In the eyes of its Catholic contemporaries in the early 1560s, the French episcopalate must have appeared to be in an enviable position. A highly influential role in the formulation of the Council of Trent’s reform programme left its mark for posterity in the shape of the final decrees and earned its members the respect of the entire Catholic church, an impression not lessened by the fact that the French delegation had only been present at the Council’s final sessions (1562–63). At the Council, the bishops had been led by the charismatic and widely renowned Cardinal Charles de Lorraine, archbishop of Reims and advisor to the French monarchy, who returned to France well satisfied with the outcome of his negotiations on behalf of the French church and crown.1 This impression of episcopal dynamism and confidence was also fed by the fact that throughout their sojourn at Trent, the French delegates had displayed such signs of enthusiasm for Catholic reform that it seemed very likely they would soon become models of Tridentine leadership for bishops throughout Europe.

In reality, these expectations were not fulfilled. Most historians, as well as those contemporaries best placed to assess their bishops, present a very different picture of the post-Tridentine episcopate in France. Both contemporaries and historians have frequently drawn attention to abuses within the episcopate, predictably focusing on the exploits of infamous individuals within its ranks, such as those who converted to protestantism or who lived particularly scandalous lives. Perhaps this is inevitable, for as one leading historian of the ancien régime church has remarked, ‘Just as the Devil has the best tunes, so the affairs of the world provide the historian with better evidence than fervour and devotion.’ Yet this preoccupation with vice and abuse means that historians have judged the episcopate to be a highly worldly body, controlled by the crown and powerful aristocratic families, who used bishoprics as pawns in their political games; the classic example cited is the ‘turbulent ambition’ of Charles de Lorraine. This overwhelmingly negative view is perhaps understandable in view of the frequently uncomplimentary opinions expressed by contemporaries on the
state of the episcopate and in view of the notoriety of prominent individual prelates, such as Jean de Monluc of Valence, royal diplomat, member of the Conseil d’État and alleged heretic.4 The abbot of Cîteaux famously complained at the 1579 Assembly, and he has often since been quoted by historians, that the king was in the process of gradually losing control of nominations since most of the benefices were in the hands of the leading noble families, ‘who regarded them as hereditary’.5

Even allowing for some exaggeration and imbalance in the citing of episcopal inadequacies and for the subjective nature of much of the source material, there is no doubt that by the final decade of the sixteenth century the French episcopate was in a state of considerable disarray and that the criticisms of contemporaries and the judgements of historians do have a reasonable basis in fact. Despite its promising start, the late sixteenth-century episcopate failed to live up to the expectations which it and others held for its future. Indeed, it was not French bishops who assumed the mantle of leadership within the late sixteenth-century church. Instead, prelates outside France acted as the vanguards of episcopally led reform, and it was to these figures that the French had to look for guidance and encouragement in any efforts to implement Trent’s decrees within their dioceses. Yet how did the episcopate reach this state of affairs in the wake of its triumph at Trent? It was partly due to the fact that, just as the delegates returned to France, the country plunged into the wars of religion (1562–98) which were to cripple it for virtually the remainder of the century. Additionally, the episcopate itself was burdened with several institutional abuses that made the implementation of reforms extremely difficult for even the most dedicated of prelates.

In the first place, research has pointed to the geographical dislocation and economic difficulties caused by the wars of religion and to the resulting difficulties for bishops in fulfilling the functions of their office.6 In 1594, Cardinal de Joyeuse complained that two of the eight dioceses in Toulouse province still remained under the ‘heretic curse’.7 Huguenot occupation of episcopal lands and temporalities was accompanied by the potentially even more fundamental danger of the Calvinist threat to the very existence of the episcopal office itself, for the reformed faith denied that bishops were necessary at all. Its menace assumed ominous proportions when bishops themselves succumbed to heresy, and either abandoned their dioceses or were excommunicated by Rome. In fact, French protestantism succeeded in winning a number of high-profile prelates to its cause, about twelve in all, and seven bishops were condemned for heresy by Rome in 1566.8 Some conversions and resignations were rather spectacular, attracting significant public attention both within and outside France, and included the notorious and tragic dilemma of Antonio Caracciolo, bishop of Troyes, who unsuccessfully tried to persuade both Geneva and his
disapproving flock that he could remain a bishop while acting as pastor of the local Calvinist, rather than Catholic, church!9

Certainly, demoralised bishops were not themselves slow to blame the wars and the Huguenots for their failure to operate within their dioceses, complaining of protestant aggression towards their persons and property and of economic destitution which, to quote another bishop of Troyes, Claude Baffremont, resulted in diocesan ‘losses and almost infinite ruin’.10 Yet this was not the only reason for episcopal dishevelment. For its contemporary critics, the episcopate’s innate flaws cut much deeper. While conceding that the wars were at least partly to blame for the inadequacies of the episcopate, they also lambasted what they believed to be the worldly nature of the office by the late sixteenth century. They agreed that a major contributor to this worldliness was the Concordat of Bologna, the agreement between François I and Leo X in 1516 which officially dispensed with the episcopal elections prescribed under the terms of the 1438 Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges, and reserved episcopal nomination to the French monarch, subject to papal confirmation.11 Indeed, calls for the abolition of the Concordat and a return to episcopal elections by chapters would continue right through the succeeding century, though to no avail and with a consequent increasing sense of formalism. Still, complaints about the Concordat did have a basis in fact, since the system allowed successive kings to use episcopal appointments as rewards for service or as means to secure and preserve order within provinces.

It is not difficult to find cases to illustrate this tendency: a substantial number of French dioceses were granted to Italian bishops during the decades subsequent to the Concordat’s introduction. Members of prominent Italian families who had supported the French crown during its struggle with the Habsburgs for control of Italy were granted bishoprics, as were a number of pro-French curial figures. Italian names, such as Farnese and Ridolfi, crop up regularly among episcopal appointees through the sixteenth century.12 Although this particular use of episcopal benefices declined under Henri IV at the turn of the century, he too did offer some appointments in reward for political services and loyalties. Overall, it appears that the reign of the first Bourbon monarch brought some stability to the French episcopate, with relatively few transfers occurring between bishoprics, but his pragmatic approach to appointments still contributed to the continued fragmentation of the episcopate. Like his predecessors, he viewed diocesan sees as valuable elements of his political patronage and he was prepared to use them in negotiations aimed at stabilising the realm. Increasingly, after 1593, as the political tide turned in his favour, he offered benefices in return for loyalty to his newly established reign. Renaud de Beaune, archbishop of Bourges, was granted a transfer to the far wealthier see of Sens, in reward for his sustained support of the new king.
through the 1590s. Among others, rewards were made to the future cardinal Jacques Du Perron, René de Daillon du Lude and René Benoist, who received the sees of Evreux, Bayeux and Troyes respectively in return for their allegiance to the Bourbon cause.

The tendency of the crown to view bishoprics as means of promoting order and rewarding loyalty was accompanied and encouraged by, indeed relied on, the compliance of its most prominent subjects. In fact, the more the crown used appointments as rewards, the more likely its subjects were to see them purely in this light and to react accordingly. Actually, as the research of Michel Péronnet and others demonstrates, the crown was, in several areas, completely dependent on local support in its choice of candidates and it was often the wishes of local magnates which determined appointments. Prominent families regarded bishoprics as their lineal property to be exploited to retain their status and power, an assumption which was maintained into the seventeenth century, despite a new emphasis on episcopal responsibility and fitness for office. Virtual hereditary tenure went hand in hand with pluralism and simony, as just cursory examination of the records of episcopal appointments shows. The Gondi clan provided Paris with four successive bishops and archbishops between 1568 and 1661, concluding its extended dominance with the disgraced Cardinal de Retz. Among other seventeenth-century prelates who owed their seats to this state of affairs were Philibert Du Sault, who succeeded his uncle to Dax in 1623, and Henri de Sourdis of Bordeaux, successor to his brother in 1628. Pierre III and Henri de Villars were successively archbishops of Vienne in the south-east of France between 1626 and 1693, Pierre III having initially succeeded Jérome de Villars as incumbent of the diocese. In fact, this particular family perfectly illustrates the strong claim to hierarchical appointments among the nobility of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since it provided between 1561 and 1693 no fewer than eight bishops within the French church, to the dioceses of Mirepoix, Agen and Vienne.

