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Review of "Abt Dominikus Hagenauer (1746-1811) von St. Peter in Salzburg: Tagebücher 1786–1810"

Ulrich Lehner
Marquette University, ulrich.lehner@marquette.edu

Shortly before the French Revolution and the subsequent coalition wars initiated the end of monasticism in the Holy Roman Empire, Dominikus Hagenauer was elected—supported by a campaign of Leopold Mozart—to the abbatial see of St. Peter in Salzburg (1786). During his tenure he faced, among other challenges, the increasing threat of anticlericalism, the attacks of radical Enlighteners on the Church, and the possibility that his monastery would be dissolved. Regarding these experiences and many more (e.g., his friendship with the Mozart family or Michael Haydn), he wrote a 1,400-page diary, which has now been superbly edited by the Historical Commission of the German Benedictines.

The text immediately grabs attention due to the vividness of the narrative, the reported details, and the variety of topics covered. We learn not only about the liturgical and intellectual culture of the abbey, its connection to other religious orders, and the controversies about the implementation of the Enlightenment within the theology department in Salzburg, but also about the personal visits of the abbot with his family and how much chocolate he usually sent as a Christmas present to the nuns of Nonnberg Abbey. Thus the diaries become a gold mine for every church historian who desires to know more about the intellectual, social, and cultural history of 18th-century monasticism, giving a most intimate insight into Catholic life in central Europe between 1786 and 1810.

ULRICH L. LEHNER
Marquette University, Milwaukee

Stereotypes abound involving the relationship between the pre-Vatican II American Catholic Church and social institutions committed to protecting the moral and social order, such as the police, military, labor unions, and politicians. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, led by its iconic director J. Edgar Hoover, made no secret of its preference for hiring Catholics. While not Catholic himself, Hoover believed Catholics alone possessed the moral and intellectual fiber necessary for combating Communism and other ills afflicting American life. The Church responded in kind, granting Hoover adulation and willingly cooperating with the Bureau’s anti-Communist endeavors. Prior to R.’s book, this relationship had been more presumed than examined.

Both the Church and the FBI sought to stave off social chaos. Thus, underneath their shared anti-Communism, R. argues, lay shared assumptions about authority and traditional gender roles, particularly patriarchal leadership. Ensuring those values would guarantee social order, both Church and Bureau struck out against Communism and its perceived filth and infiltrations. R. investigates this shared worldview topically, covering influential laymen and bishops alike. His meticulous research illuminates the extent to which several bishops (e.g., Fulton Sheen, John F. Noll, and Cardinal Richard Cushing), laymen, and Catholic universities gladly endorsed and facilitated the Bureau’s investigations.

Researching this book took R. 20 years, and his diligence paid off. No other book sets forth the Bureau and Church’s shared intellectual and cultural (if not always religious) foundations. The book could also serve as a source for a deeper understanding of 20th-century clerical education and biographies. However, amid his rigorous research R. repeatedly assails patriarchal anxiety as the animus that generated the Church and Bureau’s fevered antimodernism and anti-Communism. Thus a work of fine historical scholarship concludes on an all-too-familiar—and thus disappointing—note: