
H-France Review Vol. 18 (June 2018), No. 128

Nicole Reinhardt, *Voices of Conscience. Royal Confessors and Political Counsel in Seventeenth-Century Spain and France*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xviii + 419 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$110.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-870368-6.

Review by Alison Forrestal, National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG).

Is it possible to write a history of the counsel of royal conscience without being privy to the secrets of the confessional? In *Voices of Conscience*, Nicole Reinhardt responds with an emphatic affirmative, supported by a wide-ranging and thought-provoking analysis of the “discursive and practical trajectory of royal conscience” in France and Spain in the seventeenth century (p. 14). With the content of sacramental confession itself off-limits, Reinhardt turns to the broader questions of counsel and ethics that arise from a period in which royal confessors were generally assumed to claim a legitimate role as advisors in the political arena. As pertinent as such questions are to historians today, they were first addressed in the period itself, when the functions and achievements of confessors and counsels of conscience were debated by theologians, political theorists, and political officials. Reinhardt argues that these debates produced a profound reshaping, not just of the confessor’s position and duties, but also of understandings of the royal conscience itself.

This is an ambitious book that draws together topics that, though related, are often treated separately or secondarily in the existing literature. Conscience in early modern Catholic societies has been studied overwhelmingly through the prism of sacramental confession, and more particularly through the many treatises and manuals for confessors that were produced in the era of Catholic reform. Particularly influential has been the work of the late John Bossy, who identified a shift in the focus of confession from the community and social behavior to the individual and interior life during the Catholic Reformation. Furthermore, by tracing a shift from the measurements of the seven deadly sins to the Ten Commandments in confessional manuals, Bossy was able to argue for an intensification in the legalist flavor of the confessional tribunal.^[1] In the political arena, the moral challenges that faced participants have hardly been underestimated, with scholars such as Robert Bireley incorporating it into their investigations of political agency at the highest levels.^[2] It has proved more difficult to work out how such challenges shaped notions of kingship and conscience in the longer term, which is one of the tasks that Reinhardt has set herself.

In order to provide a more complete review of counsel, Reinhardt has organised her book in five thematic parts, and her analysis follows a broadly chronological route. Part one deals with institutions and ideologies of counsel in the French and Spanish monarchies; part two examines the normative frameworks for the judging of royal conscience; part three moves on to the practice of counsel of conscience, while part four analyzes how confessors and theologians reflected on their roles. Finally, part five treats of the erosion of the confessor’s role towards the end of the century, which, Reinhardt concludes, laid the groundwork for the privatization of the royal conscience.

The visibility of confessors as legitimate advisors in the political arena was largely a phenomenon of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The three chapters of part one establish how and why

this had happened by the late sixteenth century by examining the institutional position of the confessors in France and Spain, the ongoing debates on the choice and quality of confessors, and the contemporary theological expertise on which they could draw. Reinhardt does a fine job of describing the contrasting positions of confessors in Spain and France. In the former, the confessor enjoyed a seat in the council of state, and on many juntas, while in the latter the less developed conciliar system of government ensured that his role was far less formalized and regularized. For theologians such as the influential Bellarmine, in any case, it was the public sins of the king that should hold the confessor's attention, and in an era in which the circulation of information was proliferating, the pressure to cultivate an informed conscience was stronger than ever. Part two examines the tools that the new and increasingly specialised field of moral theology provided to confessors for this purpose, first by offering a detailed outline of the standard text for examining royal sins, Martín de Augustinian Azpilcueta's manual for confessors, first published in 1552. Second, with case-studies on war, tax, and favouritism, this section assesses how the norms that theologians presented for decision-making worked when they encountered reality. In her erudite discussion of war, Reinhardt reveals that while Catholic moralists rejected wars fought on religious grounds, the growth in war-making by the seventeenth century combined with the development of probabilism as a method for resolution to result in an expanded list of just causes for war.