This presumption had led to what was by then the common practice of holding bishoprics en confidence. Henri IV selected a significant number of commoners as prelates: from one hundred and thirty bishops appointed between 1594 and 1610, thirty-six were members of the third estate. While this might appear to suggest a move away from confidence and control of bishoprics by leading aristocratic houses, this was not the case in actuality, since a considerable number of these bishops were dependants of noble families, chosen by them in order to ensure their continued control of the bishopric until a time when a family member was of age to be named prelate. As part of its efforts to highlight ecclesiastical abuses within the French church, the 1579 Assembly identified eight dioceses then thought to be under such arrangements, some of which were controlled by leading ecclesiastics like Cardinal de Birague, Charles de Bourbon
and Renaud de Beaune. A decade later, the figure may have been as high as sixteen. Many of these interim bishops were members of religious orders or chapters or diocesan administrators and thus experienced in ecclesiastical affairs. Yet the fact remains that the practice of confidence was an institutional abuse which allowed aristocratic control of church temporalities and a secular view of the episcopal office to be maintained.

It is fair to say that the status of bishops was in this period lower than at any other time during the ancien régime. However, this assessment relates to just one aspect of the episcopal office as it was understood at this point, the secular or political facet of episcopacy, and it is this negative and spicy feature that has generally received most attention from historians. A handful of scholars have attempted to redress the balance by drawing attention to individual reforming bishops, such as Guillaume Briçonnet of Meaux, François d’Estaing of Rodez and Claude de Longwy of Mâcon, indicating that the episcopate was subject to variety in the quality of its members and that it did contain numerous prelates who took their vocation and duties seriously. Even before Trent, these men had initiated disciplinary reforms, presided over synods and fostered public preaching. Importantly too, the episcopate’s contemporary critics did not limit themselves to negative commentaries on its inadequacies. Rather, a long tradition of reflection and writing on episcopacy, an office considered to be as old as the church itself, existed within France by the beginning of the seventeenth century. For those who chose to look, some very positive notions of what it meant to be a bishop and of the precise nature of the episcopal office were available in both printed and oral form. This tradition drew on ancient and medieval teachings, some of which were particular to France and some of which had been absorbed into the French church from external sources. Taken as a whole, these ideas and assumptions relating to the theological, spiritual, canonical and jurisdictional qualities of episcopacy provided guidelines for bishops, though not a complete or definitive image of what made a worthy bishop.

Undoubtedly, the most mature of these ideas were those that described a bishop’s administrative duties. Certainly it was to this element of the office that preachers and theologians devoted most attention when they discussed episcopacy, and it was also the aspect that the Council of Trent discussed with the greatest degree of success. It is well known that the Council’s entire programme of ecclesiastical reform was founded on the assumption that diocesan bishops were the key hierarchical figures for ensuring religious discipline and order. To this end, they were equipped with powers of government and discipline over both clergy and laity, and a system of close supervision was proposed to enable them to fulfil these functions. If this order was to be implemented residence was essential, and strict penalties were to be imposed.
for absenteeism. Through a system of annual diocesan visitations and synods, the bishop would progressively bring religious order to his territory. To complete the framework, triennial provincial councils would be attended by all bishops ‘for the regulation of morals, the correction of abuses, the settlement of controversies’.

It was in its administrative programme for bishops that the Council proved most penetrating and categorical. This programme was not original to Trent, but was brought to the Council by the delegates who participated in its debates and who voiced ideas and proposals on episcopal administration which had circulated within the church for decades and even centuries. In particular, calls for diocesan bishops to institute reform through synods were hardly new in the Catholic church, and several councils had already commissioned their implementation three hundred years before Trent. That a markedly strong tradition of administrative episcopalism existed within the French church is evident from the recommendations of the Colloquy held in Poissy in September 1561, ostensibly with the purpose of reaching some reconciliation between the Huguenot and Catholic factions in France. Rather misleadingly labelled a ‘colloquy’, however, it could never really achieve any hope of accommodation given that Catholic clergy dominated the meeting and deigned to hear Huguenot discourses only after considerable pressure from an increasingly uneasy and vulnerable crown. But although the assembly did not halt the accelerating slide towards outright civil war in April 1562, the episcopal participants (three archbishops and forty-two bishops) claimed the opportunity to produce disciplinary articles which related particularly to the administrative duties of Catholic prelates, demonstrating their dawning awareness that internal reform of the Catholic church, and in particular of its episcopate, was a vital response to the spread of protestantism. In order to offset heresy, therefore, bishops had to be resident, regularly undertake diocesan visitations and synods, ensure that only worthy candidates were promoted to holy orders and live modest lives. These recommendations were then presented by the French episcopate at the final session of the Council of Trent, as part of the thirty-four articles which comprised the French programme of reform. Their similarity to the Council’s final disciplinary decrees is incontestable.

In formulating this programme, the French episcopate borrowed from sources circulating within their own church. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a community of sentiments on an administrative programme of ecclesiastical reform had evolved within France, and was easily accessible in print. Piton’s research, supplemented by that of other historians, identifies a vocal body of individual preachers and theologians who, while not forming a cohesive reform group, did emphatically and consistently proclaim the urgent need for renewal within the church and based their hopes for its
achievement on bishops.\textsuperscript{30} Within its ranks were influential and widely respected ecclesiastics from several generations, including Jean Gerson, the former chancellor of the University of Paris, and his fellow theologian Josse Clichtove, but their ranks also included well-known preachers like François Le Picart, Jacques Merlin and Guillaume Pepin, who were contemporaneous with Trent. These men represented several points on the ecclesiastical spectrum: all were highly educated, and held doctorates in theology from famous French universities, several were appointed bishops or vicars-general at some stage in their careers, while others had extensive pastoral experience as preaching members of mendicant orders or as diocesan clergy.\textsuperscript{31} Although they emerged from very different milieux and enjoyed varying career paths, they shared the fundamental view that immediate reform of the church was absolutely essential, that it was dependent on bishops, and that their present standard was far too low for reform to succeed. The experienced preacher Guillaume Pepin succinctly expressed their disenchantment with the contemporary episcopate when he complained that there were far too few ‘Ambroses’ in the French church of the sixteenth century or, in other words, too few bishops prepared to pursue God’s interests.\textsuperscript{32}

Once Protestant ideas began to filter into France from the 1520s, the reformers saw the need to remedy the episcopate’s ills as especially pressing. Part of their response to the anti-episcopal stance of French Protestants was to emphasise the necessity for bishops within the institutional church and for successful reform with even greater urgency. Their plan of campaign was uncompromising: they agreed that episcopal residence was vital, and believed that the major stumbling block to its fulfilment was the insidious vice of worldliness which encouraged absenteeism and the involvement of bishops in ‘profane affairs’.\textsuperscript{33} Of course, this was a particularly pertinent observation in the post-Concordat age when so many bishops owed their appointments to familial influence or power politics, and when prominent prelates like the Cardinals Lorraine and Amboise played major roles in the politics of the realm. In response to this tendency, the reformers attempted to rework traditional ideas, by laying particular stress on the non-political nature of the episcopal office and on the responsibility of bishops to be present in their sees and active in their ecclesiastical duties. Linked to these demands were their condemnations of the related practices of under-age appointments and multiple benefice-holding,\textsuperscript{34} each of which were consequences of the tendency to regard the episcopate as a quasi-hereditary and secular office. Once a bishop had been chosen, he was obliged to fulfil his administrative duties. In this context, the reformers emphasised, visitations and synods were the twin essentials enabling a bishop to implant reform.\textsuperscript{35}

Obviously, therefore, Trent’s model of administrative episcopacy was not radically new but was based on ideas which had long circulated within the
church and which those seeking reform had attempted to formulate according to the perceived needs of the church. The value of the Council’s legislation lay in the fact that it gave official and codified form to what had formerly been a loose conglomerate of reform principles and proposals. Yet although it scored a decisive success in this, it did not prove nearly so comprehensive about other key aspects of episcopacy. Even during the Council’s deliberations, many deputies anticipated the potential risks of limiting its definitions on episcopacy, and they lost no energy in bringing this fact to their confreres’ notice. As a result, when the French delegation left its own country newly embroiled in a religious war, it arrived, in November 1562, at a Council that was itself in grave danger of escalating into a full-scale war of words, followed by a divisive and inconclusive termination of debate. This struggle hinged on the issue of episcopal droit divin, that is, on the source and the nature of bishops’ jurisdiction. It had been causing difficulties for quite some time; the question had first been broached in 1546 when the Council had discussed the duty of episcopal residence, and successive delegates had requested that residence be made a condition of divine law. Even after a great deal of intense debate in special committees and in the Council’s main sessions, no unanimous decision could be reached on whether a positive statement on the immediate source of bishops’ jurisdiction should be included in the decrees on residence. The final decrees of Session VI had simply commanded, as a result, that bishops be resident within their dioceses, but made no reference to the broader issue of droit divin (divine law or right).36

One might ask why the rationale behind a bishop’s jurisdiction actually mattered so long as he exercised his diocesan authority vigilantly for the sake of reform. In reality, however, as the conciliar fathers were acutely aware, the issue of whether a bishop’s jurisdiction was held according to droit divin was open to two conflicting interpretations, both with grave implications for the functioning of authority and discipline and for the hierarchical structures underpinning the institutional church. The first argued that bishops received their power of jurisdiction directly or immediately from God and that this was an inalterable principle of divine law. Alternatively, and this was the position maintained by the papacy and its zelanti supporters, one could claim that prelates derived their power of jurisdiction directly or immediately from the pope, who alone held jurisdiction in plenitude, and that the droit divin of episcopal jurisdiction was consequently without foundation.37 Each involved two distinct conceptions of ecclesiastical government, one papalist, the other more episcopalist, and, with such fundamental principles at stake, it was a quarrel that caused severe, and ultimately unresolved, difficulties at Trent.

