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Clericalism and Communalism in German Catholicism

Marc R. Forster

Two central characteristics of Catholicism in Southwest Germany were clericalism and communalism. Clericalism meant, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that German Catholics demanded that priests, especially resident priests, perform and sanctify church rituals. Communalism meant that village communes played a central role in the supervision of the rural clergy and in the organization of village life. These two aspects of rural Catholicism reinforced each other, especially since the desire for more, and more active, priests led communes to press for the creation of new parishes and benefices. Once new benefices were created, communes consciously retained influence over the behavior and duties of the clergymen. The clericalism and communalism of rural religion both reflect the popular appeal of "baroque Catholicism" and provide a window on the popular role in the development of modern German Catholicism.

ON 16 APRIL 1764 THE NEIGHBORING COMMUNES of Langenschemmern and Aufhofen, located in Upper Swabia near the city of Biberach, wrote a long letter to the bishop of Constance.¹ The community leaders protested an episcopal ordinance that forbade church services in Langenschemmern on Easter Sunday and on a number of other high feast days of the Catholic calendar. The decree ordered that the villagers attend these services in the church in the neighboring village of Schemmerberg. But these peasants wanted to hear mass and receive communion in their village church on the most important day of the Christian calendar.

The residents of Langenschemmern and Aufhofen, like many other peasants in Southwest Germany, lived in a filial parish. By the mid-eighteenth century there was a priest living in Langenschemmern, but he was only a chaplain (*Kaplan*), and the legally recognized

¹Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (henceforth GLAK) 98/3848.

parish priest resided in Schemmerberg, about fifteen kilometers away. This priest and the patrons of the parish, the Cistercian monastery of Salem, asserted the ancient rights of the "mother church." The monastery's incorporation of the parish of Schemmerberg justified its right to collect the tithe in the filial villages and permitted the parish priest to collect all fees and offerings made by the faithful. The fees and offering were, by tradition, given at Easter and three high feasts (Christmas, Pentecost, Corpus Christi).² The villagers from Langenschemmern and Aufhofen reluctantly paid these fees; they were not, however, willing to go to the services in Schemmerberg.

The villagers gave a number of reasons for wanting services in their own church. Some of these reflected the practical problems and dangers of rural life in the eighteenth century. The peasants did not want to leave their villages empty, for fear of robbers, vagabonds, and fire. They also claimed that there were many old and sick people who could not make the walk to Schemmerberg. Finally, they pointed out that at the mother parish the church was too small to hold all the parishioners, and that those coming from far away did not get seats. In fact, especially on Easter, the church in Schemmerberg was so full that many people had to stand outside and could neither hear the sermon nor see the priest and the altar.³

This latter objection points up the broad religious issues involved here. Certainly the practical problems concerned the villagers, as did the insult to their honor when they had to stand in the back of the church, or even outside, while the Schemmerbergers occupied the well-placed pews.⁴ Because they did have a resident vicar, the people of Langenschemmern did not complain about the lack of a priest to do emergency baptisms or give communion and last rites to the

²On the liturgical year, see Robert W. Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in the Reformation* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987); Charles Phythian-Adams, *Local History and Folklore: A New Framework* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1975), 21–25; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 1. Also Ludwig Veit and Ludwig Lenhart, *Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit im Zeitalter des Barock* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1956).

³See Marc R. Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the Villages: Religion and Reform in the Bishopric of Speyer, 1560–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), esp. 36–38.

⁴The problem of seats was probably important to the leaders of the Langenschemmern *Gemeinde*, who were the elite of that village and surely had seats in their church. The poorer peasants probably did not have seats in either church.

dying, a major concern in many filial churches. However, their request highlights a number of other significant religious concerns. The inhabitants of Langenschemmern and Aufhofen wanted their own priest to give them the full range of services, with full ceremony, in their own church on Easter. The villagers considered both the "silent mass," held early on Easter morning, and the sermon by the chaplain insufficient. They rejected the argument of the priest in Schemmerberg who said that the villagers had a better opportunity to show their devotion in the filial than in the mother church:

[The early mass and sermon] are more pleasing to God, and better for their souls, than going to one mass [in the afternoon] and spending the whole morning with nothing to do except hang around, especially the single men.⁵

The people of Langenschemmern wanted their village church elevated to a real parish, which would mean full services on all holidays in their community, complete with a sermon, communion, and the elevation of the host, and they wanted to witness all of this from inside the church. They also demanded that "their priest" perform this mass, not the priest from Schemmerberg. The villagers' Catholicism certainly required a priest, but their religion was also local and communal in spirit.

This incident illustrates two central and interlocking aspects of Catholicism in Southwest Germany. The first aspect was the laity's demand that priests, especially resident priests, perform and sanctify church rituals, an attitude I will call clericalism.⁶ The second attribute was the continuing communal control of parishes. The coexistence of clericalism and communalism indicates that German Catholicism evolved differently than many church reformers envisaged. Most significantly, although the people honored the special role of the priest

⁵GLAK 98/3848: "Welches Got gefälliger, und ihren Seelen anspriesslicher seyn wird, als an einem so heyl. tag nur ein einzige mess anhören, und alsdan den ganzen vormittag unnuz und mit miessigang zu bringen, besonders von lediger Bursch." (All translations from documents are mine.)

