered themselves enemies of all entrenched corporate interests.³

There could be little common ground between the Tridentine reformers and the clerics of the Imperial church. Yet after about 1650 the *Reichskirche* did gradually shed the pervasive indifference to parochial religion that had been prevalent in the late medieval church and, assimilating some of the goals of the Council of Trent, became actively involved in local religion, supporting and promoting traditional practices in the villages. By the eighteenth century, the influence of these institutions in the villages gave local German Catholicism an elite as well as a popular stamp.

The affinity between much of the ecclesiastic elite and local Catholicism reflects the strong conservative, traditional, and provincial atmosphere within the *Reichskirche*.⁴ Much of the Catholic clergy resisted the full implementation of the Tridentine reforms for narrowly particularist reasons. In some cases they sought to protect their aristocratic lifestyle from the moral reform championed by the Jesuits, but most elements of the *Reichskirche* simply defended their privileges and independence against the threat of episcopal centralization. In the late seventeenth century, as threats posed by Tridentine reform receded, these churchmen supported local religion, apparently linking the survival of German Catholic particularism with the vitality of popular Catholicism.

It is not surprising that conservative monasteries and chapters championed traditional Catholicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The alliance between the Catholic population and these institutions reflects, however, a remarkable transformation in the relationship between the popular classes and the Imperial church. This shift occurred during the early modern period, because in the early sixteenth century monasteries and chapters had been highly unpopular. Long a target of church reformers, monasteries in particular came under fierce attack from Protestants. Furthermore, the great rural monasteries of south Germany were

3. Hsia, *Social Discipline*, chap. 3, Marc R. Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the Villages: Religion and Reform in the Bishopric of Speyer* (Ithaca, 1992) (Hereafter cited as Forster), esp. chap. 2.

4. Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (July), 1989: 401. See also, Heribert Raab, "Die oberdeutschen Hochstifte zwischen Habsburg und Wittelsbach in der frühen Neuzeit," *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 109 (1973): 69-101. Peter Hersche, "Intendierte Rückständigkeit: Zur Charakteristik des geistlichen Staates im alten Reich," in Georg Schmidt, ed., *Stände und Gesellschaft im alten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1989). Gerhard Benecke, "The German *Reichskirche*," in William J. Callahan and David Higgs, eds., *Church and Society in Catholic Europe of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1979): 77-87.

among the earliest targets of peasant rebels during the Peasants' War of 1525.⁵ The Jesuits also did much to sully the reputation of the older monastic orders and collegiate chapters, especially during the Thirty Years' War, when the Society of Jesus hoped to benefit from the Edict of Restitution (1629) to take over former properties of monasteries secularized by the Protestants in the sixteenth century.⁶

Nevertheless, the relationship between mid-level church institutions and the Catholic population changed between the Peasants' War and the Peace of Westphalia (1648). If "economic anti-clericalism" defined this relationship around 1500, by 1700 the catchphrase was "Unter dem krummen Stab ist gut wohnen." (One lives well under the crozier.)⁷ Although economic and political conflicts continued in the eighteenth century, it seems that agreement on religious issues brought the people of Catholic Germany and local church institutions together.⁸

Evidence drawn particularly from the two Rhenish bishoprics of Speyer and Constance shows that Catholic religious life developed out of a dynamic that involved more than just a struggle between churchmen intent on reforming popular religion and a population determined to resist religious change.⁹ Both compromise and conflict were evident among church reformers, the rural population, and powerful local ecclesiastic institutions. This perspective forces a rethinking of the religious history of early modern Europe.¹⁰ The significant role of intermediary church institutions, as well as their resilience throughout the early modern period, calls into question the still dominant acculturation thesis of Jean Delumeau and John Bossy. In this view, the history of early modern Catholicism is one of conflict between reformed Tridentine Catholicism, which is understood as elite and even "modernizing," and traditional Catholicism,

5. See Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore, 1981). Henry Cohn, "Anticlericalism in the German Peasants' War, 1525," *Past and Present* 83 (1979): esp. 16–31.

6. Forster, 158–61. Robert Bireley, *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation. Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J. and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981).

7. Cohn, "Anticlericalism"; Hersche, "Intendierte Rückständigkeit."

8. Perhaps the emphasis of the Council of Trent on pastoral work forced the monks and canons, who had resisted the parochial emphasis of Tridentine reform in the sixteenth century, to become more active among the population, undermining their reputation as useless and parasitic. See Rudolf Reinhardt, *Restoration, Visitation, Inspiration. Die Reformbestrebungen in der Benediktinerabtei Weingarten von 1567–1627* (Munich, 1960), 80–82.

