

As Fragnito himself acknowledges, it “would be simplistic, however, to interpret Contarini’s fate only in the light of the shortcomings of the institutional history of the Inquisition” (207). Whatever its failings, the Congregation of the Index was one sign of a hardening in Catholic attitudes toward heresy during the period examined by this collection of essays. The fate of Bishop Egidio Foscarelli illustrated a similar turn toward outright repression of heterodox believers by ecclesiastical authorities. As Fontaine points out, Foscarelli himself was investigated by inquisitors from Bologna in 1558 and died in prison a year later: His “light touch” with heresy was turned to new ends by his successors at Modena, who used his scrupulously maintained notebook to chase down suspected heretics. The essays in this book are so effective at complicating the middle decades of the sixteenth century and avoiding overly rigid generalizations that one is left wondering if this subsequent shift away from conciliation toward more militant forms of inquisitorial activity was quite so straightforward and uniform in every location. Although *Heresy, Culture, and Religion in Early Modern Italy* touches on both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its essays are at their most effective when rehabilitating the mid-sixteenth century from the limitations of the traditional “Reformation” and “Counter-Reformation” framework. Perhaps with further scrutiny, the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will prove to be an era of similar contestation and compromise in early modern Italy, rather than of naked repression deferred.

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*Angels in the Early Modern World*. Edited by **Peter Marshall** and **Alexandra Walsham**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xiv + 328 pp. \$99.00 cloth.

Few other subjects in the study of early modern European religion can seem as insubstantial and flighty as that of angels, and all it takes to confirm such a view is a quick perusal of the scholarly literature on this subject, which will yield a relatively anemic bibliography. Then along comes this revisionist volume of essays on angels, courageously edited by Alexandra Walsham and Peter Marshall, which grabs all readers somewhat rudely by their corduroy lapels and forces them to admit that scholars can sometimes be blind to truly significant issues.

Collections of essays are usually difficult to review, not only because they often lack cohesion, but also because they are uneven in quality. If they are not *festschriften* in search of a common subject, then many of them also tend to deal with relatively narrow or peripheral subjects. That is not at all the case here. This book is hard to review for the opposite reason because, without a doubt, it is one of the most daring and most consistently excellent collections of essays on early modern religious history published within living memory.

In the sixteenth century, religion was redefined from top to bottom by the Protestant Reformation. As everyone knows, Protestants rejected the veneration of saints and angels, along with the sacred art in which they were depicted. In brief, it is common to assume that angels surely vanished, along with the saints and their relics, and their demotion from the realm of the sacred to that of metaphor helped ensure the eventual triumph of reason over blind faith in the Enlightenment. After all, what Reformation caricature of the

errors of Catholicism can be more vivid, or more widely known, than that of scholastic theologians arguing about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

What this collection of essays makes clear is that angels did not at all vanish from the early modern Christian imagination but actually held fast onto it, playing a central rather than a peripheral role in the redefinition of religion, and especially in the redefinition of boundaries between the spiritual and material or reason and faith. As the editors boldly proclaim, angels can provide us with a fresh perspective on the vast changes that took place in the early modern period. "In short," they argue, "angels are not an oblique window on the byways of the past, but a prism through which to view the moments and movements that defined the early modern world" (40). In large measure, the significance of angels was determined by their biblical provenance. Protestants could not jettison angels as readily as they did the saints, for the Christian Bible mentions the good ones over 250 times, and the evil ones about 100 times, under 33 different names. Since angels and demons could not be summarily dismissed, their place in the Christian religion had to be redefined through all sorts of accommodations, both by Protestants and Catholics. What each and every essay in this book does is to examine how these accommodations shed abundant new light on the complexities of the multi-dimensional upheavals of the early modern age.

The range of these thirteen essays is very broad. An introductory piece by the editors provides a survey of the history of angels in the entire early modern period. One essay deals with the obligatory Renaissance angel, and another with the medieval and early modern angels of the *Ars Moriendi*. Three essays examine the place of angels in European Protestant theology and culture (Germany and England); one takes the reader across the ocean to Puritan New England. Three essays deal with angels in Catholic Europe (Spain, Ireland, and the Jesuits); one makes the crossing to Spanish America. One essay deals specifically with demonology, and another with magic. Several of the essays deal with good angels right alongside the evil ones, for, as it turns out, they continued to be as inseparable in the early modern age as they had been in the middle ages, or since the creation of the world.

Given the subject matter, it is not surprising that most of the essays in this volume could be classified as intellectual or cultural history. Would this be a better collection of essays if it contained more social, political, or economic history? Yes, surely. But the relative absence of these other approaches in no way diminishes the value of this volume. The editors make it clear that their volume "makes no claim to have exhausted the potential of the topic: it is intended as a rough-drawn pioneers' map, rather than a definitive reference atlas" (3). Perhaps they should have referred to it as a "treasure map," for that is what it promises to be. Someday, perhaps, it may inspire a social history of angels, precisely because it lacked such an approach. And then, maybe, someone may notice that the writing of early modern history has finally overcome the spell placed on it by fundamentalists of an Enlightened, Whiggish, or Marxist sort.

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