⁶I have taken the concept of clericalism from Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: the Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). I realize that there are problems with using the term, especially since it evokes the nineteenth-century use of clericalism, which was often pejorative.

and even expected his leadership, just as Tridentine reformers hoped, communities did not give the priest control of the village parish.⁷

Clericalism and communalism were closely intertwined, and they even reinforced each other. The desire for more, and more active, priests led communes to press for the creation of new parishes and benefices. The ecclesiastical hierarchy was, mostly for financial reasons, generally reluctant to support such projects, and communities had to make monetary contributions as well as expend political capital to achieve their goals. Communes did not take this initiative without consciously retaining influence over the behavior and duties of the clergymen hired in the new positions. Furthermore, the central importance of the priest in the religious life of communities caused the people, and especially their leaders, to carefully monitor the professional performance of their pastors. Those priests who failed to carry out their duties were quickly criticized. If they continued to neglect their office, parishioners brought pressure to bear for their removal.

Neither clericalism nor communalism was new in the early modern period. The church had always sought to "clericalize" Christianity, although with mixed success. In the fifteenth century, for example, the church sought to control access to the sacred and to "professionalize" the clergy. The laity, however, often bypassed the parish priest, turning to mendicants for the sacraments and to lay confraternities for devotion.⁸ Communes played a major role in the religious life of fifteenth-century Germany, and rural Catholicism in southern Germany and Switzerland was to a great extent communalized by 1500.⁹ This was probably the logical outcome of the simultaneous creation of the parochial structure in the European countryside in the Middle Ages and the elaboration of communal institutions,

⁷John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present* 47 (1970): 51-70.

⁸Robert Scribner, *The German Reformation* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1986), 12-13.

⁹Peter Blickle, *Communal Reformation: The Quest for Salvation in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1992). Also Rosi Fuhrmann, "Die Kirche im Dorf," in Peter Blickle, ed., *Zugänge zur bäuerlichen Reformation: Bauer und Reformation* (Zurich: Chronos, 1987), and Franziska Conrad, *Reformation in der bäuerlichen Gesellschaft: Zur Rezeption reformatorischer Theologie im Elsass* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1984).

especially in the German-speaking lands.¹⁰ There is considerable debate among social and political historians over the extent to which peasant communes lost their autonomy to the rising state in the early modern period.¹¹ Whatever their fate as political players, the point here is that communes remained very influential in organizing local religious life through the eighteenth century.¹²

CLERICALISM

In seeking the origins of opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in revolutionary France, Timothy Tackett has argued that popular Catholicism in large regions of France was clericalized by the late eighteenth century. Clericalism (in this definition) "involved a relatively greater internalization of sacerdotal functions in one's view of the nature and workings of religion" and was strong in those parts of France, especially in the west, which resisted the revolutionary reorganization of the church in the 1790s.¹³ Tackett argues that clericalization was in part a consequence of Tridentine reform:

Perhaps, in practical terms, the ultimate measure of success of the push toward clericalization under the Old Regime was not the extent to which the clergy was able to crush popular religion—which was all but impossible in the short run—but rather the extent to which the clergy was able to impose its influence while still maintaining a viable and flexible *modus vivendi* with the popular expressions of religious sentiment. (235)

It appears that much of Catholic Germany experienced a similar process of clericalization. Here too there were "cultural and structural features" which made the people receptive to a clericalized religion. As in France, one can identify a "certain degree of tolerance and accommodation" on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Furthermore, the same "clustering of variables which converged to help fos-

¹⁰On communal institutions, see Heide Wunder, *Die bäuerliche Gemeinde in Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), and Peter Blickle, *Deutsche Untertanen: ein Widerspruch* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1981).

¹¹David M. Luebke, *His Majesty's Rebels* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹²On the communal church, see Forster, *Counter-Reformation in the Villages*, esp. chap. 1 (see n. 3 above). On communalism more generally, see Robert W. Scribner, "Communalism: Universal Category or Ideological Construct? A Debate in the Historiography of Early Modern Germany and Switzerland," *Historical Journal* 37, no.1 (1994): 199–207, esp. 204–5.

¹³Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 249 (see n. 6 above).

ter particularly strong clerical ... orientations..." in western France can be found in Southwest Germany. These variables included a large clerical establishment, local and rural recruitment of the parish clergy, and "a missionary tradition sympathetic to certain aspects of popular religion."¹⁴

One must also look beyond the structures of religious life and examine how the people interacted with the clergy, above all the parish priests. One aspect of this relationship was a clear decline in anticlericalism among German peasants between the Peasants' War (1525) and the end of the Thirty Years' War.¹⁵ This trend was accompanied by growing pressure from the population for an expansion of the parochial structure, especially between 1590 and 1620, and again after about 1690. Although population growth explains some of the need for more priests, the content of the petitions from communities suggests something more: an increasing demand for the presence and services of qualified Catholic priests.

A certain kind of anticlericalism, in which peasants expressed hostility toward overly zealous priests, was dominant in whole regions of France. This attitude is difficult to find in Catholic Germany, even in the late eighteenth century.¹⁶ Peasants resented priests too closely linked to repressive lords, but this problem was apparently not widespread. Conflicts between parishioners and priests over the tithe or other property conflicts were of course endemic, and sometimes the peasants drew on the older, and very rich, anticlerical tradition in criticizing the wealth and political power of the Catholic Church. Yet on the local level, peasants appear to have separated the religious function of the priest from his role as petty bureaucrat, property manager, and tithe collector.¹⁷ In Southwest Germany, the peo-

¹⁴Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 248–49.

¹⁵On anticlericalism, see Peter Blickle, *The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War from a New Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), and Henry Cohn, "Anticlericalism in the German Peasants' War, 1525," *Past and Present* 83 (1979): esp. 16–31.