9. Large parts of these bishoprics were Protestant after 1550. Together, they make up most of the modern German *Land* of Baden-Württemberg, as well as parts of the Palatinate, Alsace, and northern Switzerland.

10. The Bossy/Delumeau thesis is also undermined by the fact that villagers were often able to keep control in local religious life. See for example Keith P. Luria, *Territories of Grace: Cultural Change in the 17th Century Diocese of Grenoble* (Berkeley, 1991), and Forster. On

perceived as primarily popular, relatively immobile, and conservative.¹¹ In Germany at least, reformers failed to dominate the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and were thus in a poor position to “acculturate” or discipline popular religion.

The Resilience of the *Reichskirche*

The *Reichskirche* was not an institution of the Holy Roman Empire, although at times Catholic ecclesiastical princes cooperated politically, nor was the *Reichskirche* a protonational church. Indeed localism was so pronounced that any unity, even on religious matters, was superficial, if not impossible. The concept of Imperial church refers here to the large number of ecclesiastical institutions found in Catholic Germany, including prince-bishoprics, aristocratic cathedral chapters, imperial abbeys, collegiate chapters, and military orders.¹²

Along the Rhine and in the southwest, collegiate chapters and independent monasteries were particularly vital for the development of local Catholicism. Unlike the bishops and the canons of the cathedral chapters (from which most bishops were elected), these chapters and monasteries had few cosmopolitan connections and little stake in the efforts of Catholic reformers. Bishops gained extensive new rights and powers from the Council of Trent, but smaller chapters could only assume that Tridentine reforms meant greater episcopal supervision, a more disciplined lifestyle, and a shifting of material resources from ecclesiastical institutions to the parishes. Even during the peak period of Catholic reform in Germany (1580–1620), when most bishops, under pressure from the papacy and with the vigorous support of the Jesuits, sought to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent, canons, abbots, and monks of these smaller church institutions resisted and hindered reform. These institutions remained provincial, conservative, and traditional in their organization, outlook, and religiosity into the eighteenth century.

The smaller chapters and monasteries exerted their influence in a number of ways. Especially in the sixteenth century, they were able to weaken

confessionalization, see Heinz Schilling, “Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich. Religiöser und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Deutschland zwischen 1555 und 1620,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 246 (1988): 1–45.

11. There are important differences between Bossy and Delumeau, especially in their view of medieval Christianity, which Delumeau characterizes as “pagan,” and which Bossy sees as a community-oriented Christianity. See Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation” and idem, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700*; Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire*; and Wolfgang Reinhard, “Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977).

12. Benecke, “The German *Reichskirche*,” 78–80. “The *Reichskirche* [was] a unifying concept and not an actual institution of the Old Reich.”

and even block Tridentine reforms, primarily in order to defend their special rights and privileges. Later, particularly after the Thirty Years' War, they exerted their rights of patronage and, through their presence in the countryside and in small towns, chapters and monasteries strengthened the traditional and local traits of rural Catholicism.¹³

Small chapters and monasteries were commonplace in the western bishoprics of Germany. There were five chapters in the small bishopric of Speyer, despite the fact that by the mid-sixteenth century two-thirds of the pre-Reformation diocese was Protestant. In Trier the number of these institutions was so great that half of the Electorate's parishes were incorporated into chapters, monasteries, and convents.¹⁴ They were also common in Strasbourg, Constance, Mainz, and Cologne, with most of the monasteries concentrated in southern Swabia and the Black Forest.

These institutions resisted Protestantism as well as the Counter-Reformation. While urban monasteries (at least for men) often emptied out in the early Reformation period, rural monasteries and ecclesiastical chapters generally remained loyal to the old church.¹⁵ In some of the smaller bishoprics, like Worms and Speyer, it was the chapters, led by the cathedral chapters, that prevented Protestant-leaning bishops, who were supported by neighboring Protestant princes, from secularizing the smaller ecclesiastical territories.¹⁶

Even as confessional conflicts increased during the sixteenth century, this loyalty to the Catholic church did not lead to enthusiasm for church reform. Many canons, abbots, monks, and vicars did not make the connection, that was so popular among reformers, between moral and behavioral reform and institutional survival. Thus a 1549 report on conditions within the *Ritterstift* (or Knightly Chapter) in the town of Bruchsal (Bishopric of Speyer) gives a picture of canons unapologetically living like noblemen. Several had concubines; a number had, without permission, attended military training; they wore laymen's clothing, carried swords, and rarely attended services in the chapter church. One finds little evidence of communal or brotherly behavior, as the chapter was riddled with feuds and financial disputes.¹⁷

13. On the concept of local religion, see William Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* (Princeton, 1981).

14. Hansgeorg Molitor, *Kirchliche Reformversuche der Kurfürsten und Erzbischöfe von Trier im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation* (Wiesbaden, 1967), part 2, ch. 4.

15. Forster, 56. On dissolution of monasteries, see for example, Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century. City Politics and Life between Middle Ages and Modern Times* (Bloomington, Ind., 1976), ch. 4; Miriam Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven, 1967), ch. 9.

16. Ludwig Stamer, *Kirchengeschichte der Pfalz*, vol 3:1 (Speyer, 1945–55), 21. Also Forster, 42–49. See also Hans-Christoph Rublack, *Gescheiterte Reformation: frühreformatorische und protestantische Bewegungen in süd- und westdeutschen Residenzen* (Stuttgart, 1978).

17. GLAK 61/5431, pp. 94r–100v. [Archives: GLAK = Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe,

Positions in the *Ritterstift* were reserved for sons of Imperial knights, and the chapter had a particularly aristocratic atmosphere. Canons in other chapters, however, differed little in behavior and attitude. In the All Saints (*Allerheiligen*) chapter in the city of Speyer, the canons neglected services and manipulated the finances of the chapter for their own personal gain and to the detriment of the chapter.¹⁸ The St. German chapter, also in Speyer, had a well-deserved reputation for underpaying the priests serving in its incorporated parishes in the countryside.¹⁹ The chapter clergy in the pre-Tridentine period viewed their benefices as a kind of personal and family property, for which they fulfilled minimal religious obligations.

Despite neglecting their religious duties, canons tended to the business of the chapters very diligently. This became apparent in the 1570s when bishops and papal nuncios began to try to reform conditions within chapters and monasteries. Under this pressure, most chapters showed a surprising self-possession and a determination to defend their independence and self-rule. The chapter in Weissenburg (lower Alsace), for example, was hardly a model of internal discipline and religious piety. In 1572, one canon was removed from the chapter for "bad behavior," yet allowed to return when his family agreed to donate a considerable sum of money to the institution.²⁰ Several canons apparently collected their income while living in Mainz.²¹ Another sought admission to the chapter, assuming that his open concubinage would be no impediment.²² Indeed, several (if not all) of the canons had concubines in the early 1580s.²³

Lax internal discipline did not prevent the canons in Weissenburg from actively defending their chapter and its rights. Thus in 1572, the canons successfully negotiated to buy out, at considerable expense, the patronage rights in the chapter of the Elector Palatine, thus preventing the elector from appointing Protestant canons.²⁴ In 1597, the canons asserted their independence against the reforming Bishop of Speyer, Eberhard von Dienheim.²⁵ On this occasion, the dispute was over the election of a new dean. The bishop hoped to install a reformer, who would enforce tighter discipline in the chapter, while the canons (there were only three) insisted on their right to choose their own leader. The bishop rejected one

ADBR 5 Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin (Strasbourg), HStASt. = Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart].

18. GLAK 78/1552.

19. Forster, 35–36.

20. ADBR 12 J 1656, p. 130b. "Bad behavior" usually meant sexual misconduct of some kind.

21. ADBR 12 J 1656, pp. 95b, 123a.

22. ADBR 12 J 1656, p. 148a. This was in 1582.

23. GLAK 78/2778.

24. ADBR 12 J 1656, p. 115a.

25. On Eberhard, see Forster, ch. 2.

of the canons' candidates, but the chapter refused to elect the bishop's candidate, or even hold its election in the presence of the bishop's representatives. In the end, the canons successfully elected their own dean, although they apparently had to accept the bishop's veto power over their choice. Similar disputes occurred in 1598, 1608, and 1622, when new deans were elected. Each time the chapter maintained its right to elect the dean, to manage its own finances, and to discipline itself.²⁶ If a major goal of the Council of Trent was to enforce episcopal authority, it failed when German bishops encountered chapters like the one in Weissenburg.²⁷

