

# Prosperity and Plunder

European Catholic Monasteries in the  
Age of Revolution, 1650–1815

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHY	<i>Austrian History Yearbook</i>
AP	<i>Archives parlementaires</i>
ASVNV	Archivio segreto vaticano, Nunziatura Vienna
BL	British Library, London
DIP	<i>Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione</i> , ed. G. Pelliccia and G. Rocca (Rome, 1973– )
FRA	<i>Fontes rerum austriacarum</i>
HHSA	Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
MIÖG	<i>Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung</i>
MÖSA	<i>Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchivs</i>
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
ZBL	<i>Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte</i>

## THE COUNTER-REFORMATION AND THE MONASTERIES

It was in the middle years of the eighteenth century that the Counter-Reformation reached its apogee. This statement may well astonish, since most historians have located the movement squarely in the sixteenth century, with perhaps an extension into the early seventeenth when the Austrian Habsburg emperors, inspired by the Jesuits, sought to recover Germany for Catholicism in the Thirty Years War. The Peace of Westphalia terminated that war in 1648 by ratifying the political division of Germany on denominational lines. This settlement has been taken to mark both the end of serious religious conflict on the Continent and the general acceptance that Catholicism could hope for no further gains. One notable historian, A.G. Dickens, 'considered the Counter Reformation, properly so called, to have terminated around the middle of the seventeenth century, a time of spiritual cooling and many non-Catholic trends'.<sup>1</sup> But in fact, during the course of the next century, most of one large country, Hungary, was to be won back to Rome by a combination of force and proselytisation, and much of another, Poland, chiefly by missionary effort.<sup>2</sup> After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 Protestants were persecuted and then driven out of France. Among lesser states that followed suit was the prince-archbishopric of Salzburg, which expelled all Protestants in 1731. Of the major rulers who became Catholics, two, Christina of Sweden and James II of England and VII of Scotland, lost their thrones as a result, but a third, Augustus of Saxony, thereby secured election as king of Poland in 1697. It was calculated that a total of fifty-one German princes converted from Protestantism to Catholicism during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under the Treaty of Westphalia the subjects of a German ruler who changed his religion

could retain theirs, but they inevitably suffered a loss of status and influence, and often worse.<sup>3</sup> Until after the middle of the eighteenth century Protestants had reason to fear that intolerant Catholicism was still militant and still gaining ground.<sup>4</sup>

Contrariwise, many historians date ‘the crisis of the European mind’ to the years between 1680 and 1715, when the works of geniuses such as Newton, Locke, Shaftesbury, Bayle, Fontenelle and Leibniz revolutionised our understanding of the universe and of ourselves, thus opening the way to the Enlightenment, a movement that embraced attitudes hostile to Catholicism and even to Christianity itself.<sup>5</sup> Most Enlightened writers were enemies of monasticism, and in any explanation of its *débâcle* during the revolutionary period their attacks must figure prominently. But it took much longer than historians have generally allowed for ‘the crisis of the European mind’ and the Enlightenment to make a significant impression on Catholic Europe. Many indicators suggest that, long after 1715, Catholicism, far from being in retreat, was still strengthening its hold on the people of many countries. Until at least the middle of the century a high proportion of Catholics’ wills, in some areas the majority, stipulated that Masses should be said for the testators’ souls.<sup>6</sup> Though the proportion of theological and religious works among new publications was certainly declining overall throughout the century, there was a notable increase in the total number of such works that were published.<sup>7</sup> It has been found that, in the libraries accumulated by nobles in western France, the proportion of religious books actually *grew* until around the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> More surprisingly still, when in 1778–9 a relaxation of government controls in France led to a flood of reprints of works by dead authors, of over two million copies produced no less than 63.1 per cent were religious. Hence it is possible for the new French school of religious history to claim of France that ‘it was in the eighteenth century that the piety of the Catholic Reformation won the day, through the weight of books of hours, psalters, prayer books and lives of saints’, and, going even further, that this was the time when France was at its most Catholic – indeed that the eighteenth century should be seen as ‘the truly Christian century’.<sup>9</sup> It was a period of massive missionary effort within countries already officially Catholic, for example in France, Bavaria and Italy.<sup>10</sup> Throughout Catholic Europe during most of the century laymen and lay women of all classes, literally in their millions, continued to join in religious brotherhoods under priestly supervision, of which the most famous were those associated with the Jesuits. These organisations had varying emphases but mostly had more than one of the following objects: prayer, religious observances, processions and pilgrimages, religious education, poor relief, care of the sick and aged,