¹⁶For France, see Philip T. Hoffman, *Church and Community in the Diocese of Lyon, 1500–1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture* (see n. 6 above).

¹⁷Conflicts between peasants and priests may have declined as the patrons, particularly the monasteries, collected the tithe themselves. In many places priests became less involved in day-to-day economic life after 1650. Peasants in the southern Black Forest fought the monastery of Saint Blasien tooth and nail, but rarely does one find anticlerical rhetoric in their conflicts with the monastery. See Luebke, *His Majesty's Rebels* (n. 11 above).

ple even viewed monks as useful for pastoral duties, thereby undermining the criticism of monasteries as "parasitic," a common anticlerical attack during the Reformation and throughout the sixteenth century.¹⁸

The search for new priests was another aspect of clericalization. Rural communities actively organized and supported the creation of permanent benefices for priests, or if this was not possible, they arranged for and funded temporary clergymen, mostly mendicants from nearby towns. The reasoning behind these measures was fairly standard. In 1651, for example, the residents of Waldmössingen asked the bishop for a priest of their own, or if this was not possible, for an Augustinian to come from the town of Oberndorf on a weekly basis. The one-and-a-half-hour journey to Oberndorf was too long for the villagers to undertake every week, and as a result many had not received communion in years. Many children were growing up having never been to mass or catechism class. The villagers were willing to contribute in several ways to the project: "With the donations and alms of generous and good-hearted people, and our own sweat and blood we have completed the building of a church."¹⁹ Permission to bring a priest to this church would, the peasants informed the bishop, honor God, and "lead us weak mortal people to salvation."²⁰

The request of the Waldmössinger, while couched in the grim language of the immediate aftermath of the Thirty Years' War, was echoed time and again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by other peasants. In 1777 the community (*Gemeinde*) of Schlatt protested to the Austrian regime in Freiburg that they were poorly served by the Franciscan hired by their lords, the Knights of St. John.²¹ The commune argued that the villagers paid enough tithe to support a resident priest, who would surely do a better job. The mendicants endangered the souls of the faithful because they could not always come to Schlatt in time for emergency baptisms or to give the sacra-

¹⁸See Marc R. Forster, "The Elite and Popular Foundations of German Catholicism in the Age of Confessionalism: The Reichskirche," *Central European History* 26, no.3 (1993): 313, 323.

¹⁹Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart [henceforth: HStAst.] B466a/402. "So haben wir durch hilff Milte= undt Gottseelige Leiten hilff steür und allmossen, neben unseren armen Schweisend Bluott wider ein Kurch erbawt undt zu endt gebracht."

²⁰HStAst. B466a/402: "auch uns schwache sterbliche Menschen zuer Seeligkheit füern thutt."

²¹GLAK 79/825, no. 26; cf. 89/107.

ments to the dying. The villagers also considered the services that the Franciscans offered insufficient:

The mendicant priests assigned to this parish read two masses a week, including Sunday and holidays. These services consist of a sermon, although not always, or sometimes a catechism lesson instead, and then the mass itself, all of which happens in quick succession, so that they [the Franciscans] can get home as soon as possible.²²

Two central religious issues informed the demands for more priests. The first was the need for resident priests to baptize the newborn and confess the dying. In this area the Tridentine emphasis on the sacraments appears to have coincided with the traditions within popular Christianity that emphasized these rites of passage, especially baptism.²³ The second issue was the popular demand for complete services, particularly regular masses during the week, Sunday services with both a sermon and the mass, and extensive ceremonies on important feast days. The focus on the mass indicates its importance as the central moment in popular Catholicism.²⁴

Village communes were willing to expend their own resources to get the religious services they wanted. In 1737 the commune of Moltershausen agreed to contribute stones and other building material to repair its church, and in 1763 the same commune arranged for full services in this church on major feasts, in part by donating a field to the parish for the upkeep of a resident priest.²⁵ In other places villagers had fewer resources, but they offered to contribute work teams for

²²GLAK 79/825, no. 26. "[N]ebst den Kommt der jederzeit zu solcher Pfarrey versehend bestellte ordensgeistliche all wochen 2 mahlen zu Messen, dann an Sonntag= und gebottene Feyr tagen, und bestehet dessen vorrichtung in abhaltung einer Predig, doch nicht allzeit, und statt desen der Christen Lehr, und H. Mess-opfer, welch alles nachinander beschiehet, und sich so dann wider nacher hauss begibet."

²³Scribner, *The German Reformation*, chap. 1, esp. p. 11 (see n. 8 above). Also Bernd Moeller, "Piety in Germany Around 1500," in Steven Ozment, ed., *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 50–75, and Veit and Lenhart, *Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit*, pt. 1, chap. 2 (see n. 2 above).

²⁴On the importance of the mass, see Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, chap. 3 (see n. 2 above); John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Louis Châtellier, *La Religion des pauvres: Les Missions rurales en Europe et la formation du catholicisme moderne, XVIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1993).