The traditional interpretation of the French role at Trent presents the stance of the French delegation as unrepentantly confrontational, with the
recalcitrant deputies locked in debate with the papacy over the question of bishops’ jurisdictional *droit divin* almost as soon as they set foot in the Council’s debating chambers. This view is not wholly accurate since, in actuality, as Tallon’s investigation of the French experience at the Council demonstrates, the French delegates, and in particular their leader, Cardinal de Lorraine, considered the question of jurisdictional *droit divin* to be secondary to that of ecclesiastical reform. They were far more interested in the practical means by which the church could combat heresy than in debates about doctrinal issues. This was understandable since the French were faced with the rising power of the Huguenots in France and with the prospect of prolonged civil war, but it meant that they were willing to compromise upon the issue of *droit divin* and even to suggest that it be dropped completely from discussions. When they arrived at Trent, consequently, their priority was to resolve the damaging quarrel that had arisen before their participation. Lorraine’s initial address to the Council stressed that the delegates must at all costs avoid creating further rifts. Indeed, although all the French prelates supported the theory of bishops’ jurisdictional *droit divin*, only three explicitly requested that the Council officially confirm it. Even so, none was willing to allow the papacy to exploit the situation by manoeuvring an express confirmation of papal jurisdiction over the entire church, the contrary doctrine to episcopal *droit divin*. So, while the papal legates and *zelanti* continued to argue trenchantly for confirmation of this doctrine through the final months of the Council, they were opposed just as robustly by the French and Spanish bishops.

This failure of the Council to pronounce on the issue of *droit divin* was a critical omission. The dispute had profound possible repercussions for the jurisdictional authority and powers of bishops and the pope, and indeed for the authority of bishops over the lower clergy. In this sense, the quarrel over residence was not, in fact, about residence at all. On the surface, the call for residence to be made a precept of divine law represented a concerted attempt to halt the practices of absenteeism and pluralism which the delegates believed to plague the church. Part of the difficulty here was the willingness of successive popes to provide bishops with dispensations for multiple benefice-holding and prolonged absences from their dioceses, policies which simply compounded the obstacles to reform. A positive connection between episcopal residence and *droit divin* would put paid to such abuses. But there existed a second, broader, aspect to the question of residency, and it was this that really underlay the stand-off at the Council. All the fathers knew that residence and jurisdiction were intrinsically linked, for if a bishop was to exercise his jurisdiction effectively then he had to reside in his diocese. Yet this was only the thin edge of the wedge, for if Trent had officially confirmed that residence was a divinely ordained precept, it could subsequently have been argued that all episcopal
jurisdiction was held immediately from God. That thesis severely limited papal jurisdiction over bishops and dioceses, denying the pope the right to interfere not only in the residence of bishops but also in their exercise of jurisdiction over their clergy and laity. It drastically curtailed, therefore, papal power through the church. Yet the final decree made no reference to the origin of episcopal powers of jurisdiction; this was the compromise which the delegates found themselves forced to concede if the Council was not to flounder and break up in disarray. This meant, however, that it remained unclear whether the jurisdiction of bishops was directly derived from God or the pope. Conceivably, both interpretations of the issue could be supported and further developed in the Council’s wake, because no official doctrine existed.

Once more, the quarrel reared its head when the Tridentine delegates turned to formulating the decrees on the sacrament of order between October 1562 and July 1563. After a replay of the divisions over episcopal residence, the Council finally decreed that the priestly orders ‘truly and properly’ formed one of the seven sacraments, imprinting a unique and ineffaceable character on its recipients which enabled them to consecrate the bread and wine and forgive sins. Priests were distinct from and superior to the laity, therefore, because of the character and powers of their sacerdotal vocation, and the Council produced a plethora of regulations regarding clerical education, ordination and manner of life which were designed to ensure that Catholic clergy would conform to their defined role.41 Bishops too belonged to ‘this hierarchical order’ but were distinct from and superior to priests as a result of their charismatic authority to govern as successors of the Apostles and as a result of their charismatic ability to confer the sacraments of ordination and confirmation.42 Here, the Council plumped for the dominant scholastic distinction between episcopal order (bishops’ power to confer order and to confirm) and jurisdiction (their power to govern). As the theology of priesthood had evolved during the medieval period, leading theologians, including such luminaries as Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, had argued just this question.43 Aquinas concluded it to his satisfaction by positing distinctions of order and of jurisdiction between priest and bishop, while concurrently maintaining that both formed part of the same sacrament. The episcopate, he claimed, was not merely an extension of the priesthood but a discrete ecclesiastical state blessed with the powers of perfecting and jurisdiction.44 Although Trent adopted this distinction it deliberately avoided discussing its subtle theology since to do so would risk raising once more the question of the source of episcopal jurisdiction, a trap that the delegates were desperate to evade. In doing so, it failed, again, to respond to the logical questions: did episcopal jurisdiction come directly from God or indirectly via the pope, and secondly, precisely what degree of independent jurisdiction could a bishop expect to possess within his diocese?
A persistent tradition of gallican independence made the French delegation especially sensitive to these complex questions of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and it functioned as one of the major motivations for their stance at Trent. By the sixteenth century, ecclesiastical gallicanism had become associated with the loosely defined ‘liberties’ of the French church, which claimed to fix the boundaries of papal jurisdiction in France. But it was at least as much an attitude as a codified set of laws, and represented a spirit of independence which resented unrestricted papal monarchy in the day-to-day ecclesiastical government of France. Most famously, however, gallicanism was associated with conciliarism, for in the early fifteenth century France had been a hotbed of the conciliarist doctrine which had been promulgated at the Council of Constance (1415). When, from 1378, first two and then three rivals had emerged to claim the papal throne in the Great Schism, conciliarism had been presented as the only way to restore peace to a fractured church. The theory received its ultimate formulation in the decrees of Constance which declared that general councils held their authority directly from Christ, and that every one, including the pope, was bound to obey their decrees. Although this decision had subsequently been overturned by a papal bull of 1460 and, for good measure, by the Councils of Florence (1437) and Lateran (1512), the doctrine had not lost its attraction for French churchmen.

The Franco-Tridentine bishops followed in the footsteps of conciliarism’s greatest exponent, Jean Gerson, but also in those of later theologians, including Jacques Almain, John Major and Josse Clichtove, who had maintained the doctrine’s currency. Perhaps partly, however, because Gerson was a highly respected writer on pastoral as well as purely theological topics, his treatments of conciliarism proved the most widely disseminated in France during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The enduring popularity of his works ensured that the tradition never lost its prominence within France: six printed editions of Gerson’s complete works appeared before 1500, with three more being published during the following century. He was most famous for his leadership of the French delegation at Constance, for it was here that he offered the conciliarist doctrine published in February 1417 as the decree Sacrosancta. In his contribution to the Council’s outcome, Gerson confirmed that the locus of church unity was the pope under Jesus Christ. Given that conciliarism was a theory formulated to limit papal power, it might seem surprising that Gerson would grant an exalted place to the pope within his doctrine, but he did so as a result of his respect for the pope as the successor of Peter. Yet while Peter’s successor possessed a plenitude of power, granted to him by Christ, his use of this power was subject to the authority of a general council and could even be limited if the council deemed this expedient for the edification of the church. For Gerson, God’s will was expressed through the considered determinations of a general
council, consisting of bishops who were directed by the Holy Spirit: a general council held supremacy over the pope. Gerson also allowed bishops a large degree of independent authority in their dioceses as well as within the framework of decision-making within the church. Papal authority over bishops was executive, meaning that the pope was obliged to ensure that prelates exercised their jurisdiction according to canonical norms. Otherwise, however, he could not act in dioceses without their consent, for his power over them was not absolute. Episcopal jurisdiction was, therefore, not directly derived from him. Unlike the Council of Trent, the French theologian had no difficulty in confirming that bishops held their jurisdiction according to droit divin.