and providing for funerals.<sup>11</sup> Pilgrimages to the sites of miracles and holy relics grew ever more popular, and the number of such places increased as 'tree, rock, spring, hill and cave were brought into relation with the Catholic faith'. Nearly all were connected with the cult of the Virgin Mary. At Mariazell, the principal shrine in Austria, 120,000 to 150,000 people arrived annually in the seventeenth century, 188,000 in 1725 and 373,000 in the jubilee year 1753.<sup>12</sup> But, at least at first glance, the most telling indication that Catholic Reform reached its peak as late as the mid-eighteenth century is the evidence that the proportion of secular priests to population reached its highest known level at roughly that date not only in France, but also in Spain and Italy.<sup>13</sup>

Even those historians who contend that Catholicism was still advancing in the first half of the eighteenth century rarely extend the claim to monasteries and the regular clergy. But in fact they too – monks, nuns and their houses – were still, overall, increasing in numbers. The most striking gain was made by the various Franciscan Orders, among which the Capuchins grew from about 22,000 brothers in 1650 to nearly 33,000 in 1754. In many countries the number of regular clergy, like the number of seculars, peaked around the middle of the eighteenth century. In Poland the number of both male and female monasteries increased by a third between 1700 and 1773, and in the admittedly special case of Hungary the number of monasteries almost doubled between 1700 and 1773.<sup>14</sup> It is certain of course that monastic wealth was still growing, both because land was increasing in value and because property once acquired by the Church could not in general be alienated.<sup>15</sup>

These monastic advances are manifestly, in a crude sense, advances of Catholicism and also of the Counter-Reformation. But it is a question whether the Counter-Reformation ought to be understood as including every apparently successful Catholic activity, or only those developments that fit into a particular programme of reform, especially that of the Council of Trent. Some historians distinguish between the Counter-Reformation directed against Protestantism and a more spontaneous movement perhaps called the 'Catholic Reformation'.<sup>16</sup> Whatever terminology is adopted, it is impossible to treat every aspect of monastic expansion as part of a movement of reform. But, to put it at its lowest, no monastery in this period of spiritual renewal could be immune to reforming influences.

During the acute phase of the Reformation Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinians and Premonstratensians, despite their wealth and political standing, suffered a serious decline even in the countries where monasteries were not suppressed by Protestant rulers. Houses located in the areas that were ravaged by

wars of religion were inevitably affected, especially in parts of France during the second half of the sixteenth century and in most of Belgium and the German lands for over a hundred years before the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Monasteries were assailed, often physically, by the Protestantism that was at times dominant even in what now seem the most unlikely places, such as Austria, Bohemia, Belgium and Provence. But the old Orders were not simply victims of violence; many of their houses were simply abandoned. They had lost much of their appeal even to loyal Catholics.

On the one hand, reformers were uncomfortable with the relaxation of the original rules which had been permitted in almost all the old Orders. What has been written of the Benedictine monks of Westminster abbey in the early sixteenth century applied very widely:

[They] ate flesh-meat almost as frequently as their equals in secular society; as many of them as possible made use of private chambers, in preference to sleeping in the common dormitory; and they moved in and out of the monastery quite freely. They allowed themselves substantial wages, or personal incomes . . . They employed professional cantors to sing their services, and schoolmasters to teach in their schools. Already, in fact, there was a pragmatic resemblance between the community at Westminster and a collegiate establishment.<sup>17</sup>

The Cistercians had long ceased to live in the wilderness and to keep their churches unadorned. As for the Franciscans, those branches which had abandoned their original insistence on poverty were held by many reformers to have entirely lost their justification.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, as we saw in the Introduction, many of the leaders of the Catholic Reform movement of the sixteenth century, intent above all on increasing the numbers and effectiveness of parish clergy and filling parish churches, mounted a more fundamental critique of traditional monasticism. Monasteries, however strict and observant, were seen as obstructing these aims because they isolated their priestly inmates from the world, took worshippers out of parish churches and escaped the supervision of bishops, as also did the private chapels of the aristocracy and, in many cases, even the brotherhoods that financed Masses for their members at special times and in special buildings. Many Catholic reformers throughout our period were torn between the conflicting aims of restoring the older Orders to their original purity and challenging their very *raison d'être*.<sup>19</sup>