²⁵HStASt. B486/1273.

building or made regular contributions of wood from communal forests.²⁶

Although clericalism was a permanent feature of both official and popular religion, there was an increased demand for priests in Catholic regions after 1650. This process kept the clerical council (*der geistliche Rat*) of the bishops of Constance busy in the first decades of the eighteenth century.²⁷ One way to expand the number of clergy was to hire assistant priests, primissaries (*Frühmesser*), and chaplains. In 1708, for example, the Teutonic Knights reported that the parishioners of the filial church in Dettingen wanted the priest in Dingelsdorf to hire a "permanent assistant."²⁸ Beginning in 1709, the inhabitants and a local nobleman in Laupheim attempted to force the monastery of Ochsenhausen to hire and pay a primissary in their parish.²⁹ Although the council supported this endeavor, Ochsenhausen tenaciously resisted, prompting episcopal officials to threaten legal measures in 1714. In both these cases the additional priest was eventually installed.³⁰

The Clerical Council also discussed a number of projects for the creation of new parishes in this period, at Möhringen (1710), Ingerkingen (1711), and Dettingen (1712).³¹ In general, episcopal officials responded positively to these schemes. The rigid parish structure of the period 1500–1650 was weakening; it is significant that in all cases monasteries resisted new parishes, while communes, with modest support from episcopal officials, applied pressure for change. The peasants could be most imaginative about the arrangements for new parishes, a sign that they wanted results. The residents of Immenriedt proposed that the property of the parish priest in Kißlegg, where the mother church was located, be freed from a number of taxes and dues. This would increase his income by 100 Gulden,

²⁶See GLAK 61/13465, pp. 458–60 and 567–75, for one example of the complicated negotiations for the building of a new church in Mainwangen in 1707.

²⁷Erzbischöfliches Archiv Freiburg (henceforth: EAF), Ha 216, 217, 218.

²⁸EAF, Ha 217, pp. 301, 303.

²⁹EAF, Ha 217, pp. 46–47, 70–71, 105–6, 184–85, 213. Ha 218, pp. 362–63, 382–83, 501–2, 522–24.

³⁰Other examples of revival of secondary benefices: *Caplanei* in Hummertsried, HStASt. B486/438 and *Frühmesserei* in Nusplingen, HStASt. B467/684.

³¹EAF, Ha 218, pp. 52–55, 227–28, 235–36, 250, 291–93, 398–99.

allowing him to hire an assistant to conduct services in Immenriedt. The villagers were rewarded for their initiative.³²

There are other indicators of the growing importance of the clergy. In the century after the Thirty Years' War, pastoral work absorbed many holders of *beneficia simplicia*, who theoretically were not required to provide such services.³³ Furthermore, mendicants and monks played a significant pastoral role by the mid-eighteenth century, something that in the 1770s and 1780s surprised Austrian officials intent on abolishing monasteries. Much of the monk/priests' work was unofficial, as villagers called on Capuchins, Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans from nearby towns when they needed a priest.³⁴ The regular clergy performed especially important services in the many towns and small cities of the regions, where parish priests were few and overburdened.³⁵ When questioned in the 1780s about the usefulness of monasteries, magistrates almost uniformly applauded the regulars.³⁶ The Capuchins received the most praise, especially for their work in the mountainous regions near Waldshut, Stauffen, and Tettwang. One town council argued that "they are not just useful, but necessary."³⁷ The parish structure, which despite the efforts of the people changed only slowly, required that the Capuchins and other orders filled the needs of a clericalized religion. There is a certain irony that the success of clericalization, a fundamental goal of Catholic reformers, depended on the diversity and variety of the Catholic Church in Germany, which ran counter to the spirit of the organizational reforms of Trent.

The vehemence with which peasants attacked priests who did not fulfill their professional responsibilities is another indication of the importance of the clergy. In 1661 the Vogt (a kind of mayor) and council of the Black Forest village of Schönau criticized their priest, Father Giselbertus Strankhaar.³⁸ According to his parishioners, the

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 335–36, 418–19, 426–27. ³³GLAK 79/837. ³⁴GLAK 118/186.

³⁵Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 133, compares the density of parishes in Italy and Germany. There were far fewer parishes in German cities.

³⁶HStASt. B17/426.

³⁷HStASt. B17/426: "nicht nur nützlich, sondern notwendig."

³⁸GLAK 229/94055. Father Giselbertus was probably a Benedictine from St. Blasien. The parish was incorporated into the monastery, which also had extensive juridical rights, many serfs, and considerable estates in the area. See Luebke, *His Majesty's Rebels* (see n. 11 above).

Father did not teach the youth to pray the Our Father or the Hail Mary, had failed to preach on a Palm Sunday and a Good Friday, did not support the parish confraternity, and refused on several occasions to hear confessions. Father Giselbertus compounded his unpopularity with a personal lifestyle that did not fit the villagers' image of a priest. According to one report, the priest was raising several young dogs and a wolf in the parsonage. The peasants feared that the wolf would injure the village children, and even expressed deeper fears:

Everyone knows the true nature of a wolf and the father should keep him under control so that it does not hurt anyone ... [and] it is not a good idea to raise a wolf in our valley ... and even less advisable that he enter the church. Serious trouble could easily result from this wolf.³⁹

Father Giselbertus denied most of the charges, and called the Schönauer lazy, neglectful, superstitious, and "Idioten." In his view, the children's inability to say their prayers was the parents' fault. He maintained that his dogs and wolf had not harmed anyone, adding, "[I] must in passing comment, that it is nicer to live with dogs and wolves, and that one receives more loyalty from them than from my ungrateful parishioners."⁴⁰

One should not be distracted by Father Giselbertus' eccentricities. The complaints about his professional performance were typical. Any priest who did not provide enough masses, or who failed to preach, risked the wrath of his parishioners. Equally important were the sacraments, especially baptism and marriage, as well as confession and communion at Easter. Finally, the Schönauer complained about the arrogance of the priest, particularly when he kept people waiting in the church while he finished preparing his sermon, when he did not show up for confessions, or when he unilaterally canceled sermons. The priest was vital for the practice of Catholicism in Schönau, and

³⁹GLAK 229/94055. "Allein weiss man woll was ein wolff für ein Natur hat, so solle er herr deme im der gewarsame behalten damit niehmant kein schadt dar durch geschehe.... Also ist diess nit rumlich ein wolff in einem thall auf zue ziehen...viell weniger dz er soll in die kirchen kommen, und leichtlich ein grosser unglück von dem Wolff entspringen kente."

