Early modern Roman Catholics did not have many changes to adjust to as the Church reformed itself during the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Lutherans and Calvinists, by contrast, experienced radical alteration of their traditional liturgical year, religious services, and social patterns; they knew they were witnessing a Reformation. For ordinary Catholics, however, innovation took the form of modifying past practices, and it usually crept in subtly, slowly, over generations. Although historians of the Reformation era now properly include parallel revisions in the Catholic sphere as fully part of the religious reform movement of that day and not simply as a reaction against emerging Protestantism, qualitative differences have perhaps not received adequate attention. Even the devout Catholic populace may hardly have noticed the small additions and excisions that the ecclesiastical apparatus undertook from above, for similarity prevailed. Most of those who constituted the body of the faithful could not have known that the papacy promoted a uniform Mass everywhere by the early seventeenth century. It probably did not register long in their minds if one or two peculiar seasonal or local tropes fell away as a result.1 A few finely tuned ears might have caught new strains of ecclesiastical music. More would have grasped the utility of catechisms that their head-priests employed in teaching them and their children precisely what to believe, even though they often resisted sending their offspring and young servants to instruction. Yet the content of those emerging catechisms was not unfamiliar to them, just more detailed, orderly, reiterated, and pressed upon them with admonition. They did not possess the text in written

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1 A regional study of such modifications is Leopold Kretzenbacher, Nachtröntisch untergegangene Bildthemen und Sonderkulte der ‘Volksfrömmigkeit‘ in den Südost-Alpenländern (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, in Kommission bei C.H. Beck, 1994).
form, and so the medium of communication was still oral, from cleric to his figurative sheep. They could have worked up interest in and joked about efforts by bishops to curtail clerical concubinage. They may even have feared that such prohibitions would drive priests from stable to unstable liaisons, for the latter were far more dangerous to the common weal.

They would certainly have been aware of the refurbishing of local sanctuaries—they could well have contributed financially to these improvements—but they would not have perceived that the program of, say, the Milanese archbishop Carlo Borromeo was manifested in the results. Their judgments would have run more toward concepts such as *beauty, grandeur, elegance,* or *richness.* They might have admired elaborate new baroque pulpits that projected out into the assembled parishioners’ midst and afforded a better view and hearing of the preacher; but it is unlikely that they would have understood those pulpits as a symbol of missionary zeal or confessional rivalry with neighboring Lutheran or Calvinist clergymen who were enjoined to hone their homiletic skills. Grandeur aside, and whether they were redecorated or not, in Catholic sanctuaries, images of the local patron saint, the Virgin, and the bleeding crucified Christ remained.

In certain regions, as along the Rhine, beginning in the later sixteenth century, the people could indeed have noticed a fresh influx of initially non-resident preachers—Jesuits or after them Capuchins most likely—but even these repeated the pattern of itinerant sermonizing that began not later than the twelfth century and involved, depending on where one lived and the current need, Waldensians, Cathars, Cistercian abbots, Dominicans, Franciscans, members of other mendicant orders, admirers of Jan Hus, and the independent preachers who crisscrossed Europe during the fifteenth century. Before any hint of Luther or Zwingli, many cities of the Holy Roman Empire possessed formal preaching posts, for the desire to hear the Word of God, to know what was in the Bible, was already widespread. Some rural folk strained their ears too but with less chance of edification, unless a religious house or a sympathetic and well-to-do nobleman were situated conveniently

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