

In the Web of Arguments and Interests: Debate in Vienna on the Introduction of the Subject Teacher System

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Abstract:

The paper discusses the history of Vienna's first attempt to introduce a subject teacher system. The last half of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a lively debate over educational policy at the heart of the Habsburg Empire, driven by the secularisation and modernisation agenda of Enlightenment absolutism. Educational issues were at the centre of the monarch's power and political aspirations vis-à-vis the Church, since it was in this area that the secular influence of the Church was hoped to be limited as quickly as possible. While the Court achieved significant and lasting partial successes in lower and higher education, the reform of grammar schools and need to rid them of ecclesiastical influence were almost completely neglected. The most important endeavour of those pushing for modernisation was the introduction of a subject teacher system. There were good reasons for doing so, since this could have paved the way for transforming, at a stroke, a curriculum which still reflected the centuries-old Jesuit tradition, removing monk teachers and guaranteeing the prevalence of secular viewpoints through state teacher training in the long term. The experiment, which can be divided into two intensive phases, had failed completely by the end of the 1810s but provided important lessons for both contemporaries and succeeding generations. Those involved with the struggles were able to observe the internal divisions within the Catholic Church and the strength of the reform Catholic group, while a few decades later, with the introduction of Entwurf, the first attempt at introducing the subject teacher system served as an applicable historical precedent for future generations to copy.

Keywords: *eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Vienna, enlightenment absolutism, education policy*