

Bernard Vandermeersch, *Comme il importe au bien de l'Église et de l'État... L'opposition de l'épiscopat « Belgique » aux réformes ecclésiastiques de Joseph II (1780-1790)*. Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, 94 (2010), 498 p., € 55.

The bishops of the Ancien Régime were the pastors of an institution which always claimed to be the ally of kings, their adviser, and sometimes a moderater of their intemperances. However, the “Belgian revolution” of 1789 rang the death knell for Joseph II's (1780- † 1790) sovereignty over the Austrian Netherlands and religion was no stranger to it. How did the Belgian episcopate find itself in the camp of the factious? The profound reasons for ecclesiastical opposition to Josephism were little known. The author bases himself on a detailed study of episcopal correspondence and anti-Josephist pamphleteering. Contrary to the commonly accepted notion, the episcopate was not hostile to Joseph II's initial reforms, of Febronian orientation. It was only with the well known general seminary “affair” that we see ultramontanism triumph, in a skilful reversal carried out by the archbishop of Mechelen and his entourage, identifying imperial reforms with the realization of a deist and Jansenist plot.