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Robert Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 300 pp. Notes, bibliography, map, illustrations, and index. $65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-521-82017-0.

Review by Brian Sandberg, Medici Archive Project.

The Thirty Years War broke out in 1618 at the height of the counterreformation movement, as militant catholics seemed poised to sustain major offensives against protestants throughout Europe. The highly motivated members of the Society of Jesus, a new counterreformation religious order founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540, led the fight against "heresy" in the name of the pope. By the early seventeenth century, the Jesuits had developed an impressive missionary organization with about 13,000 members, and their influence extended across catholic Europe and beyond. *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors* explores the roles that Jesuit confessors played in the series of religious conflicts that engulfed Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century. Robert Bireley questions the myth of a pervasive Jesuit political influence and challenges the notion of the Society of Jesus as a hierarchical and monolithic organization blindly carrying out the orders of the pope.

Bireley brings a fresh perspective to the study of the Thirty Years War by focusing on Muzio Vitelleschi, the superior general of the Jesuits from 1615 to 1645, and his relationships with Jesuit confessors serving in courts throughout Europe. Vitelleschi is a fascinating protagonist. A Roman noble who had become a Jesuit in the 1580s against his father's will, Vitelleschi gradually rose within the Society of Jesus and headed the religious order during one of the most difficult periods of its history. Vitelleschi's faith, management, influence-seeking, and problem-solving all come to life through his rich correspondence with Jesuit court confessors. Bireley makes excellent use of thousands of letters and minutes from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus that reveal the superior general's attempts to grapple with the complex political and religious controversies of the Thirty Years War. Bireley defends Vitelleschi, arguing that he "realized the difficulty and delicacy of the confessors' task and tried to shield them from some of the criticism it inevitably evoked" (p. 275).

A supporting cast of Jesuit confessors interacts with Vitelleschi in the book. William Lamormaini acted as court confessor of Emperor Ferdinand II von Habsburg, promoting militant catholicism and praising Ferdinand's "glorious enterprise" of restoring the Catholic Church in the Holy Roman Empire (p. 91). Lamormaini advised Ferdinand II on the controversial Edict of Restitution, which restored ecclesiastical property throughout the empire, and counseled the emperor against making concessions to protestants, even though Ferdinand II overruled him to pursue negotiations for the Peace of Prague in 1635. Adam Contzen, who served as confessor of duke Maximilian of Bavaria, emerges as another passionate advocate of catholic militancy, yet he often clashed with Lamormaini over political issues. In France, a succession of Jesuits heard Louis XIII's confessions and became embroiled in court politics. Jean Suffren, for example, acted as spiritual advisor to both Louis XIII and Marie de Medici until he was sent into exile with Marie in 1631. Bireley is able to build on his previous studies of two prominent court confessors, and his descriptions weave a rich tapestry of the confessors' lives, but sometimes the biographical asides disrupt the flow of his argument.[1]

The book traces Jesuit involvement in the Thirty Years War by analyzing Jesuit positions on successive policy debates as the war progressed and expanded from a Bohemian revolt into a full-scale European war. This chronological organization allows Bireley to show the reactive nature of much of Jesuit policy, as the superior general and the court confessors struggled to respond to the latest political and military developments. The narrative sometimes relies too heavily on "traditional" diplomatic history and a somewhat dated notion of "princely absolutism", however. For example, Bireley spends over fifteen pages re-telling the story of Nicholas Caussin's attempts to use his post as confessor of Louis XIII to criticize the king's chief minister Richelieu and influence royal policies. Cardinal Richelieu outmaneuvered Caussin and persuaded Louis XIII to dismiss the Jesuit confessor, who was then humiliated by the minister's publicists. While this well-known tale of intrigue is interesting, it distracts from the examination of confessors' limitations and ministers' abilities to influence confessors. Similarly, the author's elaborate narration of the famous Day of Dupes interrupts his important analysis of the intersections of religion and politics (pp. 114-120).

Robert Bireley focuses his interpretation precisely on the diverse relationships between religion and politics, creatively using the ambiguous position of the Jesuit court confessors to expose the complexities and contradictions of religious politics during the Thirty Years War. Jesuits sought to gain influence through their advisory roles, adopting a missionary strategy of winning over rulers in hopes of affecting their subject populations (p. 31). Internal directives of the Society of Jesus show that confessors were supposed to address questions of conscience, but to avoid advising rulers on purely political issues or "reason of state". Yet, differing and contradictory conceptions of the role of the confessor emerged when religious and political issues overlapped.

