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Joseph Bergin, *Church, Crown, and Episcopate under Louis XIV*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004. xii + 526 pp. Maps, tables, notes, appendices, and bibliography. \$60.00 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-300-10356-5.

Review by Barbara B. Diefendorf, Boston University.

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This major new book carries the prosopographical study of France's bishops that Joseph Bergin began with *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589-1661*, through the personal reign of Louis XIV. [1] As such, it offers not only a fascinating study of how the qualifications and selection of bishops changed during the Sun King's long reign but also a broader comparative perspective for viewing these changes over the reigns of the first three Bourbon kings. The transformations are impressive indeed. The age at appointment rose significantly, with underage appointments having disappeared almost entirely. At the same time, the education level rose, with even scions of distinguished noble houses having often taken the time and trouble to secure a doctorate in theology before having their names put into candidacy. Moreover, in contrast to Henry IV's bishops, the overwhelming majority of candidates had already taken priestly orders before their names were advanced, a growing number had spent time in seminaries that exposed them to the spiritual and pastoral imperatives of the Catholic Reformation, and an increasing proportion had served in administrative positions that offered useful experience in the church. Unlike in previous generations, this experience only rarely came from serving as coadjutor to a reigning bishop. Louis XIV severely limited the use of co-adjutorships and refused to allow the position to be used merely to ensure that a bishopric would remain in a family's hands. Instead, he appointed them only where justified by the failing health of a seated bishop or another legitimate reason. In short, episcopal office was becoming a career path that required careful preparation and not just good connections at court.

It is important not to exaggerate the extent of the change, as Bergin warns at several points. This was still the ancien régime, and patronage played a very important part in determining who advanced, how fast, and how far. The system was, by Bergin's assessment, more professional than it had been in the past and yet still flexible—that is to say, there was still room for influence and favoritism—and he identifies this particular combination of factors as responsible at least in part for its "originality" (p. 316). It is the attempt to track this shifting relationship between patronage and professionalism that makes Bergin's book both interesting and significant. By systematically analyzing one of the ancien régime's most important and yet neglected governing elites, Bergin gives us new insights into just how Louis XIV's personal rule worked.

The book explores its subject first topically and then chronologically. Like *The Making of the French Episcopate*, it is supplemented by a biographical dictionary that is in itself worth the price of the book. The first chapter surveys the integration into the French church of regions newly acquired between the 1640s and 1670s in order to raise questions, later to be answered, about how "the crown compromised and negotiated by turn with Rome and local ecclesiastical elites, and how heavily it relied on hand-picked bishops to achieve its ambitions" (p. 14). Chapters two through four examine the social and geographical origins, education, and preparatory careers respectively of the 250 men named as bishops during Louis XIV's personal rule. The profile that emerges from these chapters shows Louis XIV's bishops to have had similar social origins to other governing elites. More bishops were born into commoner families than either before the Wars of Religion or during the eighteenth century. More than three-quarters of the bishops came from the nobility, however, with 40 percent of these from families

whose nobility dated back to the fourteenth century or beyond. Not surprisingly, even those families that were not noble were most often involved in service to the crown. Equally unsurprising is the fact that bishops commonly had family ties to previous or current bishops, as well as extensive ties to other governing elites. The path to preferment involved kinship networks and not social status alone.

Louis XIV's bishops were better educated than their predecessors, with a higher percentage having university degrees than in the past. Among the graduates, the percentage that studied theology rather than law increased from 74 percent among those who entered the episcopate in the 1660s to 97 percent in the 1710s (p. 98). Moreover, an increasing proportion of the theology graduates, including a number who bore distinguished old names, went on for the doctorate. The University of Paris, by far the preferred institution for study, "was becoming a distant precursor of the *grandes écoles*" (p. 102). Although impossible to measure in any direct fashion, the contacts made there eased the path to advancement and also helped create a common culture among an ecclesiastical elite. The same is true, albeit on a smaller scale, of the seminary of Saint-Sulpice, which counted thirty-eight bishops among its former students, ten of whom were nominated in the first decade of the 1700s alone. Although the absolute numbers here are not large, the fact that many of these bishops, along with others who developed less formal affiliations with Saint-Sulpice, returned to the seminary through later years and even resided there during visits to Paris suggests that the institution played a significant role in shaping episcopal culture during the later stages of Louis XIV's reign.

