

Book Reviews

Joshua Rodda, *Public Religious Disputation in England, 1558-1626*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, pp. x + 232, £70.00, ISBN: 978-1-4724-1555-4

After the Westminster Conference of 1559 Robert Persons would write that ‘the Queen and those that were nearest about her having determined to make a change of Religion, thought they should do it best, and most justifiable, if they promised *some name of disputation*, wherein the Catholics had been satisfied or vanquished’ (p. 77). Joshua Rodda’s comprehensive study of such debates between Catholic, Protestant, and Nonconformist Puritan divines places them on the front line of Reformation religious controversy, as a meeting ground whereon it was hoped truth would be established (and further dissension eradicated) through formal and rational argument. Although the Westminster Conference resolutely failed in this polemical aim, and in subsequent years public disputation declined in the face of an increasing state monopoly on truth, Rodda demonstrates the continued appeal of the *idea* of disputation as a sieve through which arguments were processed with logic, rhetoric, history, and formal scholarship.

In a largely successful attempt to track oftentimes subtle changes over time in disputants’ ideas about the preferred method of distilling truth while placing these changing ideas in conversation with concurrent shifts in politics, Rodda’s chronologically ordered chapters give ‘play by plays’ of specific disputations while highlighting decisive changes in public understanding of disputation’s goal. The introductory chapters determine the parameters of disputation: first in a cultural context and then as per the formal procedural agenda used in the universities. Following chapters examine the use and perception of religious disputation through the reigns of Elizabeth I and then James I, focusing on its application in sustaining the national Church as the practice was alternately endorsed and condemned by the Crown as royal aims shifted.

Topics most frequently taken up for public disputation by early modern divines included transubstantiation, the succession of the visible Church, and conditions and limitations on Church authority. Although the scriptures were accepted across confessional lines as a source of authority in these disputes, the ability of Catholic disputants to refer to the writings of Church fathers in support of their positions depended on where their Protestant opponents broke the line of apostolic succession from Rome. Rodda’s strongest chapter, ‘Disputation

Exploited?', considers the ways that the rules of disputation themselves came up for debate and could be held hostage: for example, Catholics adhered to the use of scholastic syllogism in disputes, but at the other end of the religious spectrum Puritans feared that an undue focus on human logic or rhetorical flair would open the door for human error.

As a result of divergent positions on the method and goal of disputation, its permissibility as a means of settling disputes waxed and waned over time. While Elizabeth banned the practice following her religious settlement for its propensity to stir religious division, she exploited it during the 1580s to discredit imprisoned Jesuits like Edmund Campion. Although James condemned public disputation in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, he encouraged (and even participated in) domestic disputations aimed at converting recusants during the temporary period of Catholic toleration surrounding the Spanish Match. A very brief concluding chapter proposes that in spite of Charles I's expressed disapproval of disputation for inciting controversy in the face of his efforts at religious unity, the practice's loss of appeal during the 1630s came not as a result of any denial of its ability to establish truth, but because of the perception that fallible disputants failed to submit before proper and agreed authorities. While Rodda's endpoint in the 1630s (just as the Arminian controversy would tear England apart) might seem abrupt, readers interested in continuing the trajectory of his focus should consult Ann Hughes's earlier work on the role of religious disputation in fuelling religious controversy during the 1640s and 1650s.

Disputation's authority as a means of establishing truth across confessional lines makes it a unique window through which post-Reformation religious divisions can be viewed. As 'a cross-confessional narrative; a story not of one movement or another, but of the methods of communication and understanding between them,' Rodda's work offers not only a deeper understanding of the shared ground disputants of the past met upon, but also provides shared ground for historians interested in the evolution of ideas (p. 6). Intellectual historians concerned with the awkward relationship between faith and reason in the early modern period will find much of interest. The work's attention to the continental activities of English Catholics who trained in disputation at Douai, practiced leading Huguenot converts back to Catholicism, and then brought their skill at conversion back to England to use in gentry houses as well as prisons, will likewise appeal to those interested in the dissemination of knowledge through social networks.

Many of these continental networks were sustained through print. Indeed, Rodda's consideration not only of printed accounts of disputations, but of printed disputations themselves, is one of his study's strongest attributes. In addition to a focus on the problematic

issue of how these events were recorded and set forth which details the tensions surrounding contested edits to the records of disputations before printing, Rodda also demonstrates a lay interest in considering these theological disputes. Indeed, Rodda's nuanced awareness of the complicated and contrived relationship between disputation and more widespread printed polemic, and of disputation's simultaneous use as a tool by and against both Jesuit missionaries as well as oppositional Puritan malcontents, makes this a significant contribution to scholarship on the development of an extensive and informed public sphere of political debate.

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Silvia Mostaccio, *Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during the Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615)*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014, pp. xvi + 218, £70.00, ISBN: 978-1-4094-5706-0

Despite recent developments in the field, there remains a tendency to isolate the experience of Early Modern Catholics in Britain from events in mainland Europe and even the world. If this is true of the historiography of Catholicism then it is arguably even truer of Early Modern British historiography more generally. The island mentality still holds a strong grip and, if anything, recent works on British and Irish Catholic exile communities have pioneered a move away from this.

It is for this reason that Silvia Mostaccio's work is rather disorientating for someone working on British and Irish Catholicism. Not only does it address European historiographical debates but, when seeking examples to back up its arguments, it frequently neglects British examples that really showcase what is being suggested. Integration of the British and Irish experience into the overarching narrative is still, apparently, a long way off on both sides of the English Channel.

Early Modern Jesuits between Obedience and Conscience during the Generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581–1615) concentrates on the battle between the interior and the exterior, the subjective conscience versus objective outward obedience. Mostaccio argues that discussions happening within the Society of Jesus under the tenure of its fifth superior general, Claudio Acquaviva, are a means to exploring the growing awareness of the individual in the early modern period. It is the Jesuits' reach, through the pulpit and university chairs, that underlines their importance to this developing sense of self-awareness, internal debate within the fledgling order reflecting deliberations in