

that it had done little or nothing to prepare useful servants of the state. Anyway, he added, he was opposed in principle to the 'segregation of aristocratic youth from other classes', advocating instead state schools 'where young people of all classes can come together in friendship and thus lay the basis for the elimination of all social prejudice, whose baleful influence makes citizens of the same state almost foreigners to each other'. Noble academies in the provinces were thrown open and their foundation places made generally available as public scholarships, so that nobles could sit in class with commoners and see that birth meant nothing.³² In future young nobles were to be educated for state service in the same way as everyone else, which meant – among many other things – that they were no longer allowed to go off on a grand tour, picking up foreign habits which were expensive and useless.³³

For contemporaries, the most dramatic illustration of Joseph's egalitarian drive was his abolition of the nobility's legal privileges. This was so important because its implications were immediate, visual and sensational. They were illustrated by the case of the young count who had led a life of dissipation, had been expelled from both the army and the civil service, had been convicted of conspiracy to forge bank-notes and had been sentenced by the courts to imprisonment. Joseph then intervened personally to change the sentence to a period of street-sweeping, followed by the notorious barge-pulling in Hungary, which – predictably – the wretched count survived only briefly. The sight of an aristocrat sweeping the streets of the capital, shackled to a chain-gang of common criminals, his head shaven, wearing a uniform of coarse brown cloth, supervised by warders carrying whips, and watched by a crowd of derisive Viennese represented the humiliation of a whole class.³⁴

In view of the behaviour of upper-class radicals in any period, it should not come as a surprise to learn that Joseph combined theoretical egalitarianism with practical snobbery, consorting socially only with the highest of high society. However, he did so only with a small portion of it. His long-standing aversion to anything which smacked of a baroque court³⁵ was redoubled after he became sole ruler. Although the full paraphernalia could still be unleashed for a grand state occasion, as it was for the visit of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Russia in 1782, in effect the Habsburg Monarchy ceased to have a court. It is impossible to assess what effect this lacuna had on

the regime's fortunes. Frederick's Prussia flourished without a court, while Louis XVI's lavish version at Versailles did not save him from the guillotine. On the one hand, it seems reasonable to conclude that Joseph's demonstrative distancing himself from his aristocracy did nothing to foster their sense of loyalty when the crisis came at the end of the 1780s. On the other hand, there were some contemporaries who believed that he had succeeded in instilling a new ethos of service in his nobles:

In the course of Joseph's reign the nobility in Vienna became steadily more humane, more courteous and more obliging. Before Joseph's day their most common characteristics were dissipation, indebtedness, arrogance and ignorance. But when the monarch set an example by giving priority to service without distinction of birth, by punishing follies and crimes without discrimination, and by showing that it is the lower orders which are the most indispensable and useful members of society and that a state can well do without a nobility, and also by giving a personal example of how well modest frugality becomes a man of high standing – then the nobles had to climb down from their divine pride if they did not want to seem ridiculous by comparison with their sovereign.³⁶

This optimistic verdict was echoed by another contemporary, Johann Pezzl, the author of the best-informed account of Vienna in the period, when he observed that whereas in the past the sole function of nobles had been lining a room like wallpaper, now they knew that the only way to attract the attention of their sovereign and the respect of the public was through service of the state.³⁷

THE PEASANTRY

In the past, the Habsburg Monarchy had been governed by an alliance of three roughly equal partners – the dynasty, the Church and the nobility. The reforms of Maria Theresa had elevated the sovereign from being *primus inter pares* to being above the rest of society. Now Joseph sought to depress them

further, in a process of social planning which would reduce all to the same level. It was when this egalitarian programme moved from the realms of law, education or society to attack the economic foundations of noble predominance that the Monarchy began to shake.

Any attempt to explain the tripartite relationship between Joseph II, the nobility and the peasantry is bedeviled by the extreme variety of the last two groups. A great magnate such as Prince Esterházy, with his dozens of castles, thousands of serfs and millions of acres, had nothing in common beyond legal status with a Magyar gentleman farming his own plot single-handed: hence the need to speak not of 'the nobility of the Habsburg Monarchy' but of the nobilities.³⁸ The same applies to the rural masses. At one end of the scale were the 'slaves' of Bukovina, a group of gypsy origin who could be sold, exchanged or inherited and were legally equivalent to inanimate property, with no rights of any kind and no protection against their owners.³⁹ At the other end, there were the prosperous farmers of the German-speaking lands, owning their own land or enjoying hereditary tenure, producing for the market and employing agricultural labourers to do the hard work. The rising price of agricultural produce during the latter part of the eighteenth century allowed these rich peasants to get richer, as they proudly demonstrated in the growing size of their splendid houses and their opulent furniture.⁴⁰

Only one generalisation may be made with confidence about the peasantry of the Habsburg Monarchy, namely that any generalisation will be riddled with exceptions and open to all sorts of objections. However, generalisations cannot be avoided if any sort of sense is to be made of what happened under Joseph II. Perhaps the clearest way to explain the pattern of peasant relationships is to think of a peasant as being confronted by four different lords: a lord who controlled his land (*Grundherr* = land-lord), a lord who exercised jurisdiction over him (*Gerichtsherr* = court-lord), a lord who disposed of his person (*Leibherr* = body-lord) and a lord who took a tithe of his produce to support the Church (*Zehnherr* = tithe-lord). In the great majority of cases throughout the Monarchy, the last-named of those was a clergyman and need concern us no further. It was the relationship between the first three which was decisive. Where the three kinds of domination were concentrated in a single lord, we can properly speak of the peasants he controlled as 'serfs'

because they were dependent in both a personal and a material sense. But where the functions of *Gerichtsherr* and *Leibherr* were exercised by the sovereign — by a public authority — the peasant was essentially free.

With this in mind, an important distinction can be made between the German-speaking lands — Upper and Lower Austria, the Tyrol, Styria, Carinthia etc. — and Bohemia, Moravia, Galicia and Hungary. In the first group, the noble or ecclesiastical landowners leased all or most of their land to peasants, drawing their income in the form of rents and dues. In the northern and eastern provinces, it was more common for the landlords to farm a large domain themselves, making use of the labour dues (known as the *robot* after the Slavonic word for 'work') they were entitled to exact from their serfs. Here the landlord was also *Gerichtsherr* and *Leibherr*. The first system is described by the German phrase '*Grundherrschaft und Grundwirtschafft*', because the exercise of authority (*Herrschaft*) and the economic arrangements (*Wirtschaft*) were based on the land (*Grund*). The second system is described by the German phrase '*Gutsherrschaft und Gutswirtschaft*' because the exercise of authority and the economic arrangements were based on the estate (*Gut*).

The serf of the *Gutsherrschaft* and *Gutswirtschaft* was dependent on his lord in two ways. The first can be described as 'cultural', for without the permission of his lord he could not leave the estate, could not choose his occupation and could not marry. It was in the lord's court that his civil cases were adjudicated and his misdemeanours punished. In as much as he came into contact with a civilisation beyond the estate, it was the lord who took responsibility, by appointing the priest and — less often — a school-teacher. The other form of dependence was economic. By virtue of having been born on the estate, the serf owed his lord a wide variety of dues and services, the most onerous being the obligation to work for nothing on the lord's domain for a certain number of days per week — usually three and in some places as many as four or five. Particularly strange to modern eyes was '*Gesindezins*', the practice which obliged a serf's children to work full-time for the lord for three to seven years from the age of fourteen. In addition, the lord was able to exploit his serfs through various monopolies, the most important being brewing and milling. The land which the serf cultivated himself varied enormously in size and security, but where

the lord controlled the courts, no tenure could be said to be safe, as the constant complaints about expropriation demonstrated.⁴¹

Serfdom and the *Guts herrschaft und Gutswirtschaft* were unacceptable to Joseph II for several reasons. Firstly, the system subjected a large proportion of the population to the authority of the landlords, who for all their wealth and pretensions were nothing more than private individuals. That was repugnant to the modern state's claim to sovereignty. Secondly, the notion of hereditary subservience was incompatible with Joseph's belief in the natural equality of man.⁴² Thirdly, the control exercised by the landlords allowed them to expropriate an excessive proportion of the serfs' income, thus denying the state its proper share. Fourthly, the abuse of power permitted by the system led to social disorder, as the serfs resorted to the only weapon at their disposal — insurrection. Fifthly, the restrictions imposed on mobility starved the manufacturing and commercial sectors of labour. Finally, those same restrictions also made it more difficult for the state to recruit soldiers.

These were not original insights on the part of Joseph. Measures to protect serfs against the encroachments of their lords date back to the middle of the sixteenth century, but the very regularity with which the legislation had to be renewed testified to its lack of effect. For two centuries, any action commanded by the centre was frustrated by the hard-pressed dynasty's need for magnate support and by the landlords' control of local government. It was only when the state began to establish its own network of agents that the theoretical sovereignty of the centre could start to become reality. This proved a mixed blessing for the serfs, for any resources prised from the grasp of their lords were more likely to be diverted to the state than to be left in their own pockets.⁴³ Increasing demographic pressure on land also led to a deterioration in the peasants' material position.

The eruption of a major peasant revolt in Bohemia in 1775 showed just how little impact the reforms had made. Joseph's own response to the crisis was both weak and inconsistent; at one point he decided plans to regulate labour dues as absurd but shortly afterwards demanded it as essential.⁴⁴ Yet when he took charge as sole ruler in 1780, Joseph set in motion a programme of radical reform designed to revolutionise lord-peasant relations. Beginning in 1781, he issued decrees for each

province 'abolishing serfdom'. It is necessary to put 'abolishing serfdom' in quotation-marks, for it meant less than might be supposed. The former serf could now marry and move at will, could choose a trade or profession and was no longer obliged to send his children for compulsory domestic service.⁴⁵ This certainly represented a major step towards emancipation, but affected neither the lords' jurisdiction nor the system of dues and services — especially the *robot* — which one naturally, if inaccurately, thinks of as being part of 'serfdom'.

