

Jennifer Mara DeSilva, ed. *Episcopal Reform and Politics in Early Modern Europe*.

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All religious reform, observes William Hudon in his foreword to this collection of essays, “especially the episcopal — is fundamentally a local story” (xiii). Taking this as the starting point for a study of episcopates and individual bishops in the period immediately prior and subsequent to the Council of Trent, the editor of this volume has gathered a series of studies that aim to provide a framework for understanding the early modern episcopate in its global, regional, and local contexts. It is a worthy objective, since the status and functions of bishops were integral to the transposition of reform through the Catholic Church. Equally importantly, the collection privileges local needs and challenges present in the imposition of models of reform and hierarchical directives, defining the local in terms of geography, interpersonal relations, and vocational duties.

Although the volume is presented as a European-wide study, its geographical range is largely confined to French and Italian dioceses and episcopates, with a few incursions into the Tudor lands, Spanish territories, and Savoy. This may be excused for reasons of publishing practicality, and might also be mitigated by the fact that the contributions are sculpted to elaborate on models of episcopacy, tensions, and relationships that were common to bishops across sovereign boundaries, rather than on national or geographical episcopates. They do not always succeed in achieving this, but not simply because the essays are of uneven quality. A general conclusion would have been an invaluable means of integrating the essays, since individual contributions generally concentrate on the experiences of individual bishops and do not explicitly reach out to their companions in the volume. The publication’s impact as a whole, therefore, is not greater than the sum of its parts. Yet there is still plenty that repays reading in these components.

Two of the most interesting themes to arise in the essays are the prevalence of contested authority in episcopal identity and action, and the diverging conceptions of reform both pre- and post-Trent. In relation to the first, the case studies examined in pieces on, for example, Mary Tudor's episcopate (Raymond Powell) and the bishops of the Habsburg Netherlands (Hans Cools), provide compelling evidence of the manner in which secular authorities treated diocesan seats as patrimony, with even such committed Catholics as Mary Tudor often regarding reform as secondary to her political security. Rivalry facilitated by the latitude permissible in the appointment and functions of bishops is also the subject of the other essays, a number of which draw attention to the idea that contests taking place on the periphery or locally were often just as important as those that pitted the center (Rome) against the local. John Christopoulos provides an arresting exploration of the manner in which abortion became a site of contest in Italy; in cases of termination, the system of reservation became a weapon with which popes and bishops sought to defend their authority, with Pope Sixtus V taking the extreme measure of reserving absolution to the pope (this was revoked by Gregory XIV), thereby directly quashing Trent's reservation of absolution for this sin to bishops.

Competition for authority and overlapping jurisdictions retarded reform processes in many cases, as Celeste McNamara's study of the Bishop of Padua's efforts to reform his clergy demonstrates. However, the essays also confirm that reform meant different things to individuals and groups, so that multiple perspectives on corruption and renewal existed throughout the Church. Just as interest in reform did not originate with Trent, so too differences of opinion on its definition were apparent before the council met, as Jennifer DeSilva reveals: she characterizes the episcopate of Paris de'Grassi in Pesaro as that of "attentive observer" since the absentee prelate articulated his distant custodianship of religion through support for confraternities, relics, and the construction of sacred buildings during the early 1500s. This is an instructive reminder that even reform-minded churchmen like de'Grassi or Contarini (also nonresident while Bishop of Belluno, despite his advocacy of the practice in *The Office of the Bishop* [1517]) did not fit snugly into a single model of episcopal reform in practice. The impact of gender on the definition and implementation of reform is spotlighted by Linda Lierheimer, who does much to make up for the relative neglect by scholars of bishops' jurisdictional relationships with nuns; her three case studies of disputes that the bishop of Langres had with female religious (1620s–40s) deftly exposes that reform could be understood in gendered terms, so that *clausura* became for Zamet inseparable from submission to episcopal authority, while for protesting nuns it became primarily a means of safeguarding their independence as religious rather than a clerically controlled convention for women removed from the outside world.

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