Cardinal de Lorraine affirmed his faithfulness to this heritage when he commented in 1563 that ‘I am French, nourished in the University of Paris, which holds the authority of a council above the pope, and which censured as heretics those who hold the contrary view.’ Although he and his fellows were fundamentally in favour of the Council of Trent, they simply could not stomach the suggestion that the pope’s universal authority allowed him to override episcopal jurisdiction, especially since this did not even derive from him. The conciliar theory incorporated and legitimated both of these assumptions: from the belief that the pope did not possess universal jurisdiction within the church, it was logical to assume that he could not interfere in the government of bishops within individual churches and that, therefore, they held their power of jurisdiction directly from God.

It was largely due to the papacy’s fear of French support for conciliarist ideas that it so actively encouraged the inclusion of a canon confirming the universality of papal jurisdiction in 1562 and 1563. Pius IV and his legates even suspected that the French would abandon Trent and in its place hold a national council to resolve the problems of the gallican church and protestantism. After all, the French had, under Louis XII, convoked the infamous Council of Pisa in 1511 which re-issued the decrees of Constance. Then, in 1551, Henri II had come perilously close to rupturing all relations with the papacy, when Julian III opposed his proposal for a national council to tackle reform. Judging from past events, comparable initiatives seemed perfectly possible to the sensitive papal circle in the early 1560s. Only recently, the Colloquy of Poissy (1561) had also, in its view, displayed the alarming characteristics of a national council independent of papal control. At the time of the Colloquy, Pius IV had been horrified by the prospect of it mutating from a meeting to reform the French church into a national council proposing to resolve matters of faith and morals, and appears to have assumed that a gallican council would inevitably mean a wholly independent gallican church. In particular, Pius mistrusted Lorraine’s motives and did his utmost to ensure that the papacy could offset any movement along the road to a gallican council by deftly obliging the cardinal, as a newly appointed
papal legate, to work closely with two other loyal papal legates in the lead-up to the Colloquy. Within this context, Lorraine and his band of bishops remained, one year later, deeply suspect to Rome. In fact, Lorraine had never intended to pursue the course of action so feared by the papacy, and indeed had only acquiesced to the proposed Colloquy with the provisions that it did not address reforms of faith and that it took place under legatine direction. His favoured approach had been a meeting of the episcopate, under legatine supervision, which would discuss practical ecclesiastical reforms, neither venturing on to the terrain of doctrine nor admitting equal participation by Huguenots in any deliberations. But this was irrelevant in the cloud of suspicion that subsequently, for the papacy and its supporters at least, surrounded the cardinal and his entourage at Trent.

It would be a mistake to concentrate exclusively, however, on the tensions dividing French bishops and Rome during the later sixteenth century. To render full justice to the complexity of episcopal attitudes towards the papacy we must also take account of the more pro-papal atmosphere that developed within the French church during the century’s final two decades. This was partly due to the efforts of the papacy itself whose nuncios cultivated close contact with members of the French episcopate in order to draw them more closely into Rome’s orbit. Perhaps more importantly, the heavily pro-papal Catholic League played its part in fostering sympathy for the symbol of Catholic unity. Many bishops supported the League during the 1580s and early 1590s: Frederic Baumgartner calculates this number to be fifty-one during the period 1589–91. Of course, membership of the League did not necessarily equate with ultramontanism, so that even if a closer relationship existed between the episcopate and the papacy, the bishops still remained anxious to safeguard the traditional prerogatives of their church. In effect, they trod a tightrope between papalism and gallican independence. Most representative of this was the fact that only the League Estates General of 1593 called for the publication of the canons of Trent without qualification. In contrast, the Assemblies of Blois (1576), Melun (1579) and Paris (1586) all requested publication without prejudice to the liberties of the gallican church.

The ultramontane inclination was somewhat uncomfortably reconciled with this gallican perspective. Pierre de Villars, archbishop of Vienne, manifested the wary co-existence between the two attitudes when, in a published volume of his sermons and treatises, he described how he managed to reconcile Trent’s decrees with gallican liberties. Painting an idyllic sketch of the ancient church, Villars observed that there had originally been no exceptions to episcopal control in dioceses. Over the centuries, he continued, the exemptions afforded by traditional gallican liberties had frequently given rise to abuses, disorders and inconveniences. The archbishop squarely attributed
the blame for the introduction of liberties to those prelates who had misused their authority, so that popes had needed to grant exemptions and privileges to chapters and religious orders in order to protect them. However, now those who held privileges were equally guilty of abuses, leading Villars to urge them to use their rights properly, for the source of heresy lay in ‘the cesspit of sin’.65

Still, he commented, even though Trent had offered an escape from this cycle of abuse by retracting most privileges, he would never ‘prejudice’ traditional French liberties. For this reason, when he received the Tridentine regulations in his diocesan synod it had been with the protestation that he did not wish to contravene the rights and privileges of the gallican church.

Villars was obviously keen to protect the traditional rights and independence of the French church, but he was concurrently at pains to ensure that the decrees of Trent be officially published so that the French church would no longer be ‘almost schismatic’.66 His attitude mirrored a pattern then prevailing within the French episcopate. While it arose partly in the inflamed atmosphere of Leaguer politics, bishops perhaps also, consciously or otherwise, turned towards the papacy in the hope that it could provide them with the support that the stumbling monarchy could no longer give. In these threatening circumstances, it made sense to cultivate the goodwill of a powerful ally. That resolution is particularly demonstrated by the language and content of the fourteen reports ad limina sent to Rome between 1587 and 1599. Marc Venard correctly concludes that, in the main, they were written by prelates who sought papal support to combat the material and political suffering caused by the religious conflicts. In his 1593 report, Nicolas de Villars, bishop of Agen, presented himself as a conscientious and active supporter of the League and a reforming bishop carrying through Tridentine policies in his diocese even during bouts of Huguenot belligerence.67 Since, as Venard points out, the obligation to present ad limina reports had never had force of ecclesiastical law in France, the actions of these prelates in actually producing and sending them portrays more pro-papal sympathy within the episcopate than before the wars. The heritage of gallican independence was for the moment, therefore, reconciled with a more conciliatory and co-operative attitude towards Rome. Still, there were many bishops who did not join the League, did not cultivate closer relations with Rome and who actually supported the royalist camp throughout the 1580s and 1590s: the strength of the episcopate’s ‘conversion’ to Rome should not be over-estimated. As so often, necessity bred accommodation, but as the immediate threat to life and property receded and political stability returned to France in the seventeenth century, the alliance between bishops and Rome might lose its raison d’être.

Forced to cope with such fundamentally divergent perspectives on droit divin, it is not unexpected to find that the Council of Trent failed to produce a definitive
definition of orthodoxy on this or on the precise relationship between prelate, pope and priest. The Council’s legislation might be described as a theology in elaboration, meaning that it provided basic direction but, by reason of what it omitted, left the way open for further interpretations and possibly, of course, for disagreements. In theory, there seemed every reason why Trent, as a general council of the church, might have presented a complete dogma on these questions but, as so often, the issues which evoked such passionate responses were too intractable for this to be achieved. In any case, the Council’s priority was to produce an administrative code that could be immediately put into practice by bishops; the theological underpinning of these rules was partially sacrificed in order to restore momentum to conciliar deliberations. Yet this simply postponed the problems of jurisdiction and droit divin for the future.

A slightly similar result arose in relation to those decrees describing the episcopal pastorate and bishops’ spirituality, but for quite different reasons. Any analysis of this legislation is complicated by the fact that successive historians have read its directives rather differently. According to Giuseppe Alberigo, one of Trent’s foremost historians, the Council failed utterly to provide a theory of the episcopate, which might have linked spirituality to pastoral work and provided a basis for pastoral action. Indeed, he claims that Trent added no spiritual inspiration whatsoever to the functions of the episcopate: its administrative legislation was composed of traditional and practical principles of reform that were not underpinned by a unitary theological or spiritual vision. More recently, Oliver Logan has rejected this negative conclusion in his study of the sixteenth-century Venetian clergy. In a very brief discussion of the Tridentine decrees, Logan suggests that Trent did indeed provide what might be called an embryonic pastoral spirituality. Yet he admits that this spirituality was rudimentary, and that it even failed to make full use of traditional pastoral teaching to expose the links between administrative actions and the apostolic vocation of bishops.