Other reforming decrees followed thick and fast. Also in 1781 a new penal code gave peasants better protection against their lords' abuse of their criminal jurisdiction. Among other precautions, it was ordered that punishments exceeding a week's confinement or penal labour had to be confirmed by the local state authorities. If the lords exceeded their powers, they would be punished themselves and obliged to pay compensation to their victims — a method of encouraging a responsible judiciary which might well be resurrected today. Lawyers were appointed by the state to advise peasants about their rights and to assist their protection.⁴⁶ Other measures abolished forced labour on crown estates and imposed limits on it elsewhere, improved security of tenure, encouraged the division of domains into peasant holdings, abolished monopolies of milling, brewing and distilling, and introduced a new law on hunting designed to prevent the lords' game damaging peasants' crops. Symbolic of Joseph's replacement of the old style of personal kingship by state service was his decision to close down his hunt, selling the hounds and retraining the hunt-servants as foresters or footmen.⁴⁷ Equally characteristic was his order that peasants should no longer have to bow to or kiss the hands of their lords.⁴⁸

Joseph had embarked on an extremely dangerous exercise. On the one hand, his reforms alienated the nobilities, in whose hands lay power in the localities. On the other hand, he gave the oppressed rural masses reason to hope that the hour of their deliverance was at hand. With the state bureaucracy so weak, there was always a danger that conflict between lord and peasant would lead to a breakdown in government. This is what happened in November 1784, with the eruption of a major peasant insurrection in Transylvania. This should have come as no surprise to Joseph. On his first visit to Transylvania in 1773 he wrote home: 'My house is continuously besieged by

Wallachians and peasants giving in memorials, of which, taking only the political, I've already collected more than 7,000'. By the time he left the province, that total had more than doubled.⁴⁹ Another visit exactly ten years later taught him that nothing had improved in the meantime: 'everything is just as before: national and religious hatred, confusion and intrigue, magistrates, lords and landowners exploiting the subjects'. He was also well aware of the latter's specific grievances: the infliction of excessive punishments, the extortion of excessive dues and services despite government decrees to the contrary, the expropriation of peasant and communal land and the levying of inequitable and unpredictable taxes. In addition, justice and education were in a deplorable state. With grim precision, Joseph concluded: 'all these evils can only be eradicated by a cut of the sabre'.⁵⁰

Less than eighteen months later the Romanian serfs took his advice, taking revenge on their Hungarian landlords and their families with terrible brutality, killing, burning, looting and raping. The news could not have come at a worse time for Joseph, just as he was sending his troops off to the Low Countries to prepare for war with the Dutch. But what seems to have upset him most was the revelation that his good intentions had not been enough. He wrote to the governor of Transylvania, Baron Brukenthal: 'I never imagined that such a terrible thing could happen in my day and age and after the advice which I have given so often and so assiduously to promote the general good and general security, and still less that it would spread so far and so intensely. I cannot find the words to say how much this depresses and upsets me'.⁵¹ It was yet another illustration of how counter-productive his reforms could be. He had tried to remove all 'national enmities' and to make all the inhabitants of the province feel that they were all Transylvanians rather than Hungarians, Szekler, Saxons or Romanians. Alas, he had only succeeded in making the separate groups more aware of what divided them from each other.⁵²

Joseph now found himself in the unenviable position faced by all rulers who seek to reform in the face of opposition from the local establishment. He knew that the grievances of the Transylvanian serfs were justified, yet he could not allow them to take the law into their own hands. As soon as he received news of the outbreak – ten days after it had happened – he

ordered the commander-in-chief in Hungary, General Schackmin, to take immediate repressive action with two cavalry and two infantry regiments, supported by field artillery. Captured ring-leaders were to be executed summarily on the spot.⁵³ At the same time he organised conciliation, instructing local officials to seek the support of the Greek orthodox clergy in persuading the insurgents to return home. He also appointed a commission of inquiry to investigate grievances, including members who were Greek orthodox by religion, were familiar with the Romanian language and were 'free of prejudice'. Optimistically, he urged the nobles to show mercy to their serfs, as the best way of preventing a recurrence of violence in future.⁵⁴ News that in fact they were exacting terrible vengeance, slaughtering sixty prisoners in one place and forty in another, provoked a furious letter to the Hungarian chancellor, ordering immediate military intervention to stop the killing and the granting of a general amnesty.⁵⁵

The investigation of the causes of the outbreak confirmed Joseph's assessment and revealed just how little could be achieved by reforms ordered from Vienna. Enclosing reports from officers on the spot, Joseph concluded:

It has been well known to me that for many years the serfs on the Szalat estates have presented the most pressing complaints about the oppression and brutality of the public officials as well as of the landlords, and I have called repeatedly for the investigation and redress of grievances, but alas up till now it has all been in vain. Commissions of inquiry have indeed been appointed but all they have been able to achieve is that the serfs have been maltreated even worse than before, the officials have been whitewashed and the abuses have never been attacked at their roots. Certainly the situation can be kept under control by force for a while, but when people are oppressed too much and the bow is strung too tightly, sooner or later it is bound to snap.

