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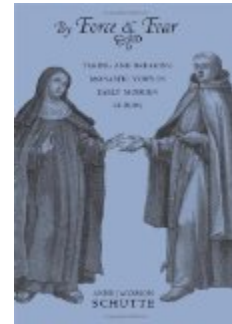
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anne Jacobson Schutte. *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. xii + 285 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4977-2.

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In early modern Catholic Europe, monasteries and convents of course attracted some men and women who felt a strong calling for the religious life. Quite often, however, these institutions in effect served as warehouses for the sons and daughters of (usually) affluent families who did not want to see the family fortune excessively reduced through dowries and inheritances. In 1563, the Council of Trent decreed that monastic vows must be freely made and that people must be at least sixteen years old and have completed an uninterrupted novitiate (usually lasting one year) before taking formal vows. These dictates, however, ran contrary to *patria potestas*, the doctrine from Roman law that gave fathers enormous authority over their sons and daughters. This principle was widely assimilated in European society and long after Trent, family members, especially parents, continued to exert very strong pressure on young people to join religious orders. Until now, however, historians have paid scant attention to the issue of forced monachization. When they have addressed this issue, they have most often concentrated on cases of individuals, mostly women, who were forced to take religious vows. With this very impressive study, Anne Jacobson Schutte is filling a major void.

Schutte looks at a broad swath of time stretching from 1668 to 1793. She bases her study on a number of sources pertaining to the Sacra Congregazione del Concilio (Holy Congregation of the Council, hereafter SCC), a committee of cardinals formally established in 1588 to hear petitions that were referred to it by the pope on matters concerning Tridentine discipline. Although two other Roman tribunals—the Rota and the Holy Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the registers of which are far too

voluminous for one scholar to peruse—could also hear such appeals, Schutte plausibly suggests that the SCC heard most cases of forced monachization. Records reveal that these cases typically took years to adjudicate, especially when family members or religious orders actively contested the petitions.

For the 125 years under study, the SCC recorded 978 petitions to be released from monastic vows. Some of Schutte's findings fly in the face of what one might expect. The overwhelming majority of petitioners (82.5 percent) were men, and children who were forced to join religious communities were not always the youngest offspring. In blended families, for example, daughters and sons from a previous marriage might be consigned to the religious life. The registers of almost half the petitions are fragmentary with no recorded decision. For those petitions for which a decision is extant, the SCC ruled in favor of the supplicant in less than half (43.2 percent) of the cases. Interestingly, female petitioners were proportionally much more likely to get favorable rulings than males (70.8 percent as opposed to 37.6 percent). Schutte explains that this was partly because women faced more hurdles in filing petitions; consequently, the women whose requests made it to the SCC generally had strong proof of coercion. Moreover, sexist attitudes could actually work to women's advantage in these petitions, as the cardinals of the SCC believed that women were more easily intimidated than men by violence or threats. Schutte provides some persuasive explanations of these data but wisely eschews extensive quantitative analysis; the sources, for example, cannot reveal the total number of involuntary professions, the number of petitions made to other courts, or the varying degrees of discontent in

different religious orders. Schutte effectively compares the SCC material with depictions of forced monachization in creative literature from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Contrary to the petitions to the SCC, most such portrayals involved the forced monachization of women, aptly seen in Denis Diderot's *La religieuse* (late 1700s) and Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1827). She persuasively posits that women's real-life social and legal subordination made them more convincing tragic victims than men.

Receiving counsel from canon lawyers in Rome, petitioners cited a range of motives to be liberated from their vows, including being born out of wedlock; having certain illnesses or physical infirmities (both of which violated the constitutions of some male monastic orders); or having taken vows before the minimum age. By far the most common ground, however, was force and fear exerted upon the professands by parents or other family members. Although ordinarily one had to petition for release within five years after taking vows, many made their requests much later, often because they were too afraid to seek release until those who had forced them into monasteries had died. The degree of intimidation and even violence that some unwilling professands endured was truly mind-boggling. There were numerous cases of youths even being threatened with death by fathers and siblings, and a good number of young men were warned that they would be sent off to war if they refused the monastery. Petitioners' chances for success were significantly enhanced if they had the support of those who had forced them to take vows. Schutte found numerous cases in which individuals were advised by their confessors to clear their consciences by admitting that they had coerced someone into joining a religious order. Men who petitioned to be released from religious orders to become secular priests enjoyed a higher chance of success, especially after the appearance in the 1770s of an expedited process for this specific kind of petition.

Geographically speaking, more petitions originated in Italy, especially in the papal states and the Kingdom of Naples, than in any other country. A number of petitions involved religious in Spain, France, Portugal, Malta, and, quite rarely, in the Holy Roman Empire, the southern Low Countries, Poland, and even Russia. Schutte rightly attributes the very uneven distribution of petitions to the challenges associated with communication; the difficulty and the cost involved in filing and sustaining a petition was directly proportional to one's distance from Rome.

Schutte's analysis is largely synchronic as she sees relatively little change from 1688 to 1793 in the motives of the perpetrators or the victims of forced monachization and in the criteria the SCC used in making decisions. There were significant changes, however, in the frequency with which such petitions were made. After a peak in the years 1728-37, the number of petitions declined precipitously thereafter, which quite plausibly reflected a decline in forced monachization itself and, concomitantly, an increase in the freedom the children of the elite had in determining their futures. Schutte deftly analyzes an important new attitude toward personal freedom in the work of Giuseppe Alessandro Furietti, who served as the SCC's secretary for the years 1743-59. Although his predecessors had written summaries of cases in a dry, neutral fashion, Furietti clearly tried to influence the cardinals' decisions by expressing his abhorrence of the force and fear used in so many involuntary professions. He was in effect employing the language of freedom that was so important to the philosophes of the Enlightenment.

Combining brilliant analysis with poignant stories, this elegantly written page-turner is a superb piece of scholarship that should stimulate further research on the very important subject of involuntary monachization. The only point of interpretation that this reviewer finds less than convincing pertains to the history of the family. On the basis of the petitions made to the SCC, Schutte rejects the notion that the early modern era witnessed the birth of the modern family in which rigid patriarchy gave way to greater equality between spouses, more freedom for children, and stronger sentimental ties among family members. The records of the SCC are frankly not the best sources for looking at early modern family relations; since they invariably involved someone, usually parents, who tried to force youths into the religious life, they are quite skewed toward the negative. This evidence, especially for female plaintiffs, also comes from families that were better off financially, whereas certain studies have made a strong case that the companionate marriage first took hold further down the social scale—with growth in wage labor, working-class young people depended less on dowries or inheritances to form families, resulting in reduced parental influence and a greater possible role for sentiment in the choice of mates. Moreover, the likely decline in forced monachization from the mid-1700s dovetails nicely with a decline in patriarchal power. This minor objection aside, Schutte has written a model study that will attract all readers interested in the history of Catholicism, monasticism, and the Counter-Reformation.

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