However, by the time the Council of Trent came to discuss these matters in 1563, monasticism, condemned by Luther and suppressed by all Protestant rulers, had

become accepted as one of the indispensable defining elements of Catholicism. A Church that maintained belief in purgatory and in the value of praying to saints and of saying Masses for the dead, and glorified chastity and celibacy, necessarily accepted the rationale of monasticism. Though some popes, Catholic rulers and bishops wished to reform the Orders drastically and to take away much of their independence and wealth, it had become impossible to take truly radical measures against them. In its decrees of 1563 the Council of Trent stressed the need for monasteries to adhere to the rules of their Order, insisted that they group themselves into congregations, and encouraged the bishops to inspect them. It recalled monks and nuns to their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, totally forbade them to own land as individuals and allowed them the use of other property only with the permission of their superiors and only if it included ‘nothing superfluous’ – though ‘they were not to be denied anything that may be necessary’. The age at which binding vows could be validly taken was fixed at sixteen for both men and women.<sup>20</sup> But that was as far as the Council dared go. The sternest ‘reform’, in fact, was imposed two years later, by the new pope Pius V, when he decreed in his bull *Circa pastoralis* that all nunneries must henceforth be strictly enclosed.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, far from reducing the number and influence of monks and nuns, broadly defined, the promoters of the Counter-Reformation created new Orders, principally the Jesuits and Capuchins, which not only attracted the faithful away from parish churches but introduced new rivalries among the regular clergy, especially over control of education. The Jesuits indeed amounted almost to a new hierarchy under direct papal control, in competition with all the Church’s traditional authorities. The monastic ideal, applauded by the Church, commanded widespread respect and there was no shortage of vocations. Many men preferred to become members of a religious community, probably based in a town, to working in isolation as a parish priest, especially in the countryside. Archbishops and bishops were generally under the thumb of the secular rulers who effectively appointed them. Most parish clergy were admitted to lack both zeal and education, and many of them were appointed by lay lords who might be Protestants or at least hostile to the new piety. There was virtually no provision for the education of parish clergy until the Council of Trent required each bishop to set up a seminary for priests, and this decree was ignored in many dioceses for decades, in some for centuries. The geography of dioceses and parishes, largely fixed in a distant past, did not meet current needs, yet was enshrined in law and had created so many vested interests that it was very difficult to modify. All these constraints monasteries could ignore. Houses of the old Orders had the wealth, and could

therefore recruit the personnel, to contribute in various ways to education and the cure of souls. But much the most speedy and effective way of providing zealous and educated clergy for pastoral work was to establish a brand new Order which would create its own seminaries and whose members, bound by a vow of obedience, could be ordered to areas where there was a particular need for them.

In the seventeenth century renewed attempts were made to reform traditional monasticism. Cardinal Richelieu, the ruthless minister of Louis XIII, building on the work of cardinal de La Rochefoucauld, had plans to get rid of all old Orders in France that would not reform themselves. Richelieu was in a unique position to realise these plans since he had caused himself to be appointed abbot of at least seventeen monasteries and prior of a few more, and was head of the three greatest of the ancient Orders by virtue of being abbot of Cluny (Benedictine), Cîteaux (Cistercian) and Prémontré (Premonstratensian). But he died in 1642 before he could carry through his programme. In John Elliott's words the monasteries then staged 'a virtual . . . insurrection', almost like the nobles' *Fronde*, and the old Orders in France were safe – and in a sense prospered – for another century.<sup>22</sup>

In Italy, however, Innocent X decreed in 1652 the biggest reform and purge of monasteries there before the late eighteenth century, suppressing a quarter of the peninsula's 6,000 male houses – in principle, all those that had fewer than twelve monks. But this, too, evoked a strong reaction, and he was forced to re-establish at least a third of the houses he had condemned, lowering his criterion of acceptable size to six monks.<sup>23</sup>