Although the serfs' grievances were essentially socio-economic in nature, the situation had been made much worse by ethnic and religious differences.⁵⁶

Although eager to advocate justice, love and confidence to the Hungarian nobles as the best way of averting further trouble, Joseph himself was prepared to authorise the use of brutality with disturbing ruthlessness. Once the revolt was under

control, he ordered the parading of the captured ringleaders through the places where the worst atrocities had been committed and their execution 'in an exemplary manner' with maximum publicity, in full view of the greatest possible number of people and in such a way that it was made clear that the executions had been ordered by the Emperor himself.⁵⁷ The Transylvanian officials responded with alacrity: on 28 February 1785 the leader of the revolt, Horja, and his chief lieutenant, Gloschka, were broken on the wheel, quartered and displayed in segments on poles alongside the road.⁵⁸

Horja's insurrection had been alarming for several reasons. Firstly, because it was so widespread: a contemporary source estimated that at one point 36,000 insurgents were under arms. Secondly, it was extremely violent: in the county of Hunyad alone, sixty-two villages and 132 noble residences were burned and 4,000 people, most of them nobles and their families, were killed 'in the most horrific manner'.⁵⁹ No doubt these estimates were exaggerated, but they demonstrate the impact the episode made on public opinion. Thirdly, and most importantly: Horja claimed to be acting on the authority of the Emperor. When he addressed his first armed band, he wore a brass chain bearing the image of Joseph II, a crucifix and a charter written in gold letters. All these insignia, he told them, had been given to him in Vienna by Joseph himself, together with the mission of liberating the Romanians from the yoke of the Hungarian nobles.⁶⁰ It was this, more than anything, which allowed Horja to attract so much support so quickly. When it became clear that the imperial authorities had disowned the revolt, his supporters faded away.

Noble landowners who had warned against any relaxation of the ties which bound serf to lord watched with grim satisfaction as 'the thieving, murdering hordes of peasants' laid waste the Transylvanian countryside. If they hoped that Joseph would have learned his lesson from this episode, they were to be sorely disappointed. The year before Horja's revolt, Joseph had set in motion a comprehensive reform of the Habsburg Monarchy's taxation system which had profound implications for all noble landowners. In a flurry of letters and memoranda he demonstrated yet again his preference for working from simple first principles stridently proclaimed: 'The land and the soil which nature has given to man to support him is the sole source from which everything comes and to which everything returns, and

whose existence remains constant through all the vagaries of time. For this reason it is incontestably true that land alone should provide for the needs of the state'. Moreover, 'natural justice' demanded that all land should be treated equally, no matter what the status of the owner. Was it not a 'fatuous prejudice', he asked, to suppose that there had once been a time when there had been only lords and no peasants and that the latter, when they materialised, were allowed the land only on certain conditions? The fact of the matter was that primal equality had made way for privilege and inequality as a result of usurpation. It was high time to strip the abuses away, so that the state and all its members could benefit equally. To this end, he announced the creation of an entirely new system, based on the equal taxation of land. Differences in its value, resulting from variations in type, fertility and location, would be dealt with by taking a ten-year average net return (in other words after the costs of cultivation and the seed had been deducted) based on the market value of threshed corn. All other forms of taxation, whether imposed on trade and industry or consumption, were to be abolished.⁶¹

This was not just a reform of taxation; it also involved a reconstruction of rural relations. In the past, the wretched peasant was kept chained to the estate and forced to contribute so much to his lord in various dues and services, that there was precious little left for public service or public funds. So long as the rural economy was based on a personal nexus of subservience and dues were paid in kind rather than cash, the mass of the population would remain beyond the reach of the state's agents, whether in the form of tax-collectors or recruiting-sergeants. Joseph ordered therefore that the manifold seigneurial burdens, including the *robot*, should be consolidated into a single cash payment. In this manner, he was convinced, the mighty potential of the Habsburg Monarchy, at present restrained by the bonds of prejudice, could be liberated to serve the state. It was this combination of a reform which was both fiscal and 'urbarial' (i.e. regulating relations between lord and peasant) which made Joseph's programme so radical — and so controversial.⁶²