Which of these judgements is correct? Certainly, a thorough reading of the legislation on episcopal residency and orders would appear to confirm Alberigo’s claim. But is this true of the bulk of its episcopal legislation? In short, the answer is no. Trent did, in fact, occasionally manage to provide guidelines that ‘spiritualised’ the episcopal office and the duties associated with it. Certainly its legislation on bishops was primarily and principally administrative, for this reflected the Council’s immediate objectives. Consequently, any attention that it gave to episcopal spirituality is found in the decrees that described bishops’ administrative obligations. But in these decrees the programme of administration is explicitly twinned with a spirituality that was intended to underpin and inspire it. To achieve this, the Council drew on familiar pastoral teachings which emphasised the prelate’s role as shepherd, father
and protector. Even in its otherwise limited decrees on residence, it managed to incorporate the New Testament’s analogy of the good shepherd, to underline the fact that bishops could not ‘like hirelings . . . desert the flocks committed to them’, for only resident bishops could properly ‘attend to the guardianship of their sheep’. Prelates should be vigilant in carrying the ‘burden formidable even to the shoulders of angels’, that of directing souls towards salvation. This metaphor was carried through to the second decree on residence, where bishops were urged to reside as ‘shepherds and leaders’ of the flock entrusted to them. Likewise, the bishop’s duty to oversee the moral welfare of his charges was based on the image of the benevolent shepherd and father, reproving, entreatng and rebuking those under his protection, ‘in all kindness and patience’. Session XXV’s decree dealing with the living habits of bishops also attempted to base its call for modesty of table and train upon a pastoral spirituality. Bishops were to ‘manifest simplicity, zeal for God and a contempt for vanities’ on all occasions. Their temperate example would encourage ‘moderation, modesty, continence’ and humility in those whom they supervised. Here, the analogy of service was adopted, with bishops presented as ‘the servants of the servants of God’, those called to labour and care ‘for the glory of God’ and ‘the salvation of souls’. They were to deport themselves so that their lives became ‘a sort of perpetual sermon’, testaments to God’s glory and consistent with the character of their office.

The legislators at Trent were obviously seeking to associate the lives of bishops with their vocational responsibility for the souls in their care: the example and supervision of bishops would lead others towards imitation of their virtues, towards a more Christian life and ultimately, it was implied, towards God. Yet here too, Trent was not truly innovating since its pastoral images of protection, fatherhood, service and guidance were all traditional themes drawn from sources like Saint Paul, Ignatius of Antioch and Gregory the Great. Indeed, the Council frequently included biblical quotations to support its advice and to connect its bald rules with the conscientious bishop’s personal faith. Session VI’s precept on residence quoted Paul’s advice to Timothy, a classic text on episcopal duties. But the directives produced were not only traditional; they were also limited in value. Assessed as a whole, Trent’s legislation on episcopacy was overwhelmingly legalistic and focused on the disciplinary power of bishops to bring about religious order. It offered only glimpses of the possible theological and spiritual perspectives behind bureaucratic functions. Its decree on preaching, which might have been expected to provide the occasion for references to the pastoral basis of instruction and teaching, did not do so, but merely directed bishops to preach personally and to appoint suitable persons to do so within their dioceses ‘for the welfare of the faithful’. There was no reference to the source of bishops’ obligations to preach and instruct, that
is, to the salvation of souls, nor were there any suggestions relating to how a bishop might prepare for this function. It was a similar story in regard to visitations and synods. Bishops were directed to carry these out as key parts of their administration but Trent completely neglected their pastoral motivation and their connection to the vocation of bishops as directors of souls. Nor did the Council dwell on the prelate’s personal approach to these duties, in terms of preparation by prayer or reflection on their importance to his pastoral responsibilities. Rather, the decrees simply stated the obligation of prelates to carry out visitations and synods and outlined penalties for their failure to hold synods. What emerged most clearly from the decrees was the fact that a bishop was an administrator. This was Trent’s main preoccupation. The spiritual motivation for a bishop’s activities was secondary.

Overall, however, Alberigo’s evaluation of Trent is rather unjust. Despite its understandable preoccupation with the administrative or legalistic aspects of episcopacy, the Council did offer some spiritual grounding to the pastoral activities of bishops. Prelates were encouraged towards conscientious pastoral administration and care so that they could fulfil their role as protectors and directors of their flocks, ensuring their spiritual welfare and ultimate salvation. The salvation of souls was, therefore, to be the goal of their activities. Yet beyond these stock images of the bishop as shepherd and father, the Council offered little insight into the spiritual foundations of episcopacy or into the virtues which a specifically episcopal spirituality might bring to a bishop’s personal life and to his pastorate. In summary, its representations were raw, constrained and unimaginative.

The best indications of Trent’s shortcomings on pastoral episcopacy come from the reactions of bishops in its aftermath. Although reasonably happy to adopt its administrative model of visitations, synods and seminaries, these men were far from contented with the guidelines that it had offered on episcopal spirituality and pastoral theology. Almost immediately, they set about amplifying the Council’s fledgling material so that it would fulfil the needs of bishops working in the field. Among these ecclesiastics was the archbishop who was quickly to become synonymous with this period of Catholic resurgence, Charles Borromeo of Milan (1538–84). But these were also the decades of prelates like Gabriele Paleotti of Bologna (1522–97), Agostino Valier of Verona (1531–1606) and Jean Ribera of Valencia (d. 1611), all imbued with an energy that fired their administrative and disciplinary reforms. Another of these bishops, Barthélemy des Martyrs, archbishop of Braga (1514–90), left his diocese only four times in the twenty-one years of his episcopate, if his attendance at Trent is excluded. As a resident bishop, he carried out annual visits of his sprawling diocese with its nearly thirteen hundred parishes, and presided over
regular diocesan synods. Each of these bishops based his governing activities on the Tridentine model, giving primacy to residency, visitations and synods. The administrative systems that they implemented in order to overhaul religious discipline among clergy and laity therefore shared sufficient similarities to be labelled as both ‘Tridentine’ and ‘reforming’.

When compared with their reforming brethren in Italy and Spain, French bishops are revealed to have been a good deal slower to adopt Trent’s administrative programme. Their delegation returned from Trent reasonably satisfied with its decrees, which at least offered a way forward for reform of the church to be commenced. Yet, once they stepped back on to their home soil, it appears as if the bishops promptly forgot about the Council’s objectives for several years. Of course, intermittent conflicts could discourage even the most enthusiastic bishop from instituting reforms. Still, the bishops did manage to hold diocesan synods on their return, and here they might have referred to Trent’s regulations. Rather surprisingly, however, their statutes, with just one exception, do not mention Trent at all. But within two decades Trent was mentioned in the resolutions of virtually every synod, and reform-minded bishops increasingly adopted its programme.

Several reasons lay behind this shift: in the first place, although the wars may initially have discouraged or prevented some prelates from undertaking reform, the decrees were gradually recognised to be the best weapons with which to trounce protestantism. This was particularly the case in the wake of the obvious failure by 1567 of the crown’s policy of religious toleration. Enthusiasm for the Tridentine programme was a gradual and rational decision on the part of those French bishops who recognised the need for ecclesiastical reform and who were actively willing to foster it. It may also have been a product of the strategic warming of relations between bishops and Rome during these years of critical political insecurity. At least as important, however, is the fact that several French bishops were genuinely inspired and influenced by the efforts of dynamic prelates elsewhere who had successfully initiated Tridentine-style administrative reforms in their dioceses. Although these stimulations to reform did not affect the whole episcopate, they did energise individuals who can certainly not be simply distinguished from their brethren as ultramontanes: they included some who were quite anti-papal and anti-Leaguer in their politics, while pro-Tridentine in their ecclesiastical outlook. One did not need to be an ultramontane to favour Tridentine reform. Cardinal de Joyeuse was a determined supporter of Henri IV, but an equally avid advocate of Trent’s rules and an ardent admirer of its standard-bearer, Charles Borromeo.

This cautious reinvigoration was facilitated and reflected, in part, by the availability of the Council of Trent’s decrees, published in French for the first time in 1564 and reprinted at least ten times before 1600. But active reform
initiatives were most clearly apparent in the cluster of provincial councils held from the early 1580s. These were heavily Tridentine in tone, in the sense that they officially received the Council’s decrees within their provinces and incorporated the Tridentine legislation into their own statutes. Significantly, they were also substantially influenced by the post-conciliar legislation produced by Charles Borromeo for the reform of the archdiocese of Milan. Both Paul Broutin and Henri Brémond assumed that the papal enclave of Avignon acted as the conduit for the popularisation of Trent and Borromeo in France: under the government of several reforming bishops from Rome, such as Philip Neri’s companion Francesco Tarugi, it saw synods and visitations from 1566 onwards and acted as a kind of shop window for Catholic reform. In contrast, Marc Venard’s magisterial study of Avignon has pointed out that the progress of rejuvenation in the province coincided with, rather than anticipated, the early pulse of reform in France. His conclusion suggests that one must seek beyond Avignon to find the channels responsible for the dissemination of the Tridentine and Milanese disciplines.

