

*L'Absolu et le monde: Études sur les écrits du Petit Concile. Bossuet, La Bruyère, Fénelon et leurs amis.* François-Xavier Cuche.

Lumière classique 110. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017. 712 pp. €85.

The pretext for this very substantial anthology of essays and articles lies less in the composite beliefs and achievements of the unlikely quartet of men who made up the so-called Petit Concile, which forms the subject of the author's earlier monograph, *Une pensée sociale catholique* (1991), as in the more extended exploration of their individual temperaments and outputs. The Petit Concile was composed of two prelates (Bossuet and Fénelon), the abbé Claude Fleury, and one layman, the writer Jean de La Bruyère, all of whom served in various courtly settings as tutors to royal princes. Their membership in some kind of sodality affords no more than a linking thread, however, for a range of searching and erudite pieces on a very broad spectrum of Counter-Reformation topics.

After the preliminary encomia, there are thirty-six contributions, mostly taken from thematically inspired studies, learned journals, and festschriften from the last three decades, and divided into four broad sections: "Spiritualité, Philosophie, Morale"; "Écriture"; "Histoire, Ecclésiologie"; and "Politique, Économie, Société." With the exception of the third and briefest section dominated by Fleury, who was the author of a vast *Histoire ecclésiastique*, completed and published posthumously, as well as comparative studies of Judaic and early Christian mores and a discourse on the medieval university, the remaining sections incorporate material linked to all of the four major protagonists, alongside an occasional essay on a related subject as illustrated by a lesser-known contemporary (the Dominican controversialist Antonin Massoulié, the satirist François Gacon, or the panegyrist Fléchier). The bibliographical information is contained in very extensive footnotes, rather than being transferred to a composite table and, as the author acknowledges, there are some inevitable overlaps and repetitions. A few chapters in particular range more widely than the remainder in affording synthetic overviews of the last two decades of the seventeenth century and the end of the reign of Louis XIV, who died in 1715—the era, in other words, defined by the intellectual historian Paul Hazard in 1935 as epitomizing "la crise de la conscience européenne," and pointing forward to the concerns of the Enlightenment. It is here that Cuche's sheer range and capacity for analysis that is both accessible and erudite is shown at its most impressive; and the final piece, if only by accident, brings the reader back to features of the Augustinian dichotomy between love of self and love of God that underpins the terms of the volume's title.

Overall the number and variety of concerns is daunting, as is the author's command of them. They range over the relatively more expected dimensions, such as personal spirituality, morality, communal penitence, social injustice, the nature of kingship, and the need for economic reform (with Fénelon's political allegory *Télémaque* [1699] in predictably high relief), to more unexpected topics, including agrarianism, urbanism, the

family, sport, physical fitness, and the benefits (or lack thereof) of traveling. The corpus of primary material is immense, throwing up a whole spectrum of texts that seem to merit more sustained investigation (such as Fénelon's anti-Jansenist polemic). And in case the whole collection seems too theologically or historically focused, many pieces in the second section give careful rhetorical and stylistic accounts of certain features of the published corpus, nowhere more sharply than in the chapter on La Bruyère's written idiom "Les marques de la Remarque." In two particular areas Cuche seems to be a lone voice: in defense of the notorious last chapter of La Bruyère's *Les Caractères*, more usually treated with some skepticism on account of its derivativeness; and in the exposition of Fénelon's theory of tragedy, which, if followed, goes a long way toward explaining why eighteenth-century attempts in the genre have fallen out of the theatrical repertory.

What the whole enterprise compellingly achieves is nonetheless a wide-ranging exposition of dimensions to French Counter-Reformation thinking and writing that often get sidelined by more notoriously controversial movements and more easily vulgarized quarrels. Cuche modestly offers his collected material less as a summation than as an incentive for future scholars to take his initiatives further; and it will be a tribute to both the tone and inventiveness of this whole enterprise if such potential fertility is stimulated rather than stifled.

Richard Parish, *St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford*

*Responses to Religious Division, c. 1580–1620: Public and Private, Divine and Temporal.* Natasha Constantinidou.

St Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Leiden: Brill, 2017. xiv + 288 pp. \$137.

More and more, we are learning that there was no such thing as a pure theory of early modern religious toleration, or even religious peace or coexistence, in some single reified and essentialist sense. Rather, there were many, many variations on the theme. Almost every author who touched on the theme had a different take. This volume contributes to our understanding of the era by juxtaposing the ideas of four people: Pierre Charron, Justus Lipsius, Paolo Sarpi, and James VI/I. Author Natasha Constantinidou rightly explains that each of these authors wrote from a different point within widely spread networks of correspondence and publishing, but each knew the work of the others, or of others who knew the work of the others, in a web of intersecting and interacting thinkers and doers. All were thinkers, but Sarpi and James were also doers, involved in high-level diplomacy and political action.

The author's discussion of Charron brings out some puzzles about him. She reviews at length the ways in which he contradicts and undermines his own claims. He makes it very clear that he thinks he is refuting the skeptics, but Richard Popkin and Jose Maia