Traditional monasticism therefore still seemed to be secure, even sacrosanct, in Catholic countries during the seventeenth and most of the eighteenth centuries, apparently little affected either by the schemes of church reformers or by the growth of state power and consciousness. As the numerous conversions of princes show, Catholicism had come to be regarded as the natural support of absolutism. In return, rulers whose dynasties had stood out against Protestantism felt committed to maintaining the ethos and institutions of the old religion – or at least dared not risk assailing them. Many Catholic monarchs and statesmen believed that monasteries, monks and nuns were too numerous, that they diverted scarce resources from activities more useful to the state and that they ought to be curbed. The nobilities of Catholic states regularly complained that the Church was steadily buying up their estates. In a few special cases such pious kings as Philip II and Louis XIV succeeded in acting on these views: Philip seized some monastic property to help pay for his wars against heretic Powers; Louis reduced certain monasteries' privileges.<sup>24</sup> But in general rulers accepted the

Church's teaching that the ascetic impulse was a laudable, perhaps the highest, manifestation of the Christian life, acknowledged that individuals were entitled to give themselves and their property to monasteries and recognised that that property, like all the Church's land and goods, was held in perpetuity, in 'mortmain'. They conceded to monasteries and their members, as to all clergy, at least partial exemption from ordinary taxation. They acquiesced in the position that they had few rights over monasteries, and further that many houses were wholly or largely outside the jurisdiction of the bishop of their diocese, owing obedience in ecclesiastical matters instead to authorities that were often based outside the lay ruler's territories: to superiors and generals, to congregations and, in some cases, only to the pope.

Protestant rulers, of course, had reaped great financial benefit, at least in the short term, by the dissolution of monasteries and the appropriation of their lands – though Henry VIII was exceptional in diverting almost all the proceeds to secular uses. But Catholic rulers derived practical advantages of other kinds from the continuing existence of rich old monasteries. Although the Council of Trent had decreed that all communities should be free to elect their heads, many elections were in fact heavily influenced or determined by the secular government. A practice existed, though frowned on by the Council, whereby the ruler appointed a 'commendatory' abbot, perhaps a bishop, perhaps a lay statesman or nobleman, even a foreign prince, who might have little or nothing to do with the community but would enjoy a good proportion of the house's revenues and could, if he wished, reside in the abbot's often opulent lodgings. The religious side of the monastery would then be overseen by an elected prior deploying a much reduced budget. This practice was widespread in Italy, and still more in France, where in the eighteenth century the king, having acquired from the pope the right to appoint to most senior church benefices, nominated commendatory abbots to more than a thousand major houses of monks. This patronage was naturally of great value to the monarch.<sup>25</sup> In Austria and Bohemia the great monasteries of the old Orders, as the dominant element in the First Estate, were deliberately raised up by the Habsburgs in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a counterpoise to the then largely Protestant nobility. There were moments in Bavarian history when Protestantism was so strong among the nobility that the ruler needed the prelates of the First Estate to defeat it.<sup>26</sup> The richer monasteries also made themselves useful to governments by lending substantial sums to the Crown at reasonable rates of interest, fulfilling some of the functions of banks and offering exceptionally good security.<sup>27</sup> So, although Catholic rulers commonly imposed certain

restrictions on monasteries' recruitment and property and on their activities in the world, and monitored, manipulated and frustrated abbatial elections, they did not seriously contemplate the drastic action against the old Orders that had accompanied the Protestant Reformation – not, at any rate, until the second half of the eighteenth century.