⁴⁰GLAK 229/94055. "Muss aber beynebens lehren, quod melius sit cohabitare inter canes et lupos und grösser trewheit bey ihnen zuefinden, als bey meinen undankbaren Pfahrkinderen...."

his parishioners had clear "expectations concerning the proper role and behavior of the priest." At the same time they surely did not obey him uncritically.⁴¹

It is easier to demonstrate the importance of priests in the villages than to explain the clericalization of Southwest German Catholicism. It is worth mentioning some tentative ideas. Certainly the clericalization of popular religious practice was a goal of Tridentine reform, yet the importance of the Catholic clergy in Southwest Germany is not just an indication of the victory of Catholic reform. In fact, an important element in the relationship between the church and the population was the weakness of Tridentine reform. The large number of monasteries and collegiate chapters, all with extensive rights (especially of patronage) in rural parishes, provided a buffer between aggressive Tridentine reformers and the population, preventing the alienation of the population from the church. Furthermore, the density of the Catholic clergy in this region, a source of anticlericalism in the early sixteenth century, was less threatening by 1600, and even a source of strength after 1650. The diversity of the clergy meant that the Catholic Church was less monolithic than the neighboring Protestant territories and precluded any coordinated attack on popular culture. Finally, most Catholic priests, monks, and nuns were local people, of small-town or even peasant background, which made it easier for the people to accept them.

The institutional and sociopolitical factors behind clericalism are only a part of the story.⁴² The attachment of the population to the religious ceremonies in which the priest officiated was another characteristic of popular religion. An examination of these religious practices—whether they were sacraments like baptism, confession, and communion, or devotions of lesser theological significance, like processions, pilgrimages, and the rosary, and even sermons—are central for our understanding of popular Catholicism. An analysis of these practices is the subject for a separate study. At this point it is important to look at the communal context within which people practiced these devotions.

⁴¹Quoted from Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, 229 (see n. 6 above). Also see Forster, *Counter-Reformation in the Villages*, esp. chap. 6 (see n. 3 above).

⁴²Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture*, esp. 229 (see n. 6 above).

COMMUNALISM

Clericalism did not mean that parish priests took control of parishes. In fact, the growing importance of the parish priest was in significant ways the result of the communalism of Catholicism in the Southwest. Communes promoted clericalism while continuing to administer church property, influence the appointment of priests, and organize village religious life. Even in the eighteenth century there were striking continuities with the communal church of the pre-Reformation era as described by Peter Blickle.⁴³ As they did around 1500, Catholic peasants demanded that the priest respond to their needs and desires, that he not require extra pay for basic services, and that he live as a member of the community. Furthermore, although lay people accepted the special power and position of the priest, they did not allow him the initiative in arranging and promoting religious devotions. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, peasants organized processions, pilgrimages, and confraternities; funded the building of chapels and the placement of stations of the cross, pictures, or new altars in parish churches; and demanded that priests lead prayer meetings and other devotions. An active laity was a central feature of rural German Catholicism.

There were, then, striking continuities in the ecclesiopolitical role of the rural communes between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. One must, however, heed the warnings of Robert Scribner to avoid using communalism as an overarching or universal category in German history.⁴⁴ The communalism of religious life, for example, does not preclude a weakening of the communal role in local administration. When one examines the day-to-day management of parish life, one has to acknowledge the central role of the communes. Here too an oversimplification or romanticization of the commune is to be avoided. There is no doubt that a village elite dominated the parishes as they dominated the communes. With these caveats in mind, the

⁴³Blickle, *The Communal Reformation and The Revolution of 1525* (see nn. 9, 15 above).

⁴⁴Scribner, "Communalism" (see n. 12 above). See also Heinrich Richard Schmidt, "Die Christianisierung des Sozialverhaltens als permanente Reformation" in *Kommunalisierung und Christianisierung: Voraussetzungen und Folgen der Reformation, 1400-1600*, ed. Peter Blickle and Johannes Kunische, *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, Beiheft 9 (Berlin: Franz Steiner, 1980), 113-63.

concept of communalism contributes to our understanding of rural Catholicism.

The most obvious role played by the commune was in the administration of the parish. The commune always participated in the management of parish property. In Schönau in 1613, for example, the village council prepared the annual accounts (*Rechnungen*) without consulting with the priest. In 1624 the same village council asserted its right to draft these accounts, which clearly symbolized control of this property, without informing either the priest or the patrons of the parish, the monastery of St. Blasien.⁴⁵ Even when the Austrian government forced the Schönauer to make concessions, as happened in 1624, the priest was allowed only to witness the submission of the accounts, not to participate in their preparation.⁴⁶

Overseeing the finances of the parish gave communal officials, especially the church overseers (*Kirchenpfleger*), some power over the priest. Most clergymen in parishes received a significant part of their income from parish property. In the village of Fischbach, admittedly an unusual case, the parish priest received his whole salary directly from the *Gemeinde* in the form of four cash payments, as well as grain and wine rents from the parish property and other fees.⁴⁷ Even more important for most priests was the small tithe, which in most places communal officials collected and then gave to the priest. This situation caused, of course, endemic conflict between priests and their parishioners.