The connections between reform-minded French bishops and Borromeo proliferated during the late sixteenth century, so that the growing cult around the Milanese archbishop gradually filtered into the French church. It is not unexpected that French bishops should have been attracted to the practical and thorough detail of Borromeo’s regulations, seemingly perfectly adoptable in any diocese and responsive to the most entrenched forms of disorganisation. The breadth of these contacts should not be over-estimated, but it is possible to point to some bishops who definitely benefited from their acquaintance with Borromeo or Borromean admirers and imitators. At least one French archbishop, Pierre de Villars, esteemed by the bishop of Geneva, François de Sales (1567–1622), for his conscientious episcopate, enjoyed a limited correspondence with the Milanese archbishop and venerated his memory. He visited Borromeo’s tomb in May 1592 as he returned from a sojourn in Rome. Borromeo himself was not actually in personal contact with many French bishops, even though subsequent tradition reported that François de La Rochefoucauld met him in 1579. It was principally through his disciples, and one of his successors in Milan, Federico Borromeo (1564–1631), that the archbishop’s distinctive reform methods became known in France and that his cult was promoted. Nuncios Castelli (term in office 1581–83) and Ragazzoni (term in office 1583–86) and the Tuscan archbishop of Aix-en-Provence, Alexandre Canigiani, were all close disciples of Borromeo and did their best to encourage bishops to adopt his methods of government. Ragazzoni, a former reforming bishop of Bergamo, enjoyed continuous relations with François de Joyeuse, archbishop of Narbonne, Cardinal de Bourbon of Reims and Bishops Rose of Senlis and Gondi of Paris, all of whom had an interest in ecclesiastical reform.
Federico Borromeo, nephew of Charles and his successor in Milan, was a close advisor of the future cardinal and Borromean devotee François de Sourdis from the 1590s, while François de Sales knew a number of French prelates such as La Rochefoucauld, Pierre de Villars and, slightly later, Jean-Pierre Camus. These were bishops who adopted the Borromean-Tridentine style of administration in their own activities and acted as channels for its broader dissemination within the French church.

That the dominant influence on administrative reform within the French episcopate during the late sixteenth century was Charles Borromeo is again obvious from the legislation of the seven provincial councils held in France during these decades. All these borrowed heavily from the decrees of Borromeo’s provincial councils, which were collectively published in 1582 as the Acta ecclesiae Mediolanensis. As templates for navigating disciplinary reform, these decrees were highly attractive to bishops, for they ranged logically over virtually every conceivable area of administration, from ecclesiastical conferences to confraternities. When the papal nuncio Anselmo Dandino addressed the Assembly of Clergy at Melun in 1579, he took the opportunity to propose that Borromeo’s texts be used as a basis for its legislation. This suggestion met with the Assembly’s approval, and Melun successively provided the model for the seven provincial councils held between 1581 and 1590. In fact, these were, if anything, even more Borromean in structure and tone, confirming the burgeoning of this tradition in France and the late archbishop’s influence on episcopal reform.

Melun voiced its support for the promulgation of the Tridentine decrees in France (though with the proviso that gallican liberties be preserved), but drew substantially on the 1566 council of Milan, even following its order of topics, for its detailed recommendations to bishops. Like other late sixteenth-century French councils, it insisted that bishops be resident and conduct their administrative duties with care. Recognising the urgent need for residency, the Council of Bourges even went as far as to order prayers to be recited for this end. These synods structured episcopal administration around diocesan visitations and synods, asking that they be held regularly to assist the supervision of clergy and ecclesiastical government: ‘Among the charges of bishops one of the principal . . . is the visitation, of which the first goal must be to introduce and maintain sound and correct doctrine . . . ; to support and preserve good morals . . . , to move and enflame people to true religion by exhortations and remonstrances, and to ordain all things for the edification of the faithful.’ After Melun, each council confirmed its acceptance of the decrees of Trent, but included specifically Borromean innovations in its administrative directions to bishops. Embrun, for example, advised its bishops to divide their dioceses into congregations, with vicars forane overseeing monthly conferences of parish priests for the purpose of study, prayer and the celebration of the mass.
The very fact that French bishops held these councils during the late sixteenth century demonstrates that ideas of reform were filtering fitfully into France: provincial councils had been advocated by Trent as essential to ecclesiastical renewal. Moreover, their prevalence indicates that several members of the episcopate were not simply interested in purely theoretical concepts of reform but were actively attempting to achieve it, and realised the crucial administrative role of bishops in doing so. Of course, adopting Tridentine and Borromean governmental practices within councils was of no use unless efforts were made by bishops to follow these directives in their dioceses. The evidence suggests that some bishops, though again a minority, sought to do just that; a number of visitations were carried out and several bishops held diocesan synods at which Trent’s decrees were promulgated.95 Pierre de Villars was actively committed to the programme of Tridentine reform. Visitations, synods and personal preaching, virtually unknown by bishops throughout most of the century, were principal elements of his episcopate as a result.96 Villars’s interest in reform and his efforts to implement it were also manifested in the subjects of his Opuscules; he composed these didactic exhortations to his clergy in the hope of relighting ‘the blaze of devotion’. Topics that Villars considered important enough to discuss included the perils of simony and confidence, the importance of clerical residence and the interior dispositions and external behaviour necessary to ecclesiastics.97

Villars also noted in his Opuscules that several prelates resided in their dioceses and were active administrators. They were, therefore, he noted with a hint of flamboyance and probably of hyperbole, ‘torches of doctrine, blazes of piety and devotion’.98 ‘Several’ resident bishops does not seem a large number when the episcopate numbered over 100 prelates, but Villars was surely referring only to the province of Vienne, which had eight dioceses. From Mirepoix in the province of Toulouse, Pierre de Donnaud reported in 1593 that he had carried out visitations, convoked a synod, and established laws ‘conformed to the sacred canons, and especially to the holy Council of Trent’.99 Cardinal de Joyeuse, it appears, also attempted to put into practice the administrative directions contained in the provincial council over which he presided in 1581. His report to Rome nine years later claimed that he had held a provincial council, several diocesan synods and visitations ‘in conformity to the prescriptions and examples of the Council of Trent’.100 Indeed, it appears that his visits owed just as much to Borromeo’s example, for they rigorously followed the format developed by the archbishop of Milan, and included questionnaires and inventories for curés to complete and procès-verbaux of the visitations’ proceedings, as well as post-visit deliberations and archiepiscopal statutes that were devised using the results of the visitations’ investigations.101

Administration was just one aspect of episcopacy, however, albeit a crucial one. Post-Tridentine bishops both outside and inside France were well
aware of this fact. Many of them came to realise that the Council of Trent did not offer a comprehensive treatment of episcopacy in all its facets. Feeling insufficiently served by Trent, they themselves, therefore, had to supplement its shortcomings. For this reason, a number of works on the officium episcopi were published during the late sixteenth century, envisaged as guidebooks for bishops on the spiritual and practical aspects of their office. The driving forces behind these were, not surprisingly, prelates themselves. A number of them actually produced texts based on their own practical experiences and reflections and, in particular, attempted to provide an episcopal spirituality to inspire and supplement administrative actions. One such was the well-known reforming archbishop of Braga, Barthélemy des Martyrs, whose Stimulus pastorum proved a highly popular manual among bishops. Although this was initially written by Martyrs as a handbook for his own use, its potential appeal to other bishops was recognised by his associate, Louis de Grenade, who published the book in 1564. The Stimulus subsequently went through numerous editions, and Borromeo himself thought it an extremely useful guide for bishops. It reached France too, for it was printed four times in Paris during the 1580s. The particular value of the work lay in the fact that its author fused Trent’s practical directives with an intense, interior spirituality in order to provide a link between administration and theology. The motives for a bishop’s actions, he claimed, were unreserved love for God and affection for the souls under his care. These were the twin guides for tireless administration and could be cultivated through prayer, meditation and daily eucharistic celebration. They would then manifest themselves in the exterior actions of conscientious administration and in personal virtue. Spirituality had, therefore, to accompany and inform administrative practice; without this fusion, the bishop’s activities were simply formulaic. A real episcopal pastorate would see the prelate acting ‘like a sun which shines forth to light the earth’, as an administrator but, equally, as a director of souls.