Although some ecclesiastical institutions, like the St. Guido Chapter in Speyer and the Benedictine monastery of Weingarten, embraced Tridentine reforms, at least in the period 1580–1620, they always defended their “liberties” and independence.²⁸ The canons at St. Guido, led by their dean Dionysius Burckhart, moved to enforced internal discipline and even sought to reform religious conditions in the chapter's incorporated parish of Otterstadt. The canons did not, however, involve the bishop in this process, and when the reform party lost influence after about 1610, the chapter returned to its traditional relaxed discipline and lost all interest in the rural parishes.²⁹

Tridentine reformers, especially the Jesuits, exerted influence in many chapters and monasteries in the decades after 1570.³⁰ These reformers emphasized the moral renewal of the lives of the clergy and could do little to change the institutional setting. The Thirty Years' War, however, ended this reform period. In fact, Tridentine reform in much of Germany was an episode that ended in the 1630s, not, as is often argued, an ongoing reform movement that lasted from the 1580s into the eighteenth century.³¹ Conditions in most chapters and monasteries after 1650 differed little from those in the mid-sixteenth century. The canons continued to defend their rights and privileges and resisted all efforts to enforce episcopal authority over the chapters. Even in 1700, the chapter in Weissenburg, for example, showed little or no interest in the Catholic

26. All these documents can be found in GLAK 78/2778, which is unpaginated.

27. The chapter in Weissenburg was probably the weakest in the bishopric of Speyer. Clearly bishops had little chance of enforcing their authority in the Cathedral chapters or the Imperial monasteries. See for example Louis Châtellier, *Tradition chrétienne et renouveau catholique dans le cadre de l'ancien Diocèse de Strasbourg (1650–1770)* (Paris, 1981), part 2, chs. 1 and 2.

28. On Weingarten, see Reinhardt, *Restauration, Visitation, Inspiration*.

29. Forster, pp. 111–16.

30. Reinhardt, *Restauration, Visitation, Inspiration*, esp. 20–30, 192–214.

31. Historians have often failed to recognize the spasmodic nature of Tridentine reform. See Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire*. Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 39–40, discusses different stages of Catholic renewal.

parish of the town, of which it was the patron. Despite complaints from the town council and pressure from the bishop, the canons refused to appoint a parish priest, giving a canon the income of the parish instead. This canon fulfilled his duties in a perfunctory way, never preaching, teaching catechism classes, or visiting the sick and dying. The canons did not think of the chapter as a pastoral institution and were reluctant to shift resources to the parishes.³²

The *Ritterstift* in Bruchsal, because the chapter was originally an independent Benedictine monastery founded in the twelfth century, and perhaps because its members were all Imperial knights, was particularly aggressive in defending its rights and privileges in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Typical of the determination of the *Ritterstift* canons was the twenty year conflict between the Bishop of Speyer and the canon Herr von Frenz. In 1654, von Frenz refused to attend an episcopal visitation of the chapter, ignored summons to appear before the bishop's court, was suspended, and eventually excommunicated. Von Frenz then appealed to Rome and the papal nuncio in Cologne and the case dragged on into the 1670s. In the long run the pope expressly confirmed the bishop's right to inspect conditions within the chapter. The bishop then apparently revoked von Frenz's suspension and excommunication and the canon kept his position in the chapter.³³

Even convents, in theory more vulnerable to episcopal control, maintained considerable independence and self-government in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After the Peace of Westphalia, the Convent of Frauenalb (northern Baden), was able to secure its authority over a number of villages in the region and exercise its patronage over five Catholic parishes. The sources indicate that the abbesses neglected these parishes and did little to support reform efforts or confessionalization of the population.³⁴ The behavior of the nuns in the convent was proper, according to the inspectors appointed by the Bishop of Speyer who visited the convent in 1657. Their friendly report indicates that conditions in the convent were acceptable, that the nuns behaved piously, did not travel extensively, took regular walks in the surrounding hills (but did not associate overly much with the villagers), and only occasionally played a friendly game of cards. At the same time, these officials admitted that episcopal authority in the isolated convent was shaky at best, and that the bishop

32. Forster, 192. P. Archange Sieffert, "Die katholische Pfarrei St. Johann zu Weissenburg im achtzehnten Jahrhundert," *Archiv für elsässische Kirchengeschichte* 4 (1929): 177-78.