Rome too had to show great restraint in its dealings with monasteries, even those nominally under its direct jurisdiction. The Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, a permanent commission of cardinals, established in the seventeenth century, had some power to oversee monastic life, though only in Italy.<sup>28</sup> But the Vatican's fundamental attitude was – and ultimately had to be – that the Orders were spontaneous growths, representing successive renewals of the Church. Historically, popes had at first looked askance both at the brand of monasticism promoted by St Francis and at that invented by St Ignatius Loyola, but had come round to accepting them as manifestations of the workings of the Holy Spirit, though needing to be regulated and moderated. In the less spiritual eighteenth century new Orders were few but the story was the same. The Redemptorists, founded by Alfonso Liguori in the kingdom of Naples in 1732 to conduct rural missions, were approved by the Vatican, but only after some years of reluctance and under strong pressure from below. The same happened with the new devotions surrounding the Stations of the Cross and the Sacred Heart, which the new Orders promoted.<sup>29</sup> More generally, the pope's freedom of action was subject to the severest political constraints. Many of the cardinals were in effect appointed by secular rulers rather than by the pope. In most countries his authority in spiritual matters was recognised only with strict limitations, and any attempt to assert his normally latent claims to temporal power over states other than his own evoked a violent reaction compounded of fury and derision. The doctrine of papal infallibility, maintained by popes and some of the Catholic hierarchy, especially the Jesuits, was accepted by few others. Catholic rulers commonly ignored or suppressed the pronouncements of the Vatican. Some of the major Catholic governments of Europe – France, Austria, Venice – refused for long periods even to publish the decrees of the Council of Trent, and when the publication was allowed in Spain it was accompanied by a reassertion of royal power over the Church.<sup>30</sup> Hence it was only in Italy that Innocent X could hope to impose a reform of the monasteries, and even there the resistance he met from other rulers in the peninsula forced him to abandon half his scheme.<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere papal attempts to interfere with local Orders and monasteries usually rallied rulers in their defence. Even if popes sometimes regretted it, rather more than half of all Catholic clergy were regulars, many of them belonging to old Orders that had not been thoroughly reformed,

many of them virtually beyond Rome's control, and many of them none the less more effective and reformist than the average secular. The Vatican had to live with this situation and make the best of it.

These conditions, on the one hand fostering monastic independence and creativity but on the other hand permitting abuses to flourish and blocking even the most obviously desirable reforms, prevailed in every Catholic country until well after the middle of the eighteenth century. But the spirit of the Catholic Reformers lived on, and there were always elements within the Church which deplored at least some aspects of monasticism. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the most significant of the critical tendencies was 'Jansenism'.<sup>32</sup> I can only present its exceedingly complicated story in a crudely simplified form. Originally Jansenists were followers of Cornelius Jansen, professor at the University of Louvain in Belgium and then bishop of Ypres, whose book called *Augustinus* was published in 1640, two years after his death. It glorified the theological stance of St Augustine, which placed greater emphasis than did most of the Fathers of the Church on the depravity of Man. Taken to its extreme, this line of argument led to the view that only the arbitrary grace of God could save him, and hence that faith was the way to salvation and works were valueless. This was Protestantism, and it is no accident that Luther had been an Augustinian friar, steeped in the writings of the Father from whom his Order claimed to derive its inspiration. With these doctrines often went demands for simpler worship, plainer buildings, access to the vernacular Bible, stricter personal morality, better parochial care and fewer and more observant monks and nuns. These attitudes became quite fashionable in the France of Louis XIV, where they were particularly associated with the Cistercian nunnery of Port-Royal des Champs near Paris. They soon became entangled in a complex and endless web of intellectual, political and ecclesiastical disputes. Within the Church the principal enemies of the Jansenist tendency were the Jesuits, determined to assert the superiority of their own theological teaching, which had become notable not only for its emphasis on the merit of works but also for its cultivation of 'casuistry' or 'probabilism', a mode of argumentation designed to create subtle justifications for a wide range of actions which at first sight breached morality and Christian teaching. Towards the end of his long reign Louis XIV came to see the nuns of Port Royal and their male sympathisers as, like the Huguenots, a threat to the unity of Church and state, and in 1709 evicted them. Not content with that striking exercise of absolute power, in the following year he had the buildings of the nunnery demolished. In 1713 pope Clement XI, urged on by the Jesuits and the ageing Louis XIV, condemned in his bull *Unigenitus* 101 'Jansenist' propositions from a book by Quesnel known as the *Réflexions morales*. These reflections

were attached by Quesnel to his French translation of the New Testament, and some of the condemned passages came word for word from Augustine's own writings.