Court confessors' varying perspectives on the relationships between religion and politics produced divisions amongst the Jesuits. Bireley explains that Jesuits can be seen as "militants" or "moderates" based on their opinions about how to respond to heretics. He draws a useful distinction between "holy war" and "religious war" to explain the varying Jesuit approaches to politics. While a "religious war" "was fought primarily for the advancement or defense of religious interests," a "holy war" relied on God's providence and involved "the belief in a summons from God to take up the fight and a promise of divine aid that would lead to victory even in the face of great odds" (pp. 61-62). Muzio Vitelleschi tended to support militancy and believed that "activity against heretics justified involvement in politics by the Jesuit court confessors" (p. 270). Confessors such as Lamormaini and Contzen argued for catholic militancy and aggressive attempts to eliminate heresy within their rulers' territories. Other confessors, like Johannes Gans and Johannes Vervaux, represented moderates who rejected the notion of "holy war" and advocated concessions with enemies in the name of peace.

These sorts of divisions at times produced serious disputes amongst Jesuits. For example, debates in 1640-1641 over the issue of amnesty for protestant rulers in the Holy Roman Empire produced intense polemics, with Jesuits on both sides of the issue (pp. 215-221). Jesuit confessors often became involved in pamphlet wars, and Bireley ably incorporates intellectual history methods to explore their polemics. Since these pamphlets were often written anonymously, rumors and criticisms could spread as readers claimed to recognize fellow Jesuits' writing styles. The acts of the provincial and general congregations of the Society of Jesus allow Bireley to trace Jesuits' opinions about polemical literature and their internal debates over the issues raised by pamphlets. Vitelleschi appears as a mediator and advisor in most of these conflicts, attempting to preserve unity and harmony within the order.

Rifts within the Jesuits were exacerbated by the attachment of court confessors to their rulers, especially since princes usually selected their own confessors. Rulers expected their confessors' advice on critical decisions involving religious policies, and they often asked their religious advisors to defend their religious programs, even in print. Vitelleschi attempted to prevent confessors from becoming overtly involved in court politics, but he also recognized that rulers represented vitally important contributors to religious orders. The superior general's "perception of the need for princely support for the Society's

work explains Vitelleschi's almost obsessive concern to avoid offending princes" (pp. 273-274). The Jesuits' reputation and credibility seemed to rest largely on the decisions of individual court confessors and their abilities to navigate internal court politics and foreign relations with other rulers.

Jesuit confessors were intimately involved in diplomacy, then. The court confessors at the imperial and Bavarian courts exercised considerable influence and represented significant actors in European diplomacy. Lamormaini's attempts to prevent the emperor from making concessions to protestants failed, however, and the 1635 Peace of Prague largely ended the militant Jesuits' attempts to instigate "holy war". Jesuits in France, Germany, and Spain were able to affect religious policies, but had less power than their imperial and Bavarian counterparts. Surprisingly, the diplomatic connections between the Jesuits and papacy only receive a limited treatment here because, as Bireley explains, "Vitelleschi's contacts with the papal curia are difficult to document directly, because they were usually carried on viva voce" (p. 25). The author does show how Jesuit confessors failed to prevent divisions amongst catholic rulers from leading to war between France and the Habsburgs in 1635. Yet, religion continued to be a significant factor in warmaking and peace negotiations, and moderate Jesuit court confessors played important roles in the peacemaking initiatives that ultimately led to the Westphalian conferences. Bireley's work joins a growing literature reexamining the diplomatic processes that culminated in the famous Peace of Westphalia.[2]

The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War is an impressive study that contributes significantly to the religious history of early modern Europe. While many histories of the war dismiss religious factors or see them as secondary, this book rightly places religious issues at the center of the conflict. While Robert Bireley successfully reformulates the interrelationships between religion and politics, a more theoretical approach to religious politics might have problematized his categories of "holy war", "religious war", militants, and moderates even more.[3] Nonetheless, the author's explanation for the changing religious character of the Thirty Years War after 1635 seems convincing. Bireley's focus on Muzio Vitelleschi and the court confessors provides a genuinely new perspective on the history of the counterreformation movement and its impact on the Thirty Years War.

NOTES

[1] *Robert Bireley, Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Robert Bireley, *Maximilian von Bayern, Adam Contzen, S.J., und die Gegenreformation in Deutschland, 1624-1635* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1975).

[2] Derek Croxton, *Peacemaking in Early Modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia, 1643-1648* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1999); Derek Croxton and Anuschka Tischer, *The Peace of Westphalia: A Historical Dictionary* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 2002); Klaus Bussmann and Heniz Schilling, eds., *1648 War and Peace in Europe* (Münster: Katalog, 1998). See also the *Actis Pacis Westphalicae* series, edited by Konrad Repgen.

[3] R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

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