33. GLAK 94/271.

34. Hans-Joachim Köhler, *Obrigkeitsliche Konfessionsänderung in Kondominaten. Eine Fallstudie über ihre Bedingungen und Methoden am Beispiel der baden-badischen Religionspolitik unter der Regierung Markgraf Wilhelms (1622-1677)* (Münster, 1975), 119-27. The nuns played the Bishop of Speyer off against the local Margraves of Baden-Baden.

had little chance of forcing the nuns to comply with his wishes.³⁵ In fact, conditions within the convent may have been laxer than episcopal officials could determine. In the 1690s, for example, the abbess of Frauenalb intercepted a series of love letters between a nun and a local priest which indicated a long-standing relationship.³⁶ Despite this episode, Frauenalb was hardly a center of scandal in the region; it was also far from a center of reformed Catholicism.

Monasteries were in theory less vulnerable to episcopal centralization than convents and ecclesiastical chapters, yet abbots and monks shared the fear of episcopal centralization. The privileges and exemptions of German monasteries were so extensive that the decrees of Trent threatened considerable new episcopal interference. Monasteries were quick to assert their rights, particularly when villagers appealed to episcopal officials for redress of problems in the parishes. Thus the abbot of Schussenreid protested vigorously in 1649 to the Bishop of Constance that his monks were indeed providing local parishes with religious services in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, despite complaints from several peasants.³⁷ Conflicts between bishops and monasteries over episcopal visitation rights in the monasteries and in the parishes, over episcopal supervision of finances, and over episcopal interference in monastic elections were common.³⁸

The outlook of the nuns, monks, and canons was more than just defensive. Clerics of the Imperial church consciously favored particularism over centralization. A long legal document produced for the *Ritterstift* in the eighteenth century demonstrates this attitude. The canons saw themselves, not as an institution of the universal church, but as an Imperial chapter, enmeshed in a particular web of obligations, privileges, and rights. The chapter claimed a variety of privileges ranging from the right to tap its own wine between Easter and Pentecost to complete independence from any secular authority.³⁹ The canons were not unaware of the decrees of the Council of Trent, especially those decrees requiring the residence of the canon and the right of bishops to conduct a visitation of the chapter.⁴⁰ The report, however, also deftly sidesteps these decrees, arguing that the chapter possessed papal exemptions broad enough to negate all episcopal rights granted by Trent.⁴¹

35. GLAK 88/389.

36. GLAK 88/402.

37. HStASt. B467/Bü28.

38. For conflicts between the Bishops of Constance and the Abbey of St. Gallen in the eighteenth century, see GLAK 82/584. See also Armgard von Reden-Dohna, *Reichsstandschaft und Klosterherrschaft. Die schwäbischen Reichsprälaten im Zeitalter des Barock* (Wiesbaden, 1982), esp. 13–15.

39. GLAK 65/11604, pp. 31v–33v.

40. GLAK 65/11604, pp. 38v–42v.

41. GLAK 65/11604, p. 45r.

In the eighteenth century as in the sixteenth, canons, abbots, abbesses, monks, and nuns across the “individualized country” of Germany shared the attitude of the canons of the *Ritterstift*. Should we expect otherwise? The chapters and Imperial monasteries could only keep their ecclesiastic immunities, extensive secular powers, and vast properties within the “incubator” of the Holy Roman Empire.⁴² Centralization, whether undertaken by a powerful prince or by the church, could only hurt these institutions and the universalism of Tridentine Catholicism was inimical to the world view of the *Reichskirche*. This element of the church clung doggedly to both its special prerogatives and to particularism.⁴³

The *Reichskirche* and Traditional Catholicism

The institutional strength of the monasteries and collegiate chapters meant that, despite the efforts of some Tridentine reformers, they remained important elements in German Catholicism throughout the early modern period. Furthermore, through their powers of patronage, their secular authority in many villages and their very presence in the countryside, these institutions were far from marginal elements in the religious lives of the people. If, in the sixteenth century, chapters and monasteries functioned to impede reform, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they tended actively to strengthen and reinforce the traditional elements of popular Catholicism. More specifically, the particularism of church institutions dovetailed with the devotion of the rural population to local religious traditions. Together, the Catholic people and these institutions prevented the imposition of uniform religious practice or (to quote John Bossy) a “code of parochial observance [that] should be made watertight and universally enforced,” thus allowing for the survival of local religion.⁴⁴

The sources reveal much about institutional friction within the church, especially between the bishops and these middle-level institutions. It is more difficult to determine the influence of these institutions on the Catholic population. Chapters and monasteries did have some power through their control over the appointment of parish priests. In the bishopric of Speyer, for example, one quarter of the Catholic parishes were incorporated into the five small chapters.⁴⁵ In the Electorate of Trier, about half of the parish priests were appointed by monasteries, convents, and collegiate chapters.⁴⁶

42. Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, Estate, General Estate* (Ithaca, 1971).