Another work of this genre, Agostino Valier’s Discours en manière d’instruction, was translated into French in 1585. Similar in structure and themes to that of Martyrs, Valier’s work was the product of his extensive experience as bishop of Verona. It too emphasised the administrative duties of bishops within their overall character as pastors and ambassadors of Christ, entrusted with the salvation of souls. For Valier, every chore of episcopal government could be related to its ultimate divine purpose, and bishops could prepare themselves for their duties through prayer and study. At least some French bishops valued this kind of guidance: an inventory of the personal library of the bishop of Cahors, Antoine IV Ebrard de Saint Sulpice, recorded that he possessed a copy of Valier’s Discours, along with French and Latin editions of the Council of Trent and the Acta ecclesiae Mediolanensis. The French translation of Valier’s work on
the officium episcopi was actually completed by Ebrard’s archdeacon and relative Chrétien d’Ebrard de Saint Sulpice, who reported in its preface that the bishop of Cahors had brought an Italian copy of the book to France from Italy.

Louis de Grenade (1504–88), the Spaniard behind the publication of Martyrs’s work, was one of the key figures writing on episcopacy during the post-Trent years. Rather than a bishop, Grenade was the provincial of the Portuguese Dominicans, but his reform initiatives ranged widely from preaching to the publication of spiritual and theological writings. His interest in episcopally driven reform led him to publish a volume on the topic of episcopacy just one year after the Stimulus was first printed. In it, he explored many of the ideas contained within the Stimulus, once again seeking to provide a synthesis between the theology and spirituality of episcopacy and its practical functions of administrative government. The dignity of the office, Grenade noted, was such that only the truly worthy should be promoted to it, those who were able and willing to live holy lives and who possessed the virtues of prudence, diligence, fortitude and knowledge. Drawing on his own extensive experience as a preacher, Grenade also produced a work on preaching entitled Ecclesiasticae rhetoricae, at the request of Charles Borromeo. The archbishop of Milan was also the driving force behind Valier’s De rhetorica ecclesiasta and Diego de Estella’s Modo de predicar, works specifically designed to advise bishops on effective preaching. Setting an example for his fellow bishops, Borromeo preached personally and invited skilled preachers, including Francesco Panigarola, to Milan. He is, therefore, particularly significant in the history of late sixteenth-century episcopality for three reasons: for his distinctive administrative discipline, based on the Council of Trent; for his emergence as an episcopal model even within his lifetime; and for his promotion of writing and reflection designed particularly to aid bishops and to build on the limited principles of Trent.

Evidently, reforming bishops of the late sixteenth century were struggling to establish a vision of episcopacy that covered all aspects of their pastoralate. It was as pastors that Borromeo, Martyrs and the bishops who imitated them, like Ribera of Valencia, primarily understood their role, and they searched for an ideology which situated administrative functions within a theological and spiritual framework that was broader and less legalistic than that offered by Trent. Their views made their way into France through the publications described above but were also incorporated into the acts of Charles Borromeo’s provincial councils. As a result, the provincial councils held in France during the 1580s and 1590s used the language of Borromeo and, therefore, of those non-French bishops who, like Ribera, were influenced by him, as well as of Martyrs who shared so closely the views of Borromeo on episcopal spirituality. Melun stressed the episcopal virtues of piety, humility and wisdom as well as the obligation of bishops to cultivate these through frequent recourse to
prayer, confession and the eucharist. They were also, as Trent had directed and reforming bishops had exemplified, to live as simply and modestly as possible. Great emphasis was simultaneously placed on episcopal preaching, in the wake of Trent’s admonition and the efforts of reforming bishops to encourage this practice. The bishop had to combine diligent administration of his diocese with a strong spiritual life, concerning himself solely, therefore, with the health of souls and ‘celestial habitation’. All his actions and indeed his entire outlook were to be governed and inspired by these goals.

The hagiographic tradition that developed around Charles Borromeo was yet another means of propagating contemporary ideas. Slightly surprisingly, given his popularity, no French editions of the archbishop’s life were produced at this stage, but a general hagiographic cult was already well on its way: Agostino Valier’s life of Borromeo, first published in 1586, went through a dozen editions up to 1604 while another enthusiast, Carlo Bascapé, produced a further hagiographic work in 1592. Each concentrated on the rigorous administrative style adopted by Borromeo and on his concern for discipline within his diocese. Yet they also attended to the archbishop’s spiritual life, describing his constant efforts to deepen his relationship with God through prayer, study and the sacraments. The result, as they judged it, was that he not only carefully fulfilled his administrative responsibilities but he did so with great virtue and with the sole motive of serving God.

Much of what Borromeo, Martyrs and Valier included in their writings and adopted as guiding principles for their pastoral ministries was already familiar fare within the older tradition of writing on episcopacy. Certainly there was no shortage of raw materials for this, particularly from the early church and its leading figures, many of whom were themselves prelates; Martyrs’s *Stimulus pastorum* made frequent reference to the patristic literature of Augustine and John of Chrysostom, for example, incorporating their advice into his personal vision of the *bonus pastor*. These were also among the Fathers of the church counted by Valier as suitable role models for episcopal preaching. It is true, too, that some effort to provide a specifically episcopal theology and spirituality had been made within the church by more recent, but still pre-Trent theologians. The same French sources that had so much advice to offer bishops about administration also recommended ways in which they could develop their spiritual life and their relationship with God in a manner appropriate to those charged with the care of souls. To this end, they described the bishop’s vocation in terms of obligation. His task was to guide souls to salvation through both word and deed. He should, therefore, be a disciple of Jesus Christ, with qualities of integrity, wisdom, eloquence, humility and courage. Using, as Trent would subsequently, the particularly pastoral images of the shepherd and his flock and the benevolent father caring for his children,
reformers urged bishops to nourish their charges through teaching and example, and stressed that they should be prepared to devote their entire lives to their spiritual benefit. This attempt to provide government and administration with a clear spiritual motivation was accompanied by directions on how a prelate could develop a profound sense of vocation and a close relationship with God. To achieve both, preachers and theologians advised regular prayer as well as study of the life of Jesus Christ. Jean Gerson’s advice to Pierre d’Ailly when he acceded to the bishopric of Le Puy in 1395 detailed specific reading through which the bishop could hope to find spiritual nourishment and strength for the particular functions of his office. Spiritual reading and study was a theme of special importance to Gerson; he referred five times to its necessity in the course of his letter to the new bishop of Le Puy. He particularly recommended the pastoral works of revered bishops like Gregory the Great, Gratian and Ambrose as well as the lives of the ancient bishops. The inexperienced prelate should also, he stated, study the Gospels and Paul’s epistles so that he might gain spiritual insight into the episcopal condition and its attendant responsibilities.

These theologians and preachers hoped to encourage what they considered to be currently missing from the lives of many prelates caught up in worldly pursuits: a sense of true vocation, grounded in a deep conviction that they served God and that they were pastors of souls. In this model, the bishops’ administrative functions would not be merely means of governing, but would have a real spiritual resonance. Bishops would not, therefore, be just administrators, like secular officials, but representatives of Christ who, modelling themselves on Jesus and saintly prelates, were actively engaged in the work of salvation. Yet there is no doubt that bishops of the late sixteenth century found this representation inadequate. Although not wholly neglecting theology, reformers in France, like those at Trent, were preoccupied with establishing systematic administrative practice. The theology and spirituality of episcopacy were always secondary to their primary concern for immediate and visible reform. In consequence, bishops like Borromeo, Martyrs and Valier believed themselves obliged to supplement the existing advice with the ideas most valuable to their own experiences and requirements. The same conviction was obviously held by French bishops who adopted Borromean-Tridentine reforms and who provided the readership for the new literature dealing with the episcopal condition. It was not that the pre-existing teachings on episcopacy were outdated. Rather, it was felt that contemporary interpretations of the office were necessary. These, by expanding on traditional ideas and incorporating original and energetic insights, would be more directly relevant to bishops and sensitive to their immediate circumstances.

In many ways, the views expressed in both word and deed by bishops like Borromeo were absolutely in tune with those of pre-Tridentine reformers.
The main difference between the post- and pre-Trent eras was that the period after the Council saw a number of dedicated bishops, imbued with the spirit of reform, putting these ideas into practice and encouraging others to do so. Yet, despite their hopes, these bishops did not really succeed in escaping from the bureaucratic or legalistic straitjacket fashioned by the Council. French bishops admired the personal virtues and the spiritual ideas which drove Borromeo’s episcopal activities, just as they admired the example of Barthélemy des Martyrs and other reforming bishops. Yet it was principally their administrative energy and strategies which had caught the imagination of this minority of French prelates; there is no evidence that these men had latched on to any mature pastoral model of episcopacy. Their narrow interpretation of the office was a function of the fact that, generally, the post-Tridentine vision of the good bishop remained heavily dependent on the bishop as administrator, with only limited efforts to develop the theological aspects of the office. Attempts were being made to forge an episcopal spirituality for contemporary bishops, but there were several directions in which this development could move, depending on the needs of prelates. This was especially true in the case of French bishops who lacked contemporary models of their own to follow and depended largely, for the moment, on the ideas of non-French reformers.