Communal officials always possessed keys to the church sacristy, baptistery, and offering chest. Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century parish priests struggled to secure a key for themselves so that they would not have to seek out communal officials to enter the church.⁴⁸ Priests usually did get keys to the church, but often not to offering boxes. In Öwingen, the monastery of Salem supported the mayor of the village when he refused to give a copy of an offering box

⁴⁵GLAK 229/94055.

⁴⁶Rudolf Reinhardt, *Die Beziehungen von Hochstift und Diözese Konstanz zu Habsburg-Österreich in der Neuzeit: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur archivalischen Erforschung des Problems "Kirche und Staat": Beiträge zur Geschichte der Reichskirche in der Neuzeit*, vol. 2. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1966).

⁴⁷GLAK 98/3817; agreement from 1698.

⁴⁸GLAK 229/94055, Schönau.

key to the priest.⁴⁹ The possession and control of keys, of course, also had great symbolic implications, which were not lost on the parties involved.

Priests complained that communal officials treated the parish church as if it belonged to the community. The priest in Schönau argued that the villagers should not hang pictures and install chairs without consulting him.⁵⁰ Chairs and pews became a big issue after 1650, as peasants built them into rural churches for the first time. Conflicts over seating took place at several levels: priests squabbled with communal officials over who should determine seating arrangements, and the villagers feuded with each other over the best seats in church, with the priest often taking sides. In Blumenfeld in 1726, Pfarrer Johan Thomas Metzger tried to bring, as he called it, "order" (*Ordnung*) to the new seating installed in his church.⁵¹ He placed his mother, his housekeeper (*Haushälterin*), the chaplain's maid, and the wife of a local official (the *Obervogt*), in the front row. Although Metzger thought this arrangement came close to matching the way the women had previously stood during services, regularizing the seating caused an uproar. Several women did not like seating the priest's mother in the front row and protested by standing in the main aisle through a whole Sunday service. Communal officials then intervened, arguing that the new seating violated tradition, and complained to their superiors that the priest planned to take away "private chairs" and divide them among all parishioners. It seems in fact that Pfarrer Metzger may have wanted to go beyond arranging a good seat for his mother and supported the majority of his parishioners against a village elite. Village leaders asserted that Metzger was innovating, and that he was motivated by "ambition."⁵² One thing is clear: The villagers played a major role in the administration of the parish, even when they were divided among themselves.

Communes also influenced the appointment, disciplining, and removal of parish priests.⁵³ In a small number of parishes villagers exerted this power through the direct patronage of the church, while

⁴⁹GLAK 61/13463, p. 309r. This *Opferstock* also held money from an endowment given to keep up a roadside cross and picture.

⁵⁰GLAK 229/94055.

⁵¹GLAK 93/252.

⁵²Cf. HStAst. B467/47. In Altdorf/Weingarten the *Rat* tried to reorganize seating arrangements, a move that the *Pfarrer* and some of the poorer parishioners resisted.

⁵³See Forster, *The Counter-Reformation in the Villages*, chaps. 1 and 6 (see n. 3 above).

in a much larger number of places they controlled secondary benefices. Furthermore, communities brought indirect pressure to bear on monasteries, chapters, and government officials who had the actual right to appoint priests. Finally, as we have seen, peasants kept a close eye on the performance of their priest and did not hesitate to seek the removal of unacceptable clergymen. The town council of the small Austrian town of Binsdorf held the right to nominate the community's parish priest, who was then proposed (officially "presented") by the emperor to the bishop of Constance.⁵⁴ All evidence indicates that Austrian officials respected the choices of the council. In 1587, at a time when the Hapsburg government aggressively sought to eradicate concubinage among parish priests, officials in Innsbruck approved the council's nomination of Jacob Armbruster, who was known to have a concubine. In 1589 the council and commune further consolidated their hold over the priest by permanently adding the income of a chapel, over which they had patronage, to the resources of the parish.⁵⁵ Binsdorf was an exceptional but not isolated case. There were other parishes where the commune had the right to appoint priests; in Fischbach, for example, the *Gemeinde* nominated twenty-two priests between 1580 and 1777 to the monastery of Salem.⁵⁶

By the eighteenth century, the mayor, council, and commune of Binsdorf had legally lost some control over the appointment of the parish priest. In 1762 the Binsdorfers nominated three candidates for the vacant parish and sent their names to Austrian officials. A government commission then interviewed the three finalists, and one of them was presented to the bishop.⁵⁷ However, the final outcome seems to have been predetermined. The candidate recommended first and most strongly by the *Gemeinde* received the post. According to Austrian officials he did no better than the others in the examination but was appointed because he had good recommendations "from his whole flock where he will be the shepherd...."⁵⁸ The Binsdorfers had a juridical right to nominate a priest, which gave them a special role in appointments. Other communes were sometimes less successful in getting their candidates appointed. In 1588 the commune in Deilingen also recommended a priest who had a concubine, but Austrian

⁵⁴HStAst. B37a/134. ⁵⁵HStAst. B37a/135. ⁵⁶GLAK 98/3819. ⁵⁷HStAst. B38/573.