Horja's revolt did nothing to change his mind. Never did Joseph show himself more determined and obstinate than in his imposition of his 'Taxation and Urbarial Regulation'. Not even the bitter opposition from most of his senior bureaucrats made

him hesitate. On the contrary, the knowledge that they were all landowners complaining through their pockets spurred him on. In 1785 the great land survey which was a necessary precondition of the new system was begun and driven on with periodic tirades and visitations. By 1789, knowing that he had not long to live and showing all the impatience of Lessing's modern man who wanted the future today,⁶³ Joseph believed that the time was ripe for implementation. The measure had changed somewhat from earlier drafts: values were now to be based on a six-year average of gross income. The peasant was to keep seventy per cent of his gross produce; of the remaining thirty, 12.5 per cent was to go to the state and 17.5 per cent to the lord. This latter sum included all dues and services, including the ecclesiastical tithe and the *robot*.⁶⁴ When countering the criticism of Count Chotek, who refused to sign the law of 10 February 1789 and was dismissed, Joseph stated that if in the past a peasant had been deprived of more than a third of his income, then he had suffered a grievous wrong which must now be corrected.⁶⁵

HUNGARY AND BELGIUM

It was a good indication of his enthusiasm for the tax decree that, when Joseph made that ringing statement, the Habsburg Monarchy was beginning to fall apart under the dual pressure of foreign war and domestic unrest. Discussion of that crisis, which proved to be final for Joseph and nearly terminal for the Monarchy, must wait until the last chapter. Here it remains to look briefly at what proved to be the two main centres of disaffection. The most serious proved to be Hungary, for two reasons: because it was immediately in the firing-line after the outbreak of the war against the Turks in 1787, and because without its resources the Habsburg Monarchy would have ceased to be a great power. Even when stripped of the Polish, Italian and Belgian provinces, the Monarchy continued to be a major player in the European states-system, but the loss of Hungary in 1918 brought instant regional obscurity from which it emerged only briefly after 1938 as a junior partner of the Third Reich.

As the map on page xi demonstrates, the Kingdom of Hungary, including the Principality of Transylvania, Croatia-Slavonia, the Banat of Temesvár and the Military Frontier Region, was the most diverse part of a diverse empire. With so many mutually hostile groups to manipulate, a policy of 'divide and rule' should have made the task of government from outside relatively easy. Unfortunately for the Habsburgs, there was one group which was deeply entrenched in power and determined to maintain its position. This was the Magyar nobility, itself divided into two groups. At the top were the great magnates such as the Esterházy, Károlyi and Batthyány, with estates measured in square kilometres and great palaces in Vienna. It used to be thought that the sting of this group — comprising only some fifty families — had been drawn by their inter-marriage with aristocratic families from other parts of the Monarchy and their gradual integration into the court and social life of Vienna during the course of the eighteenth century. Recently, however, Peter Dickson has argued that both propositions are myths: 'the integration of Hungary with the German lands was less advanced at the top of society by 1780 than is commonly asserted, and Joseph II's assault on Hungary [was] likely to arouse a correspondingly greater resentment'.⁶⁶

The most intractable Magyar nobles, however, were the great mass of gentry, some 40,000-strong, often tilling their little farms themselves and distinguishable from peasants only in terms of legal status. These were the men who over three centuries made Hungary un governable from Vienna and finally extracted the 'Compromise' (*Ausgleich*) of 1867 which turned the Habsburg Empire into Austria-Hungary. Their fierce sense of separatism stemmed from history, culture, economics and geopolitics. They had sought to dominate the lands of the lower Danube ever since their ancestors first thrust their way over the Carpathians in 896 AD. Even during the worst troughs of the ups and downs of the next millennium, they never forgot that once upon a time they had formed an independent kingdom, nor did they lose the ambition to resurrect it. Whether successful or not, the recurring need to repel invaders — German, Mongol, Turkish — periodically sharpened the sense of struggle which seems to be inseparable from acute nationalism.

Not without reason, the Hungarians believed that the Habsburgs treated them like a colony — as a source of cheap food and

With subtle dignity, Clemens Wenzeslaus replied that Joseph's letter had filled him with joy, for it had allowed him to follow the example of the Apostles in suffering humiliation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Raising his head and voice, he then warned that however confident Joseph's tread might be at present, there would come a time when he would be inconsolable — 'And may that day not be your last!'. In the rejoinder which brought the correspondence to a close, Joseph began in light-hearted vein — 'I see that we are not dancing to the same tune' — but put a sting in the tail: 'You take the form for the substance, whereas I keep strictly to the point in religion, and take action only against the abuses which have crept in to pollute it'.

Joseph campaigned against four kinds of abuses, as he defined them. The first was papal usurpation. As sovereignty was indivisible and as the clergy were just as much his subjects as anyone else, there could be no question of any outside authority encroaching on his jurisdiction. So all official communications from Rome to the Church in the Habsburg Monarchy and *vice versa* were made conditional on secular approval. No longer a state-within-a-state, the Church now became more like a department of state, a change symbolised by the imposition of a new oath on the bishops which obliged them to swear loyalty and obedience to His Imperial Majesty and to promote the interests of the state to the utmost of their power.

