PART ONE

THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

Titlepage 2. *Bulla* or papal lead seal. The backside of the Bulla traditionally figures the name of the reigning Pope: Clement VII (Giulio de’ Medici, 1523–34). [Catholic University of Louvain, University Archives]
CHAPTER ONE

THE APPEAL OF LOGIC

At the onset of this research, I wrote that “thanks to their societal position, academics had managed to pilot their medieval privileges, through the storm of Trent, into the early modern period,” when discussing the confirmation of the Louvain privileges of nomination by Pope Gregory XIII in 1573.¹ There is, in spite of its candour, a lot in this assessment. It consists of a causal relationship; a range of factors that are being related to each other—society, academics, privileges, Trent—and a periodisation that determines the nature of these relations. Trent is believed to have caused a storm that demarcates early modern Catholicism from medieval Christianity. Academic privileges are introduced as an anachronism in a Tridentine Age, a residual of the Middle Ages that could nonetheless subsist due to political circumstances. Implicitly, this configuration rests on a strong opposition between religion and politics on the one hand, and on a concept of change in terms of diffusion on the other hand. In this diffusion model, the nature and the spread of religious change—identified by the popping up of new religious practices, cognitive systems, institutions, and so on and so forth throughout Europe and the world—are not problematic. Referring to the internal dynamics of the belief systems in question, in casu the Tridentine Spirit, will do. What has to be explained are the contingencies (social restraints or opportunities, mental frameworks, favourable or hostile political constellations, economic limits) that accelerate, deflect, distort, slow down, or undo the effects of religious renewal in specific circumstances, but that are fundamentally external to (religious) change and to the pervasive influence of Trent.²

¹ Boute, “‘Regnum,’ ‘Sacerdotium’ en ‘Studium’,” 178.
² For a definition and a comparison with inertia in physics, read Latour, “The Powers of Association,” 266.