⁵⁸HStAst. B38/573: "besonders von dem ganzen Schaff=Stall. dene er als hirth vorgestanden."

officials appointed someone else.⁵⁹ More often, however, the intercession of the commune helped a candidate. In 1593 Jacob Dietpold became Pfarrer in Durbheim after a strong recommendation by the commune.⁶⁰ In this case, officials regretted having rejected Dietpold's application several years earlier, since the villagers liked Dietpold and treated the other priest whom the authorities had appointed very badly.

Village communes also exerted pressure on parish patrons after the finalists for a position became known. In 1755 the commune and many residents of Ingerkingen petitioned against the appointment of one Herr Belling to their parish.⁶¹ Belling was, according to the villagers,

nothing but a troublemaker, who interferes entirely too often in secular matters, so that when the peasants have business with one another, he reports the parties to the authorities and supports one side or the other.... [Furthermore], he goes around at night and listens at windows to hear what is going on. He even complained to the *Oberpfleger* [a Salem official] that the priest in [the neighboring village of] Schemmerberg kept poor order in his parish, although [this priest] receives the highest praise from everyone [else].⁶²

This case was complicated by the fact that Belling was born in Ingerkingen and had friends as well as many enemies in the village. The abbot of Salem, patron of the parish, had the final say and appointed a different priest:

[T]he said vicar [Belling] is little trusted by many, or even the majority of the parishioners in Ingerkingen, and, because of having enemies and other personal matters, he would probably cause them to stay away [from church].⁶³

⁵⁹HStAst. B37a/147.

⁶⁰HStAst. B37a/156.

⁶¹GLAK 98/3841.

⁶²GLAK 98/3841. "Der Mann seye nichts als ein Unruhe- Stifter, mische sich allzuviel in die Weltl. geschäfts, so, daß wann die bauern einige händel oder sonst geschafft mit einander haben, er mit denen partheyen zu der herrschaftl. Obrigkeit lauffe und die sachen bald so, bald anders Vortrag helffe.... Er lauffe nächtlr. Weyle in dorff um und horche vor denen fensternen, was passire. Er habe sogar den h. Pfarrer von Schemmerberg bey titl. h. P. Oberpfleger daselbst verclagte, er halte einen so schlechte ordnung unter seinen Pfarrkindern, der doch von jedermann das beste lob habe."

⁶³GLAK 98/384. "ersagter Vicarius bey sehr viel oder den meheren deren Inngerkingerische pfarrkinder kein vertrauen fünden, dise hingegen, vermutlich der gegenseytigen freundschaft halber, und wegen ein= so andere Personalien vielen austand bey den wurde."

When necessary, communes often used well-placed and well-constructed letters to get rid of unwanted priests. In the 1580s and 1590s peasants knew to accuse unsatisfactory priests of concubinage in order to have them removed. In 1584 the commune of Weilen unter den Rennen petitioned the Austrian government for the removal of their priest, Jacob Krafftensfels.⁶⁴ The letter listed ten complaints emphasizing his difficult and combative behavior, especially conflicts over the tithe, and his unwillingness to obey communal regulations regarding the use of meadows. Almost in passing, in point number seven of the petition, does the letter mention Krafftensfels' concubine and nine children. The letter concludes with an appeal to get rid of this priest and "give us a competent and peaceful priest."⁶⁵ Leaving nothing to chance, the commune also denounced Krafftensfels to the episcopal court, angering Austrian officials. In the end, their concerted effort succeeded: Krafftensfels was removed.

By the late seventeenth century, concubinage was no longer widespread; consequently when communal leaders sought to remove a priest, they now emphasized his professional failings. The priest in Tafertsweiler, according to his parishioners in 1692, did not begin Sunday services at a regular time, neglected catechism lessons, and did not hold a series of votive masses against bad weather at five in the morning as required.⁶⁶ In the eighteenth century, parishioners often pointed to a "loss of trust" when criticizing priests.⁶⁷ Although communes knew how to pull the right strings with higher authorities, they were also genuinely concerned with the performance of the clergy. As we have seen, the ability and dedication of the priest was central to the success of clericalized Catholicism. Rural communes saw it as part of their job to monitor the performance of the local clergy.

Communes went beyond overseeing the behavior and effectiveness of priests and organized much of the religious life of the parish themselves. As we have seen, some of this function resulted directly from the communal role in the creation of new benefices. The

⁶⁴HStASt. B37a/272.

⁶⁵HStASt. B37a/272. "uns mit ainem tauglichen, fridtliehen Priester, ... begeben."

⁶⁶GLAK 61/13463, pp. 320r-23r. There was a similar case in Hailtingen in 1750: HStASt. B467/500.

⁶⁷GLAK 93/248 (Mindersdorf, 1747); HStASt. B38/574 (Binsdorf, 1783); HStASt. B468/661 (Kirchdorf, 1654).

Gemeinde of Nusplingen made sure that the holder of the new chaplaincy knew exactly what his duties were.⁶⁸ He was expected to assist the parish priest, especially with confession and Sunday services; to read mass on Tuesdays for the community and extra masses during Lent; and to read two additional masses a week for the souls of the benefactors of the chaplaincy.

Communes hired priests to perform religious functions, often without consulting ecclesiastical officials. Thus the commune of Böhringen brought in an Augustinian monk to conduct services in the village church. Both the commune and the monk were surprised and shocked when the Pfarrer in Gössingen, the official parish priest of this filial church, complained in 1719.⁶⁹ The villagers were even more stunned to hear the priest argue "that the honorable *Gemeinde* of Böhringen had no power to order a priest [to perform services]."⁷⁰ Indeed, the Böhringers asserted this right by withholding the tithe from the priest in Gössingen because he did not hold services in their church.

