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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

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Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought. By **Harald E. Braun**. Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2007. xiv + 200 pp. £55.00, $99.95 cloth.

Saint Cicero and the Jesuits: The Influence of the Liberal Arts on the Adoption of Moral Probabilism. By **Robert Aleksander Maryks**. Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700; combined with Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu 64. Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008. 168 pp. £55.00, $99.95 cloth.

In his book *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), among many another intriguing aside, John O'Malley evokes once more a theme that runs like a leitmotif through his distinguished body of writing. Speaking of Renaissance humanism and of the Jesuit attempt, by embracing humanist rhetoric, to make "scholastic speculation pastorally meaningful," he notes that "they probably thought they were doing nothing more than putting old truths in new dress, but any new way of talking means a new way of thinking, a new *forma mentis*. It means different sensibilities and sensitivities" (255). I mention that claim because it is pertinent to the lines of argument pursued in the two interesting books under review here, both of which focus on writings generated by the first two generations of Spanish Jesuits, and both of which, in their different ways, testify to the accuracy of O'Malley's basic intuition. In casting their respective subject matter in a refreshing and unquestionably new light, both books point to the enthusiastic Jesuit embrace of classical learning and humanist rhetoric as one underlying but determinative factor in the shaping of the stories they set out to tell.

In the first of these two volumes, *Juan de Mariana and Early Modern Spanish Political Thought*, Harald Braun does not belabor the importance of that factor. But it certainly informs his account and underpins the new reading he proposes for the *De rege et regis institutione libri tres*, published in 1599 by Juan de Mariana, a Jesuit prominent among the society's second generation of luminaries. So far as its reputation and interpretation are concerned, the *De rege* has enjoyed over the centuries something of a checkered career. Although it was written at the request of the archbishop of Toledo, tutor to the future Philip III of Spain, and was dedicated to that

monarch, and although it was in fact a contribution to the traditional "mirror of princes" genre of political writing, intended accordingly to remind the new king "of the principles of good kingship and of the rightful place of the clergy of Castile in the government of the *monarquia española*" (xi), it quickly became infamous in France and England. In France, remarks Mariana made in the first section of his treatise were taken to constitute nothing less than a eulogy of Jacques Clément, the assassin who had taken Henry III's life. In England, in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the subsequent Oath of Allegiance controversy, none other than James I himself denounced Mariana by name as one who had "highly commended, nay, highly extolled," "king-killing" and "parricide" (9). Early denunciation of this sort certainly left something of an enduring imprint on attempts to come to terms with the precise significance of the *De rege*. But historians of political thought have tended to focus rather more broadly on the role the work ascribes to notions of popular sovereignty in the resistance to tyranny and to situate it accordingly in the tradition of political thinking stemming from such late scholastic constitutionalists as John Mair and Jacques Almain and taken up later by such sixteenth-century "monarchomachs" as George Buchanan, Jean Boucher, and Williams Rainolds. Such, indeed, is very much the picture that Quentin Skinner paints, depicting Mariana as "linking hands" with Buchanan in the advocacy of a theory of popular sovereignty (*The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 2:345).

It is also, however, the picture that Braun sets out in his book to subvert. In pursuing that attempt he makes three critical moves. In the first place, he shifts the context in which the *De rege* is to be read, removing it from the Anglo-French context framed by the monarchomach tradition and repatriating it, as it were, to its true home in Spain. In so doing, he insists that "the context within which Mariana [himself] wished to be read is that of the relationship between Church and State in Castile at the turn of the sixteenth century" (13). As a result, he is led, among other things, to focus attention on the degree to which Mariana saw "the national Church as the nucleus of the secular body politic" and to seek to convince Philip III that, if he was "to preserve his many dominions, the secular clergy of Castile must become the keystone of Spanish Habsburg government" (135). In the second place, Braun stresses the importance of seeing the *De rege* as, in effect, a contribution to the "mirror of princes" genre of political literature, giving the contents of the second and third sections of the book (which Skinner, for example, brushes to one side as "relatively conventional humanist discussions of the type of education" and nurture necessary for a prince to be successful) as much affection as the much-cited passages in the first section advocating tyrannicide, resistance to oppressive rulers, and aversion of

popular sovereignty. It is the *De rege*'s "formal structure . . . as an educational and rhetorical exercise," he insists, that "determines its ideological content" (66). And that ideological content pivots upon a transposition of "topics and terminologies familiar from juridical and theological texts and debates" into a historically driven and fundamentally pessimistic "discourse of political prudence" and reason of state—one cast "exclusively in terms of the language of political prudence" (xii, 4). In the third place, Braun is insistent on the degree to which Mariana in writing the *De rege* had committed himself to a humanist "language of exhortative rhetoric" and, in so doing, had transformed "scholastic juridical language into one of political prudence." This, he concludes, is "one of the most original aspects of the work" (160–61). With these three moves, then, Braun has engineered a provocative interpretative shift, and clearly one of no little importance.