In part three, the practice of counsel is treated more closely again, with a particularly interesting chapter on the confessors' relations with minister favorites in both realms. It quickly becomes apparent that continual harmony was the exception rather than the rule. Although she mentions the Day of Dupes briefly in her discussion, Reinhardt devotes only brief attention to it, before proceeding to Richelieu's confrontation with Nicolas Caussin in 1637. Since she argues that the cardinal's confrontations with confessors were principally about his seeming wish to act as a "surrogate king" (p. 228) rather than about clashing personalities, it would have been enlightening to compare Caussin's unusually forthright rejection of Richelieu's effort to silence him with his predecessor's submission to the cardinal's authority. Further, little is said of Mazarin in this regard, who not only shared the accusation of being a would-be surrogate king with his predecessor, but whose time as minister coincided with the establishment of an actual council of conscience in the 1640s, in which confessors assumed a part in examining royal nominations to benefices. Joseph Bergin has elsewhere explored how they fared in regard to episcopal nominations, but the Council's remit ran far wider than these types of benefices, and would bear still further scrutiny.^[3] Reinhardt makes up ground, however, in her interesting comparison of French and Spanish regalism. Strikingly, she argues that the Spanish looked to the French for inspiration in this regard during the early 1600s, and even their confessors sought to safeguard the monarch's rights over church appointments against Roman interference. Confessor Antonio Sotomayor was even instrumental in the composition of junta proposals to get rid of supposed papal abuses that were modelled on the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges and the Concordat of Bologna. Ultimately, these came to nothing when Sotomayor proved unable to warm the cold feet that Philip IV felt at the last minute, and ultimately it was left to France to carry the flag for regalism in the 1670s.

On the whole, the comparative approach that Reinhardt has taken in *Voices of Conscience* enables her to make an effective case for the steady divergence of politics from royal conscience over the seventeenth century, and for the slow retreat of the confessor to the private sins of the king and the political margins. As such, the differences are as interesting as the commonalities. In Spain, confessors were much more integrated in the day to day workings of government, and their interventions were challenged in discussions on the council floor. In France they were constantly pressured to confine themselves to the king's private and personal sins, on the basis that all of politics was to be treated as reason of state, and therefore outside their remit. Reinhardt makes clear that this had much to do with the different political cultures and understandings of kingship in the two realms. In practical terms, her comparative approach does give rise to some oddities, although she anticipates such criticisms in the introduction. She acknowledges, for instance, that most of the book's evidence for the practice of counsel comes from Spain but notes that this is revealing in itself since it reflects the different place that counselling took in Spanish monarchical politics. While true, it is still a pity that it means that an event

that she does examine, the expulsion of the Moriscos, cannot be compared to its counterpart in France, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Furthermore, while the confessor is a central figure in the book, its ambition is more encompassing, in that it takes in advice-giving in all its forms. Topics appear in more than one part, because Reinhardt analyzes them from different angles. This can make reaching general conclusions about them more difficult, and there are times when her outlines of documentary sources could be shortened without betraying analytical sharpness, her extended treatment of Azpilcueta's list of sins being a good example. Yet the breadth of the author's source work and her commitment to the fullest possible study of conscience counselling, the seal of the confessional notwithstanding, is admirable. Offering numerous insights into the power, potential, and limits of religious counsel, *Voices of Conscience* is a learned book and an absorbing read.

NOTES

[1] John Bossy, "The Social History of Confession in the Age of Reformation," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1975): 21-38; and the same author's "Moral Arithmetic: Seven Sins into Ten Commandments," in Edmund Leites, ed., *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 214-34.

[2] See, in particular, three works by Robert Bireley: *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, SJ, and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and the recent *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578-1637* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[3] Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589-1661* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998). My recent work has also investigated the Council from the perspective of one of its members, Vincent de Paul. Alison Forrestal, *Vincent de Paul, the Lazarist Mission, and French Catholic Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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ISSN 1553-9172