By this pronouncement the pope was outlawing opinions which were widespread in the Church and had hitherto been held to fall within the range of acceptable theology. Few modern writers, however orthodox, doubt that the bull was a grave error: its new, narrow doctrinal position was unsustainable and in the long run its adoption seriously weakened the papacy and the Church. A small group of Jansenists left the Church and formed a schismatic body, the Old Catholics. Other sympathisers conformed outwardly, but none the less worked more or less secretly to promote Jansenist ideas – and almost any critic of any aspect of papal policy or of the Jesuits was now liable to be called a Jansenist, especially by the Jesuits and their allies. The ramifications of the dispute were immense. It led, for example, to renewed questioning of papal authority and demands for the calling of a general council of the Church. It provoked such bitter debates that in many Catholic countries the ruler forbade further discussion of it. In France the solidarity and partisanship of the Jansenists enabled them, though in a minority, almost to dominate the *parlements*, the courts that ratified government decrees, and so to conduct a campaign against Bourbon absolutism which played a large part in precipitating the Revolution of 1789. The controversy is especially important to us because it was, among other things, a dispute between monastic Orders: the papal condemnation naturally gave great offence to those that took their inspiration from St Augustine. Ultimately, the Jesuits' success in obtaining the bull *Unigenitus* evoked a backlash, in which other Orders played a prominent part. But in the short run – for a little more than a generation – the pope's support for the Jesuits' line contributed to enhance their influence in politics and education as well as in the Church, and to facilitate the triumph of the Baroque piety and the artistic display associated with them.

By the 1740s, however, Jansenists were receiving powerful support from the writings of Lodovico Antonio Muratori (1672–1750), the polymath librarian of the duke of Modena. Nowadays famous as the ground-breaking editor of Italy's medieval documents, he was then better known for his *Treatise on Christian Charity* (1723) and his *On Well-Ordered Christian Devotion* (1747). Particularly in the last decade of his long life he dedicated himself to stating the case for internal reform of the Church. This mild scholar-priest, friend of pope Benedict XIV (1740–58), argued for changes such as the use of the vernacular in services. He declared that there were far too many clergy overall. As for monks and nuns, he complained

of the factions created within the Church by the rivalry between religious Orders and by their overweening power, wrote of the Benedictine scholars of southern Germany as ‘sunk in the darkness of barbarity’, applauded only those Orders that like the Capuchins retained their original spirit, was quite ready to see other Orders suppressed, and urged that the secular clergy – at least those who fulfilled their pastoral role – should be strengthened and accorded higher respect. He hoped that Benedict XIV would legislate in this spirit, which he saw as reviving the programme of the Council of Trent.<sup>33</sup> In practice, Benedict’s monastic reforms were very modest. In any case, as we shall see, and as Muratori sometimes recognised, many of the houses of the old Orders, partly as a result of pressure from outside, but also partly through renewal from within, had themselves become promoters of Catholic Reform, improving their discipline, forming congregations, fostering scholarship, participating in the modernisation of theology and, where their rules permitted, engaging in charitable and parochial work.<sup>34</sup> Even so, it seems in retrospect that this was the last opportunity that the Roman Catholic Church had in the eighteenth century to embark on serious reform under a respected pope in a relatively favourable climate. For, by the time Benedict died in 1758, the first rumblings were to be heard of the mental and political earthquake that was to shake the institution to its foundations, as Jansenism in a broad sense joined forces with absolutism, Enlightenment and eventually Revolution against it. Most ominously, Portugal had already launched the campaign which was to bring down the Jesuits.<sup>35</sup>

In 1763 a new challenge was thrown down to the papacy. A book was published by ‘Febronius’ – the easily penetrated pseudonym of Hontheim, suffragan bishop of the elector-archbishop of Trier – called *Of the State of the Church*, in which he argued that secular rulers, and especially prince-bishops, had the right and duty to reform the Church in their territories. This publication fitted into a campaign by the German ecclesiastical electors to arrogate to themselves many of the prerogatives claimed by the pope. A prince who was also an archbishop could make a special case, but Febronius’s work was well received by many lay Catholic rulers who wished to curb the privileges of the Church and carry through ecclesiastical reforms on their own authority. The fact that the pope had proved unable to bring about significant changes strengthened the argument. Though Rome acted with unusual speed to condemn the book, this only enhanced its fame. In discussing the state of the Church Febronius maintained that monasteries were too numerous, that disputes between the different Orders did serious harm and that monasticism needed to be cleansed and curbed.<sup>36</sup>

I shall describe in Parts II and III how these various strands combined to destroy most of Europe's monasteries. In the next four chapters I shall be talking of the period before that convulsion, and of more or less traditional monasticism continuing to flourish down to the 1780s and beyond, even while the ground was beginning to move. As Chateaubriand wrote of the Napoleonic Empire, 'at the brim of prosperity, people hear only the strains of the dream that is passing away.'<sup>37</sup>