Thomas M. McCoog. *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589–1597: Building the Faith of Saint Peter upon the King of Spain's Monarchy.*
Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xiv + 468 pp. $134.95. ISBN: 978–1–4094–3772–7.

Thomas McCoog argues persuasively that to understand the Counter-Reformation we must take into account the situation of the Catholic Church in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Many issues of the Counter-Reformation played out there, especially the relationship between religion and politics. McCoog describes the English Mission, in which the Jesuits played a major role, between the two failed Spanish armadas, the more famous one of 1588 and its follow-up in 1597, while often looking back to the start of the mission in 1580 with the dispatch of the two Jesuits Edmund Campion and Robert Parsons to England. The former was martyred in 1581 but the latter returned to the Continent to serve from there as the leading figure in the mission until his death in 1610. The author moves back and forth from events in England to those on the Continent. The heroism of the martyrs Robert Southwell and Henry Walpole and of those who languished in prison is appreciated but underplayed. Conflict and disagreement among the Jesuits and between the Jesuit party and others stands out as the main theme of the book. For a long time William Cardinal Allen moderated from Rome disputes among the parties, but after his death in 1594 no one took his place. Toward the end of the book McCoog writes, "For the final years of the century, English Catholics — and to a certain extent Scottish Catholics — were troubled more by bitter feuding among themselves than by persecution" (405).

Parsons traveled incessantly between Madrid and Rome, gathering support for the mission. For the most part the Jesuit superior general from 1581 to 1615, Claudio Acquaviva, stood behind him. Parsons firmly believed that after the execution of Mary Stuart in 1587 the only way to restore Catholicism in England was through military action on the part of Philip II, and he enthusiastically lobbied for the two armadas. Opposed to Parsons were those including the Scottish Jesuit William Crichton, who resented his close association with Philip II and shared the deep hostility to Spain of many of their fellow Englishmen. They favored the succession of King James VI of Scotland, from whom they thought to secure at least some form of toleration if not conversion after the manner of Henry IV across the channel.

Another source of division among Catholics was the attitude toward occasional conformity, that is, irregular attendance at Anglican services. The Jesuits insisted that no such conformity was allowed while others took a milder line. Conflict regularly emerged among the Jesuits themselves as well as between the Jesuits and the diocesan students in the seminaries conducted by the Jesuits in Rome, Valladolid, Seville, and St. Omers in the Netherlands. Local Jesuits in Spain and the Netherlands often claimed jurisdiction over the English colleges in their territories, and they also feared competition for benefactors from the English.

Regularly students at the English College in Rome protested against the discipline and spirituality that they felt the Jesuits imposed on them, and at one time Acquaviva was on the point of removing the Jesuits from the college.

A theme that underlies this book is the role that Jesuits ought to play in politics. Parsons always contended that one could not separate religion and politics in contemporary circumstances where heresy was so involved, and many Jesuits sided with him; but many did not. Meeting in Rome in 1593–94, a General Congregation, the highest legislative body of the Society, prohibited Jesuit involvement in the affairs of princes. But it was impossible to implement this decree literally as Parsons and others pointed out. The issue was to remain a controversial one within the Society at least through the Thirty Years War.

This book communicates a great deal of information and is based on a thorough knowledge of published and unpublished sources. But it is very difficult to read for lack of a good editor. McCoog presumes a great deal of background knowledge. The book is too long and too detailed. One can lose oneself in the flood of names. Transitions sometimes mystify. Yet it is an important contribution that calls our attention to an area of the Counter-Reformation that is often overlooked.

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