If Louis XIV's bishops were better educated for their job, so were they better prepared than their predecessors through experience gained in other ecclesiastical positions. Serving as vicar-general to a seated bishop gave perhaps the most extensive and varied sorts of experience, but other posts of "dignity" in cathedral chapters also provided useful administrative experience while at the same time placing the holder in a position to seek election to general assemblies of the clergy, diocesan assemblies, and even provincial Estates in those parts of France enjoying this institution. Pastoral responsibilities and preaching played a less important role in advancement to the miter, though noted preachers and men with missionary experience were often favored for dioceses with significant Huguenot and "new Catholic" populations.

Chapter five begins the second part of the book with an overview of "the formal aspects of episcopal patronage," that is to say, with an analysis of just how the system was supposed to work (p. 15). Chapters six through eight then discuss the particular character of and influences on the patronage system during the first two decades of the personal rule; during the Gallican crisis of 1682-1692, when the pope refused to approve candidates for France's vacant sees; and during the final decades of the Sun King's rule. This chronological division allows the reader to better perceive the patterns of change between the system Louis XIV inherited from Mazarin and the one he crafted himself over time. It allows Bergin to analyze the impact of major political events, especially quarrels with the papacy over the *régale* and the Gallican Articles of 1682, but also changing patterns of personal influence on the selection and promotion of bishops. The increasing influence of the *dévots* in selecting rigorist and yet fully orthodox candidates during the last decades of the reign is especially telling, because Bergin is able to document the cautious and yet persistent role of Madame de Maintenon in pressing the candidacy of men approved by the *dévo*t network around her confessors at Saint-Sulpice. This gets us beyond the usual polemics where Maintenon's role is concerned and shows how patronage and professionalism could work together to improve the quality of the French episcopate. It also shows the impact of the Catholic Reformation, as the bishops appointed through these networks tended to make more demands on the clergy in their dioceses. Louis XIV continued through the end of his reign to limit and balance the role of his advisors, so as to retain the autonomy of his decision-making power. This meant that there were always contrary voices and bids for favor, and yet on the whole, as Bergin admirably shows, competing factions and individuals responded to a changing religious climate and the higher expectations Louis XIV had for his ecclesiastical appointments by putting forward better candidates.

The time had passed when a freshly tonsured twenty-five-year-old could be made bishop merely on account of his family name.

Chapter nine attempts to build the sequential analyses of the previous chapters into a coherent synthesis but also to probe farther into the mentality of the men who rose to the episcopacy (and within the episcopacy, being promoted to archbishoprics or better sees) under Louis XIV. Bergin uses available wills to argue that the increasing tendency of bishops to distinguish in their property bequests between inherited family properties and wealth derived from the church, and to leave the latter sort of property either to the poor of their diocese or to their local seminary or another diocesan institution, is emblematic of the “the imprint of some of the deeper currents of the French Catholic Reformation” (p. 340). Whether or not this particular change in testamentary practice shows any deep penetration of Catholic Reformation spirituality is debatable, but it does at least demonstrate that bishops were taking their pastoral responsibilities more seriously. The earlier tendency to treat church-derived wealth as just another form of family property, and to feel justified in doing so because of the high price the family had paid to acquire the bishop’s miter, was waning at last.

Bergin’s even handed and careful analysis of an enormous body of information has many virtues but does not make for easy reading. Some might be tempted to use the book largely as a reference work. The biographical dictionary alone will serve that purpose admirably, but the book deserves to be read. It offers unparalleled insights into the complex intersection of royal authority, elite presumption, and high church office during a critical period in the ancien régime. The book cannot do everything. Bergin warns from the beginning that he cannot tell us what these bishops did once in office. The book “does not aspire to being an ‘histoire totale’ of a power elite at work throughout its life-cycle” (p. 12). The questions that the book does tackle—the questions of who rose to the episcopacy and how during the personal reign of Louis XIV—are sufficiently complex, and the answers Bergin supplies fill a sufficiently important void, that more cannot be asked.

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## NOTES

[1] Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589-1661* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

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