43. Hersche, “Intendierte Rückständigkeit”; James Allen Vann, *The Swabian Kreis: Institutional Growth in the Holy Roman Empire, 1648–1715* (Brussels, 1975).

44. Bossy, “The Counter-Reformation,” 53. On local religion see especially Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth Century Spain* and Keith Luria, *Territories of Grace*.

45. Forster, 51. The Cathedral chapter had patronage of another third.

The pattern was similar in the rest of west and southwest Germany. As Louis Châtellier has argued quite persuasively in reference to the Bishopric of Strasbourg, much of the parish clergy continued to view a seat in a chapter as the goal of a clerical career, even as Tridentine reformers emphasized the role of the parish priest. To paraphrase Châtellier, as long as the canon was more important than the parish priest, and services in the choir more important than in the nave, the spirit of the Counter-Reformation could not penetrate deeply into either church or society.⁴⁷

The weakness of episcopal government in some bishoprics, especially in the impoverished bishoprics of Worms, Speyer, Trier, and Constance, left much ecclesiastical administration in the hands of either cathedral chapters, or, in the case of much of the huge diocese of Constance, the monasteries.⁴⁸ In the dioceses of Münster and Cologne, the provosts of the most important collegiate chapters served as archdeacons, with extensive powers of discipline and oversight in the rural parishes.⁴⁹ In Southern Swabia, imperial monasteries like Salem, Weingarten, Rot an der Rot, and Ochsenhausen were constantly involved in the religious lives of their subjects and the parish priests that served them.⁵⁰

Collegiate chapters and monasteries were secular powers as well. In this role, ecclesiastical institutions were, at least before the eighteenth century, less inclined than secular states to interfere in the lives of their subjects.⁵¹ The canons of the *Ritterstift* in Bruchsal, for example, were lords of five large villages in the Kraichgau region. These villages, although nominally Catholic, become overwhelmingly Lutheran in the 1560s, apparently due to the influence of the neighboring (and Protestant) electoral Palatinate over the local clergy. Remarkably, the canons, despite engaging their subjects in several disputes over rents and tithes, ignored religious conditions in their villages for twenty-five years.⁵² The village communes appointed the clergy and organized rural religion. Efforts of the *Ritterstift* and the bishop of Speyer in the 1580s to Catholicize the

46. Molitor, *Kirchliche Reformversuche*, ch. 4.

47. Châtellier, *Tradition chrétienne et renouveau catholique*, part 4, ch. 4.

48. Hubert Jedin, *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 5 (Freiburg, 1970), 158.

49. Thomas Becker, *Konfessionalisierung in Kurköln. Untersuchungen zur Durchsetzung der katholischen Reform in den Dekanaten Ahrgau und Bonn anhand von Visitationsprotokollen* (Bonn, 1989), ch. 2, 2. August Franzen, *Der Wiederaufbau des kirchlichen Lebens im Erzbistum Köln unter Ferdinand von Bayern, Erzbischof von Köln 1612–1650* (Münster, 1941) section 3, ch. 4. Manfred Becker-Huberti, *Die tridentinische Reform im Bistum Münster unter Fürstbischof Christof Bernhard von Galen, 1650 bis 1678* (Münster, 1978).

50. These records are in HStAst. Abteilung B486, B481L, B515. GLAK 98 (Salem).

51. Hersche, "Intendierte Rückständigkeit," in T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz: 1743–1803* (London, 1974); von Reden-Dohna, *Reichsstandschaft und Klosterherrschaft*; Vann, *The Swabian Kreis*, esp. 43–47.

52. GLAK 229/57523, 229/57524, 229/79260. See also Forster, 53–54.

villages floundered on the unwillingness of the villagers to give up either their Protestant traditions or their control of the local church, and the opposition of the powerful electoral Palatinate. It is also interesting to note the arguments used by the *Ritterstift* in their efforts to convince the villagers to convert to Catholicism.

The dean of the chapter, Georg von Coppenstein, went in person to one village and made a short speech to the villagers, hoping to persuade them to boycott Protestant services. First he reminded the villagers that the Calvinists had come in and torn down the altar, ripped up the holy pictures, and knocked down the baptismal font.

We want you . . . to consider how dangerous and damaging it could be, in matters concerning the salvation of your souls, to agree to, or accept personally, quick and unfounded changes. Instead, [it would be] safer and surer to stay firmly within the old Catholic church and its teachings, which your praiseworthy forefathers handed down to you and us.

This is a traditionalist argument. Von Coppenstein hoped to keep the villagers loyal to the church, not by convincing them of the superiority of Catholic doctrine or practices, but primarily with an appeal to local tradition. It apparently did not work, probably because, after twenty years of Lutheran services, the villagers now regarded tradition as Protestant.⁵³

The story of the *Ritterstift* villages illustrates the nature of the relationship between these intermediary church institutions and the rural population in the sixteenth century. First of all, canons lacked interest in rural Catholicism and left villagers to manage their own parishes, provided, of course, that they paid tithes, rents, and dues. Secondly, what influence these institutions did exercise tended to be traditional and conservative; the canons were not advocates of Tridentine reforms, new devotions, or parochial conformity.⁵⁴ After 1650, the latter attitude became particularly important and it is worth illustrating this in greater detail.

It was not unusual for canons to cooperate with local populations in resisting religious reforms. In 1653, the canons of the *Ritterstift* prevented a new priest, Peter Nobs, who had been appointed by the bishop, from introducing the Forty Hours Devotion (a favorite Tridentine practice), in the chapter church.⁵⁵ In this action the canons may well have been sup-

53. Forster, 54. GLAK 42/no. 4736.

54. The conflicts between the older monastic orders and the Jesuits, especially during the Thirty Years' War were part of this debate. The Jesuits had few supporters in collegiate chapters either, especially after 1650. See Forster, 216–21. There is little indication that the Jesuits made much effort to influence this group, except during the late sixteenth century. Louis Châtellier, *The Europe of the Devout: The Catholic Reformation and the Formation of a New Society* (Cambridge, 1989), chs. 5 and 6. Also Reinhardt, *Restoration, Visitation, Inspiration*.

55. GLAK 94/439. See also Forster, 193. On the Forty Hours Devotion, see Keith

ported by the people of Bruchsal, who also objected to Nobs's effort to end the singing of German hymns in the church (a local tradition), to stop the ringing of bells for various purposes, and his efforts to prevent another priest from saying services in the city.⁵⁶ A long conflict ensued, with Nobs and the bishop on one side, and the citizens of Bruchsal and the *Ritterstift* on the other. Temporarily, the bishop was able to force the chapter to accept his priest in the church (which also served the community). There is little evidence that traditional and local religious practices were suppressed in Bruchsal, however.⁵⁷

The monasteries and collegiate chapters were an important part of Catholic life in southern Swabia, as they were along the Rhine. Although reformers argued that regular clergy should not interfere with the work of parish priests, in the late sixteenth century monks from the Abbey of Weingarten increased their pastoral activity in the countryside. In addition to serving the local population in the monastery church, monks served on missions in the villages, preaching, introducing catechism classes, hearing confessions, and visiting the sick.⁵⁸ In the eighteenth century, monks also played a similar role in rural religion, especially at pilgrimage sites.⁵⁹ In some places, "the parishioners did not have sufficient trust in their parish priests, because they were suspicious of them or were in conflict with them," and therefore went to the monks instead.⁶⁰ The activity of large numbers of monk/priests undermined the Tridentine goal of parochial conformity, especially in places where few parish priests were available to serve the population.⁶¹

Monasteries and chapters supported and encouraged the renewal of old shrines and the development of new ones. The monastery of Salem (Salmensweiler) promoted a new Marian shrine at Birnau in the 1750s.⁶² Even in the 1770s, as Enlightenment influences began to gain ground within German Catholicism, the monks of Salem publicized the healing powers of a priest in a nearby village.⁶³ Although they were not advocates

Luria, "The Counter-Reformation and Popular Spirituality" in Louis Dupré and Donald E. Saliers, eds., *Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern* (New York, 1989).