By the turn of the sixteenth century, therefore, French prelates had a variety of sources on which to base their understanding of the episcopal office. Those guides most immediately to hand, Trent and the examples of contemporary reforming prelates, appeared particularly attractive, for they enabled the minority of French bishops who were attempting to introduce reforms in insecure conditions to lay the foundations for permanent ecclesiastical order. At the same time, a strong native tradition of reflection on episcopacy existed which had influenced the stance of Trent’s French delegates and which could conceivably do so among future generations of bishops. This French tradition provided strongly articulated views on episcopal jurisdictional rights and authority as well as, secondarily, on episcopal spirituality. Ultimately, however, the body of representations on episcopacy that swirled within the Catholic church was as noteworthy for its shortcomings, ambiguities and outright contradictions as for its mature ideals. If French bishops sought jurisdictional, spiritual, theological or pastoral models of episcopacy, they would find fundamentals in Tridentine prelacy, the Borromean example and the French ecclesiastical tradition. Yet there was certainly no necessary accommodation between any of these, and none of them offered a thoroughly rounded episcopal ideal.

Notes
1 A standard biography of Lorraine is Henry Outram Evennett’s The Cardinal of Lorraine and the Council of Trent (Cambridge 1930).

Frederic Baumgartner, Change and Continuity in the French Episcopate. The Bishops and the Wars of Religion 1547–1610 (Durham, North Carolina 1986), pp. 134–8. See also Baumgartner’s ‘Renaud de Beaune, Politique Prelate’, Sixteenth-Century Journal, 9 (1978), 99–114, which (correctly) describes de Beaune as ‘an ambitious politician and royalist, whose attitude toward his religion was less a concern for the impact of his actions on the church than for how they affected his career and the monarchy’.

Procès-verbaux, i, p. 127.


Bergin, Episcopate, pp. 338–9.

Baumgartner, Change, pp. 133–4.


Baumgartner, Change, p. 12; Bergin, Episcopate, pp. 32, 48–52.

It was de Beaune who lifted the papal excommunication from the newly converted Henri in 1593: Baumgartner, ‘Renaud de Beaune’, 108–11.


Ibid., pp. 616, 704–5.

Ibid., pp. 715–16.

The practice whereby one person held a benefice in trust for another.

The total of 130 bishops refers to those whose social origins are known: Hayden, ‘Origins’, 32.


1560 was a year of perilous political crisis for the monarchy. Following the sudden death of Henri II in July 1559, March 1560 saw the Huguenot conspiracy of Amboise, followed, in December, by the premature death of François II and the regency of Catherine de Medici: Nicola Sutherland, The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition (New Haven and London 1980), pp. 62–100; Alain Tallon, La France et le Concile de Trente (1518–1563) (Rome 1997), p. 301. For a contrary but unconvincing assessment of the Colloquy as a truly ecumenically driven...

51 Pascoe, *Gerson*, p. 47.
52 Brown, *Gerson*, p. 75.
55 This was primarily a political council, designed to avenge Julius II’s alliance with French enemies by extending the military offensive into the ecclesiastical sphere, but the principle of conciliarism informed French strategy: Oakley, ‘Almain’, 674.
59 BN, Ms. Dupuy 357, fo. 186; Lorraine, *Lettres*, p. 468, Lorraine to Charles IX, 27 November 1562.
65 Ibid., pp. 501, 506.
66 Ibid., p. 497.
67 Ibid., pp. 159–60.
68 Alberigo, ‘L’épiscopat’.
69 Logan, *Venetian Clergy*, p. 23.
71 Ibid., Sess. XIII, ch. 1, p. 81.
74 *Canons*, ed. Schroeder, Sess. VI, ch. 1, p. 47; 2 Tim. 4:5.
76 Almeida Rolo, *L’Évêque*, pp. 107, 133.
79 Sutherland, Struggle, pp. 137–77; Tallon, Trente, p. 816.
81 Gentian Hervet, Le Sainct, Sacré et général concile de Trente (Reims 1564).
84 François de Sales, Oeuvres complètes de Saint François de Sales, 27 vols (Annecy 1892–1964), xiv, p. 128; de Sales to Villars, 15 February 1609.
85 H. de Terrebasse, Pierre de Villars archévêque et comte de Vienne 1545–1613 (Lyons 1897), pp. 8–16.
86 Venard, ‘Influence’, 210, but see Bergin’s comments in La Rochefoucauld, p. 14.
87 Venard, Réforme, pp. 733, 1100.
89 Sales, Oeuvres complètes, xii–xix; Peyrous, Réforme, i, pp. 120–4; Kleinman, De Sales, pp. 44–5.
90 Venard, ‘Ultramontane’, 152.
91 Rouen (1581), Bordeaux (1583); Venard dates this council 1583, though in Concilia novissima Galliae ed. Ludovicus Odespun de La Méchinière (Paris 1646), p. 279, it is dated 1582, Tours (1583), Embrun (1583), Bourges (1584), Aix (1585) and Toulouse (1590).
92 Concilia, ed. Odespun, pp. 98, 423; Le Concile provincial des diocèses de Normandie tenu à Rouen l’an MDLXXXI, par monseigneur l’illustrissime et révérendissime cardinal de Bourbon archévêque du dict lieu, corrigé et confirmé par nostre sainct père le pape Gregoire XIII (Paris 1582), p. 31; Venard, ‘Embrun’, 634.
93 Concile provincial, pp. 54–5; ‘Entre les charges des Évesques l’une des principales . . . est la visitation, de laquelle le premier doit être d’introduire et maintenir la saine et droicte doctrine . . .; soustenir et continuer les bonnes moeurs . . ., emmouvoir et enflamber le peuple par exhortations et rémonstrances à la vraye religion, et au reste ordonner toutes hoes à l’edification des fidèles.’ see also Concilia, ed. Odespun, pp. 249–50, 313–17, 476, 497; Venard, ‘Embrun’, 636.
95 Vernard, ‘Henri IV’, 306; Statuts renouvelles par R. Père François de La Rochefoucault évesque de Clarmont: et publiez au S. synode tenu audict Clarmont le vingtuniéme jour d’octobre 1599 (Clermont 1599); Villars, Opuscules, ii, p. 497.
96 Terrebasse, Villars, p. 6.
97 Villars, Opuscules, i and ii.
98 Ibid., ii, epistle to Pope Clement VIII (unpaginated).
100 Ibid., pp. 42–3.
101 Venard, Réforme, p. 1101.
102 Barthélemy des Martyrs, Stimulus pastorum, ex sententia patrum concinnatus in quo agitur de vita et moribus episcoporum aliorumque praelatorum (Rome 1564); Almeida Rolo, l’Evêque, p. 369.
103 In 1582, 1583 and 1586 (two editions). In the seventeenth century, editions appeared in 1622, 1658 and 1667. For this study, I have used the modern edition, published in Braga in 1963.
105 Agostino Valier, Discours en manière d’instruction de ce qui appartient à la dignité épiscopale, trans. Chrétien de Ebrard de Saint Sulpice (Paris 1585).
108 Louis de Grenade, De officio et moribus episcoporum aliorumque praelatorum (Lisbon 1565); Jedin, l’Evêque, p. 93.
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111 Wright, *Ribera*.

112 *Concilia*, ed. Odespun, pp. 98–100, 471–2; *Concilium provincial*, p. 32; Venard, ‘Embrun’, 634.

113 *Concilium provincial*, p. 54; *Concilium*, ed. Odespun, pp. 479–80; Venard, ‘Embrun’, 636.

114 *Concilium provincial*, p. 32; *Concilium*, ed. Odespun, p. 294.

115 Agostino Valier, *Vita Caroli Borromei card. S. Praxedis* (Verona 1586); Carlo Bascapé, *De vita et rebus gestis Caroli, S. R. E. cardinalis, tituli S. Praxedis, archiepiscopi Mediolani* (Ingolstadt 1592).


118 Piton, ‘L’Iéal’, 397; Vansteenberghe, ‘Programme’, 31–2, 35–6. Besides his own works, Gerson also recommended the *Summa theologiae* and Guillaume Pérault’s *Somme des vices et des vertus*.