The second group of abuses also concerned foreign interference, this time the diocesan rights of the prince-bishops of the Holy Roman Empire which extended into the Habsburg Monarchy, as described in chapter one.³ That one of Joseph's imperial vassals could exercise jurisdiction over his territories was the clearest possible sign that they did not yet constitute a proper state and was correspondingly repugnant. On hearing in March 1783 that the bishop of Passau was dying, he at once sent instructions to the local official, Count von Thierheim, to get ready. As soon as death was confirmed, Thierheim was to inform the Passau authorities that the writ of their bishop no longer ran in the Habsburg Monarchy and that a new bishopric would be established at Linz to take over his jurisdiction. A necessary corollary, it need hardly be added, was the expropriation of all the Passau estates inside the Monarchy. Within three days, the old bishop was dead, a bishop of Linz had been appointed and the Passau property was safely gathered into the

coffers of the Habsburg Monarchy.⁶

This was the most dramatic and flagrantly illegal action by Joseph in this sphere, and — as we shall see later — it was to prove a serious handicap for Habsburg policy in the Holy Roman Empire.⁷ However, it was only part of a general campaign to make the territorial and episcopal frontiers of the Monarchy coincide. New bishoprics were also created at Budweis in Bohemia, Leoben in Styria, Tarnów in Galicia and St. Pölten in Lower Austria. Agreement with the foreign powers affected, notably the Pope, Poland and the archbishop of Salzburg, was obtained only after long and arduous negotiations. Further plans to establish another see at Bregenz in the Tyrol and to promote Laibach to archiepiscopal status had to be abandoned in the teeth of fierce opposition.⁸ In Lombardy, however, all ties between the Church and Rome which were not purely doctrinal were abolished.⁹

Simultaneously with this two-pronged offensive against external interference, Joseph moved to take control of the Church's assets inside the Monarchy. Their current misuse constituted the third kind of abuse he sought to remedy. He spelled out his reasons in June 1783 in a characteristically radical memorandum to his chief minister in ecclesiastical matters, Baron Kressel. It was the clear duty of the sovereign, he stated, to ensure that there was a Church in his territories with sufficient resources to accomplish its tasks, 'in just the same way that there is an army to defend the state, courts to administer justice and a bureaucracy to deal with political and economic matters'. Unfortunately, he went on, this duty had been neglected by generations of rulers, with the result that material provision for the Church's needs had been abandoned to mere chance. In some places there was a surplus, in others a dearth and so — and now came the most damning of Joseph's rich stock of standard criticisms — 'the totality of the Monarchy is considered by no one'. Bishops only looked to the interests of their own dioceses, monastic orders sought only to increase their own numbers and wealth, and the final say was pronounced by 'a Pope who sits in Rome and who together with his congregation of Italian cardinals has never seen nor knows anything about the country in question'. There were only two ways forward, Joseph concluded: either the state could simply expropriate church property in its entirety, or it could content itself with investigating the current state of ecclesiastical

established twelve 'General Seminaries' (at Vienna, Prague, Olmütz, Graz, Innsbruck, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Lemberg, Pressburg, Pest, Louvain, Luxemburg and Pavia), where ordinands were to undergo a rigorous six-year course of study. At the heart of the curriculum was the injunction 'that the Church must be useful to the state'. The regime was austere: when Joseph discovered that seminarists at Prague were allowed to go home during vacations, he was horrified. In future, he ordered, only those with completely reliable 'moral characters' were to be permitted to make brief visits to their relations.¹⁴ It was all to no avail, of course: clergymen will be clergymen, and in the last year of his life he was still fulminating about them carousing in the towns, drinking, fornicating and contracting venereal disease.¹⁵

The nationalisation of the Church by severing foreign ties, the secularisation of a substantial proportion of Church property, the transformation of priests into civil servants and — last, but not least — Joseph's relentlessly erastian rhetoric all suggest a Manichaean struggle between Church and state. It was a confrontation dramatised for contemporaries by Pius VI's journey to Vienna in 1782. How things had changed since the Emperor Henry IV had gone to Canossa in 1077 to wait barefoot in the snow for the summons to do penance before Pope Gregory VII. Writing to his sister, Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, a fortnight before the Pope's arrival, Joseph assured her that he would receive his visitor with all the politeness the Pontiff's position demanded, but also 'with the steadfastness of a man who knows what belongs to him, what he can do and what is required for the welfare of his fatherland. Voltaire wrote that one should kiss the feet of the Pope in order to bind his hands, and I shall follow the spirit if not the letter of this advice'.¹⁶

Pius VI was in Vienna from 22 March until 22 April 1782. Although he achieved a public relations triumph with the ordinary people of Vienna, attracting more than a hundred thousand to a public blessing, he failed to extract any significant concessions from a Joseph who was determined to remain 'resolute, staunch and unshakable in his principles', as he put it to his brother Leopold.¹⁷ Although careful to avoid any public rift and at pains to stress the unity between the Roman Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, Joseph was less restrained in his private correspondence, filling his letters with sarcastic

resources and redressing the more flagrant imbalances. For the time being, Joseph preferred the second route but if it proved too slow he reserved the right to move into the fast lane. The detailed instructions which followed for the gathering of information about clerical income were underpinned by the desire for uniformity — the Monarchy was to be regarded as a single whole, with each province doing its share to help each other. He concluded with a familiar exhortation for collective effort: 'no clergyman may live in idleness for himself but must work for his fellow men and for religion'.¹⁰