While not proposing quite so dramatic a break with the established scholarly consensus, Robert Maryks, in the second book under review, also cherishes the ambition of nudging us onto new interpretive ground. His topic is the Jesuit espousal of Probabilism. O'Malley once characterized that phenomenon as "an extraordinarily important shift in approach to conscience and moral questions [that is] known to us better through Pascal's scorn than through serious study" (*The First Jesuits*, 145). With the publication of Saint Cicero and the Jesuits, a gritty, demanding, and painstaking study in which Maryks makes very good use of Juan Alfonso de Polanco's *Short Directory of Confessors and Penitents* (1554), that can no longer be said to be the case. Pascal's blisteringly influential take on the matter, set forth in his *Provincial Letters* and depicting the Jesuits as altogether too lenient and too lax (advocates of "a set of monstrous principles" [134]), turns out to be hurriedly ill-informed about the origins of the Probabilist opinion, certainly, as also, though perhaps in lesser degree, about its very nature.

What Maryks does is to make the case that the turn to the Probabilist position, *pace* Pascal, was the work not of the Jesuits, but of the Dominican School of Salamanca, where it was formulated in 1577 by Bartolomé de Medina. At that time, and down to the early seventeenth century, the Jesuits themselves still hewed to the type of "Tutiorism" advocated in Polanco's *Short Directory* and reflected in the *Constitutions* that Ignatius of Loyola (it seems with Polanco's collaboration) drew up for the Order. What that species of Tutiorism involved appears, so far as concern with one's eternal salvation was concerned, to have sprung from an intense preoccupation with certainty, safety, and security. As a result, it advocated the position that, rather than following the judgment of one's own conscience, it was safer for one to surrender that conscience (*deponere conscietiam*) before the authority of the law or of one's confessor. In contrast, what Probabilism involved (and it was a more complex position than Pascal seems to have taken it to be)

was an affirmation of "the liberty to follow one's own judgment of conscience instead of *deponere conscientiam* in order to follow the law or the confessor's opinion" (117).

The move to that position, or so Maryks observes, "was an important shift that characterized the transition from medieval ethics into a modern mentality characterized by a higher degree of subjectivity, responsibility and interiority" (117–18). So far as the Jesuits themselves were concerned, it was a transition effected not by the society's first generation but by the second, with Gabriel Vásquez initiating the process of change in 1599. And here again, was the case with Mariana's adoption of a "language of political prudence" (4, 66), we come face to face with the profoundly formative impact upon Jesuit thinking (on matters educational and pastoral as well as political) of the Order's increasingly enthusiastic embrace of classical learning in general and the modalities of humanistic rhetorical discourse in particular. As Maryks further acknowledges, it is his purpose in this book tenaciously to highlight "the crucial links between early-modern casuistry and ancient rhetoric (especially Ciceronian)" and to underline the fact that the Jesuits came to base "their rhetoric and casuistry on the Ciceronian . . . premises of the epistemic theory of probability." It is also to believe "that morals are not science (as it was meant by Aristotle) and, therefore, must rely on probable arguments . . . " (7). They came to do so, however, only with the passage of time, and only in the wake of the broadening of their ministry from an intense focus on sacramental confession to include what was for them the essentially new mission of educating youth. Along with that came the warm embrace of classical learning that was to culminate in the "marriage of casuistry with classical rhetorical tradition [which] can be traced . . . [in] the codification of Jesuit pedagogy, the *Ratio studiorium* of 1599" (83). Pascal and the Jesuits notwithstanding, or so Maryks argues, Probabilism was origin ally a Dominican rather than a Jesuit deliverance. And even in later Jesuit hands, it was far from being a "carnal and worldly policy" or "way of deliberately deceiving the conscience," one redolent of "the city of confusion, which Scripture terms the 'spiritual Sodom'" (134, 145), as Pascal would have us believe.

The vigor of their argumentation and the confident force of their claims notwithstanding, neither book, admittedly, is altogether free from flaws. Thus Braun (86) has the Council of Constance deposing the long-deceased John XXII instead of (the first) John XXIII, and Maryks repeats without qualification the mistaken early-Jesuit belief that the great fifteenth-century French theologian Jean Gerson was the author of their beloved *Initiation of Christ*. By an unfortunately overlooked series of misprints (127–28) the latter also has the composition of Pascal's Provincial Letters situated in 1556–1557 rather than a century later when Pascal, after all, was alive to do

the writing. Both books, moreover, are very much accounts driven by strong central theses and, perhaps as a result, both authors are prone to an excess of anxious repetition and a certain fretful relentlessness in an effort to drive their arguments home and to remind the reader that they have something new to say.

But then, and as we have noted, they really do have something new to say. And what they have to say is grounded in careful and painstaking scholarship with which specialists in their respective fields will now have to come to terms. That is no mean achievement and both authors are to be applauded for their achievement. Similarly to be commended are Thomas Mayer, editor of the "Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700" series, and Ashgate Publishing for including these books in a series that has already provided a happy outlet for Stefania Tutino's fine work on Catholicism in early-modern England. On the basis of its track record to date, this series has the potential for reshaping the way in which we have been accustomed to thinking about the Catholicism of the early-modern era.

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