Processions and pilgrimages were central to popular piety, especially after the Thirty Years' War.⁷¹ These were generally organized by the laity and led by the communes. Thus during the war, the commune of Birndorf instituted a regular procession, or pilgrimage, to the Marian shrine of Todtmoos. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Birndorfers participated in at least eighteen major processions each year, most of which originated with vows made by the villagers.⁷² Villagers often wanted their priests to lead, or at least accompany, processions, and in many cases priests were required to take part. Disputes sometimes broke out over this obligation. In 1750 the vicar general in Constance resolved such a conflict in Hailtingen in the following way:

The parish priest must accompany the biannual communal procession to the chapel in Weiler, although this [procession] began and

⁶⁸HStAst. B467/684.

⁶⁹HStAst. B467/473.

⁷⁰HStAst. B467/473. "als hätte ein lobl. gemeind zu Böhringen keinen gewalt einer priester zu bestellen."

⁷¹Wolfgang Brückner, *Die Verehrung des heiligen Blutes in Walldürn: Volkskundlich-soziologische Untersuchungen zum Strukturwandel barocken Wallfahrtens* (Aschaffenburg: Paul Patloch Verlag, 1958). Brückner emphasizes that pilgrimages were often a kind of extended procession, and processions a sort of local pilgrimage.

⁷²Jakob Ebner, *Aus der Geschichte der Ortschaften der Pfarrei Birndorf* (Karlsruhe: Verlag Leo Wetzels, 1938), 113–15.

has taken place up to now as a freely held devotion of the community. Devotion and yearning [for salvation?] is as dependent on the [priest's] presence and eagerness as on that of his flock. [The priest] will receive the usual 40 kreuzer....⁷³

Processions and pilgrimages were a perfect expression of a clericalized and communalized religion in that they required the participation of the priest yet were mostly organized and promoted by the communes.

Communes were enmeshed in almost all aspects of local religious life. Villagers as well as townspeople founded a large number of confraternities, sometimes in response to clerical initiatives, sometimes not.⁷⁴ Communes demanded that priests perform traditional blessings and benedictions, even when the church considered such practices suspect.⁷⁵ In the late eighteenth century, parishioners organized and funded the erection of Stations of the Cross in parish churches.⁷⁶ The laity clearly participated actively in religious life, not just as spectators at mass or recipients of the sacraments, but as organizers and innovators as well. This linked the church to popular religion and gave Catholicism a tremendous vitality through the eighteenth century.

* * *

Beginning in the 1760s and reaching a peak in the 1780s, the Austrian government instituted a thorough reform of Catholic institutions in its territories. Motivated by Enlightenment principles of rationalization and the promotion of economic productivity, "Josephine" reformers enacted a series of decrees, most of which encountered widespread opposition. Peasants and townspeople resisted not only the closing of shrines, convents, and monasteries but also the

⁷³HStASt. B467/500. "h. Pfarrvicari die zweymahlig Jährliche zu der Capellen Weyller von der gemayndt haltendte Procession, obschon dise ausfreyen willens, und andacht der gemayndt aufgenommen, bis anhero löbl. gehalten worden, mit seiner gegenwarth und Eüfer, als von welchem der schaffen, als von ihrem fürten die andacht und begürde abhanget, für die gewöhnlich. 40 kr. ziehen, begleiten und halten soll...." See also B467/546.

⁷⁴Ebner, *Aus der Geschichte der Ortschaften der Pfarrei Birndorf*, 111–12 (see n. 72 above); see also Jakob Ebner, *Geschichte der Ortschaften der Pfarrei Hochsal* (Wargen: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1958), 61–66, and EAF A1/340.

⁷⁵HStASt. B467/500; EAF A1/329 and A1/483; cf. Veit and Lenhart, *Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit* (see n. 2 above).

⁷⁶HStASt. B61/1098, B481/77, B481/78.

dissolution of confraternities, and ignored the abolition of church holidays, processions, and pilgrimages.⁷⁷ One aspect of the reforms, however, received popular support: the effort to reorganize the parish structure and create a number of new parishes. Here reforms played right into the communal and clericalized structures of popular Catholicism. Austrian officials asked priests, local officials, and communes to indicate villages that deserved new parishes or chapels, thereby intimating that communities with more than seven hundred inhabitants and/or requiring more than an hour's walk to the nearest church would receive funding.⁷⁸ Communes, especially, responded energetically to this opportunity, providing the requested data, and often writing extensive petitions for new parishes. In this area at least, popular Catholicism and *Aufklärung*-Catholicism coincided.

The coexistence of clericalism and communalism suggests that there was no clear division between official and popular Catholicism in Southwest Germany. Catholicism became more dependent on the presence and performance of the parish priest, yet this clericalization occurred, at least in part, because of popular pressure. Communes maintained an important role, but the village elites who controlled them were both representatives of the village community and agents of higher authorities. Clericalism and communalism were fundamental aspects of the dynamic between popular and official religion that created the successful Catholicism of Southwest Germany.

⁷⁷Thomas Paul Becker, *Konfessionalisierung in Kurköln: Untersuchungen zur Durchsetzung der katholischen Reform in den Dekanaten Ahrghau und Bonn anhand von Visitationsprotokollen 1583–1761* (Bonn: Edition Röhrscheid, 1989), esp. 311–15.

⁷⁸HStASt. B61/213; GLAK 79/822.

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