To enforce this uniform effort, Joseph took vigorous action to alter the balance within the Church in favour of the 'secular' clergy (priests living in the world and not subject to a rule), especially parish priests, and at the expense of the 'regulars', especially mendicant friars and monks and nuns dedicated to a contemplative life. On 29 November 1781 he ordered the United Chancellery to prepare the dissolution of all religious orders which were 'completely and utterly useless' and therefore could not be pleasing to God. These he defined as those which did not run schools or hospitals or help their fellow-beings in other practical ways. The first charge on the funds released by the expropriation of their property would be pensions for their members, but the large surplus anticipated would be devoted to the promotion of religion and practical charity.¹¹ By the time of Joseph's death, the imposition of this order had changed the Church in the Habsburg Monarchy radically and irreversibly. While the 25,000 regulars were reduced to 11,000, the 22,000 seculars were increased to 27,000, a net reduction in the clerical population of about a quarter, involving the dissolution of 530 monastic institutions in the central lands (Bohemia, Austria and Hungary) alone.¹² In other words, from constituting 53 per cent of the clergy in 1780, the regulars had sunk to 29 per cent by the end of the decade. The counter-reformation was over.

The final stage in Joseph's creation of a national church to serve the state was the re-education of the clergy. This was the last set of abuses to which he turned his attention. In the past, he believed, the young priests had emerged from the episcopal seminaries and monastic schools equipped to serve neither God, the state nor their fellow-men. What was needed was 'complete uniformity in theological and moral instruction'¹³ — and that could only be provided by training organised by the state. In 1783, therefore, he abolished the old institutions and

jibes at his guest's expense. He told Grand Duke Paul of Russia, for example, that when he learned that a papal indulgence would be extended not only to those who actually attended Pius' public blessing but also to anyone in earshot of the salute fired to mark the occasion, he ordered his gunners to let off 'a 24-calibre indulgence', so that even people living three leagues away could benefit - if the wind were in the right quarter.¹⁶

When it was all over and the Pope had moved on to fresh popular triumphs in Bavaria, Joseph reflected: 'I was a good Catholic before his arrival and he had no need to convert me'.¹⁹ He was not being ironic. It would be a great mistake to suppose that because Joseph promoted the state with such enthusiasm he was incapable of serving the Church with equal fervour. Not once in his voluminous correspondence did he ever show the least doubt in the absolute truth of Roman Catholicism - and Joseph was not a man to dissemble. What he did reject was that variety of Roman Catholicism which was ultra-montane in structure and baroque in substance. Although recognising the Pope as the titular head of the Church, he believed that most papal authority was based on usurpation: 'Only the ecumenical councils are authorised to explain the dogma which comes directly from Jesus Christ and it is to them and them alone we owe obedience. It is the same with matters of discipline: abuses can never become laws, and it is by getting back to the fountain-head and the practices of the Church closest to the time of the Apostles that we shall not be found wanting'.²⁰ Once again, Joseph was showing his liking for first principles.

The obligation to return the Church to a condition in which it was able to perform its original function was one which Joseph felt keenly. It can be seen most clearly in the time and energy he devoted to promoting his subjects' spiritual welfare. Wherever he went on his travels, he sought to promote the true faith, whether it was ordering the reconsecration of a chapel in a Hungarian prison, or ordering the archbishop of Mungacs to go in person to reconvert three villages in the county of Zips which had defected to Greek orthodoxy, or ordering the punishment of two parish priests for leaving the Host unguarded, or ordering the investigation of a report that a young man had been found smoking his pipe in the Piarist church in the Josephstadt - just to give a random sample from a single year (1786) of his characteristically detailed attention.²¹

If such instances might be dismissed as further evidence of

compulsive meddling, serious attention must be paid to the use he made of secularised Church property: 'the last thing I want is to employ even the smallest part of it for alien and merely secular purposes, rather I intend to devote it to the creation of a Fund for religion and the parishes'. For the time being, part of the income would have to go to former monks and nuns in the form of pensions, but the remainder would be spent 'solely and exclusively on the advancement of religion'.²² First and foremost that meant the creation of new parishes: in future no one should be more than one hour's walking-distance from a church. It proved to be unrealisable. Even a reformed Church was not rich enough to support Joseph's ideal of a well-paid, highly qualified and numerous secular clergy. Resources proved too limited to deal with the twin problems of demographic increase and monastic longevity (as Peter Dickson has laconically observed: 'If it had been possible to shoot the ex-monks and nuns, the Fund's problems could have been resolvable').²³ Nevertheless, Joseph's achievement was considerable. In the course of the 1780s, at least 600 new parishes were created and many more received additional curates. This could make a real difference to the religious life of the masses: a report composed in 1789, for example, revealed that in eighteen dioceses in Hungary and Croatia the number of clergy charged with the cure of souls had increased by a third and the ratio between priest and parishioner had halved.²⁴ Of particular importance for the future religious life of the Monarchy was the creation of forty-seven new parishes in Vienna and its suburbs.