56. GLAK 133/461.

57. The *Ritterstift* also resisted episcopal efforts to discipline and control the priests in its patronage parishes, GLAK 61/10973, pp. 121–22.

58. Reinhardt, *Restoration, Visitation, Inspiration*, 80–83.

59. HStASt. B17/426. This is a survey of all monasteries in Vorderösterreich, done by the Austrian government in preparation for the dissolution of monasteries as part of the Josephine reforms.

60. HStASt. B17/426, report from Kurnberg. Perhaps the villagers were suspicious of parish priests with too much knowledge of local conditions.

61. HStASt. B17/426. The report on Staufen comments that the priests would not be able to handle parochial duties without help in the "*volkreichen Land*."

62. GLAK 98/3245.

63. GLAK 98/1595.

of the full Tridentine program, monks and canons could champion new shrines and even new religious practices. Thus, like the Catholic population, these churchmen could pick and choose those devotions that fit within their religious culture.⁶⁴ This was not the rigidly unchanging ecclesiastical culture of the fifteenth century, as described so aptly by Francis Rapp.⁶⁵

That the monasteries of southern Swabia promoted local devotions should come as no surprise. Monasteries in Bavaria did the same, often for the financial benefits that came from an active and popular pilgrimage destination in the region.⁶⁶ Furthermore, religious ties between country and abbey were reinforced by the fact that most of the monks were, in fact, sons of burghers and peasants from the areas around these monasteries.⁶⁷ A common interest in shrines, pilgrimages, processions, and the cult of saints indicates that monks shared a traditional and local religious mentality with the people. This was not a religion of interiorized piety and "inward spiritual values," but rather a community religion (whether the community was the village or the monastery) that often focused on the need to "propitiate saints . . . in order to manipulate a harsh environment."⁶⁸

This support of local religious traditions came naturally in the great abbeys of upper Swabia, where each monastery had its own liturgical and spiritual heritage. Efforts led by the Abbot Wegelin of Weingarten in the late sixteenth century to enforce liturgical uniformity in the Benedictine monasteries of the region were thoroughly unsuccessful. Wegelin doubted that any agreement could be reached given the wide variety of religious practices in the monasteries.⁶⁹ The particularism of chapters and monasteries was not just political and institutional, it was religious as well.

Conclusion

The political, institutional, and religious particularism of the German church reinforced the loyalty of the population to local religious traditions. This gave German Catholicism a local emphasis and hindered the imposition of reformed Catholicism, which sought to homogenize, centralize, and

64. Châtellier, *Tradition chrétienne et renouveau catholique*, 205.

65. Rapp argues that in the late fifteenth century powerful chapters and monasteries prevented reform. Francis Rapp, *Réformes et Réformation à Strasbourg. Eglise et société dans le Diocèse de Strasbourg (1450–1525)* (Paris, 1974).

66. Rainer Beck, "Der Pfarrer und das Dorf," in Richard van Dülmen, ed., *Armut, Liebe, Ehre. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung* (Frankfurt, 1988), 124–31.

67. Vann, *The Swabian Kreis*, 45–46. Von Reden-Dohna, *Reichsstandschafft und Klosterherrschaft*, 29–34. More research is needed on the social makeup of various church institutions and the impact this had on relations between these institutions and the population.

68. Luria, "The Counter-Reformation and Popular Spirituality," 104.

69. Reinhardt, *Restauration, Visitation, Inspiration*, 208–9, 222–28.

internationalize the church. While early modern German Catholicism was certainly conservative, it was not rigidly traditional. Religious change occurred in these centuries and it came out of the interaction between the local population, local institutions like the chapters and monasteries, the parish clergy, and reforming churchmen.⁷⁰ The role of chapters and monasteries was not insignificant in this process.

Canons and monks, whose daily lives were taken up with religious practices that owed much more to medieval Christian traditions than to the reforms of the Council of Trent, undoubtedly sympathized with and participated in the religion of the people. In the context of the Holy Roman Empire, many German church institutions fought to preserve their own particular privileges and traditions, which gave them little inclination to destroy the local religion of their subjects. Localism and particularism thus became a valued hallmark of German Catholicism, as much among the Catholic elite as among the people.

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
NEW LONDON

70. Luria, *Territories of Grace*, makes a first step in analyzing this dynamic of religious change. Luria focuses too narrowly on the relationship between reforming bishop and the local population.

Copyright of Central European History (Brill Academic Publishers) is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.