Clergy old and new were subjected to a barrage of instructions on how to conduct the religious life of their flocks. It was indicative of the importance Joseph attached to it that hardly a month went by without some new admonition or prohibition issuing from Vienna. In large measure it was a continuation of the dismantling of baroque piety begun by Maria Theresa,²⁵ but Joseph brought to the task a new sense of urgency, importance and radicalism. It would be tedious to recount in any detail the decrees which reduced or abolished the processions, pilgrimages, festivals, confraternities, decorations, relics and all the other traditional practices which were as much social as religious. What is more important is the intense interest Joseph showed in the quality of his subjects' spiritual life. Anything which smacked of superstition, anything which assigned value to externals and anything which seemed 'unnecessary' was to

make way for a form of religion which was both inward-looking, in the sense of being willed by the individual, and outward-looking, in the sense of serving one's fellow-man with practical charity. To this end, Joseph was especially keen on comprehensibility, intervening in 1781, for example, to stop conservative bishops impeding the distribution of vernacular bibles.²⁶

By the time Joseph had finished his work, the Church and the religious culture of the Habsburg Monarchy had changed fundamentally. Where it had once been international, it was now national, where it had once been a state-within-a-state, it was now a department of state; where it had once given pride of place to the regular clergy, it was now dominated by the seculars; where the lion's shares of its resources had once gone to prelates, it was now the parish priests who were given priority; where the emphasis had once been on worship and ritual, now it was personal salvation and service which were most valued; and finally, where it had once been aristocratic, it was now meritocratic. Joseph made it clear repeatedly that the only avenue to promotion in his Church was ability allied to service — birth counted for nothing. In 1788, for example, he wrote to Baron Kressel asking for suggestions as to whom he should appoint to fill the vacancy at Linz: 'and I must repeat again that when making an appointment we should consider only the best-qualified (*tüchtigsten*) candidate, whether he is to be found among the parish priests, the regular clergy or wherever; and I would always give preference, without any regard for his social status, to someone who had put in good service in the cure of souls'. The choice fell on Canon Gall of Vienna, a commoner who had distinguished himself by sterling work in both parish and school.²⁷

Although this recasting of the Church in the Habsburg Monarchy could not help but provoke opposition, there was no simple confrontation between Church and state. There were many clergy, including prelates, who welcomed Joseph's reforms and did their best to implement them. If Cardinal Migazzi of Vienna and Archbishop Edling of Gorz protested noisily against the introduction of toleration or the dissolution of monasteries, other members of the hierarchy such as Bishop Herberstein of Laibach, Bishop Hay of Königgrätz or Bishop Kerens of St Pölten composed pastoral letters which might have been written by Joseph himself.²⁸ The overall docility with which the Church accepted the new order has been well expressed and explained by Peter Dickson:

In France a revolution, in England in the 1830s the threat of one, were needed to procure similar acquiescence. The increase in the power of Austrian secular government since the mid-century, epitomised by Joseph II himself; the penetration of Febronian and Jansenist doctrines, or variants of them, at Court and within the episcopate; the ineffectuality of opposition of those, lay and ecclesiastical, who doubted the emperor's policies; perhaps explain this passivity.²⁹

THE NOBILITY

Joseph was not only a meritocrat, he was also an egalitarian. From the time he first began to articulate his political thinking, he showed a deep hostility to the nobility. In his *Réveries* of 1763 he announced the startling ambition 'to humble and impoverish the grandees, for I do not believe it is very beneficial that there should be little kings and great subjects who live at their ease, not caring what becomes of the state'.³⁰ It does not seem to have worried him that he himself owed his position solely to the accident of birth, falling back on the convenient fiction that he had been appointed by 'Providence'. Perhaps it was a sense of unease at this logical flaw which drove him to such extremities of effort on behalf of the state and to such a radical programme of levelling everybody else. It was this, more than anything, which separated him from his contemporary Frederick the Great, who wrote in his *Political Testament*: 'a sovereign should regard it as his duty to protect the nobility, who form the finest jewel in his crown and the lustre of his army'.³¹

Frederick was as determined as Joseph to make his nobles work for the state, but he was prudent enough to leave them their social privileges and economic basis in return. This was not Joseph's way. Hard if shallow thinking about the nature of man and the state had convinced him that social differentiation justified only by the fact that it 'had always been like that' was an abuse and should therefore be abolished as quickly as possible. In a dozen different ways, some important and some petty, he brought home to his nobles his determination to destroy their privileged status. In 1783, for example, he abolished the *Theresianum*, the academy established by Maria Theresa for the education of young aristocrats, on the grounds