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Olivier Poncet, *La France et le pouvoir pontifical (1595-1661): L'esprit des institutions*. Rome: École française de Rome, 2011. Figures, tables, *pièces justificatives*, appendices, index. xiv + 966 pp. €110.00 (cl.). ISBN 978-2-7283-0910-8.

Review by Jotham Parsons, Duquesne University.

No one now doubts that the great religious revival of seventeenth-century France was an organic part of a Europe- and world-wide movement that can quite correctly be described as both Roman and Catholic. The most exalted Richerist, the most desperate Jansenist, the most bigoted Spaniard, and the most exasperated curialist were agreed that the Gallican church, for better or worse, was integrally connected to trans-national Catholicism. This was a fact of ecclesiology, and of the circulation of ideas, practices, and people. But it was also a bureaucratic fact, institutionalized most obviously in the provision of benefices in the Court of Rome. That quotidian reality of French Catholicism in an age of reform is Olivier Poncet's subject in this book, and it could hope for no clearer or more thorough expositor. While he does not go so far as to identify the "spirit" of these institutions with H. O. Evennett's "spirit of the Counter-Reformation" as a whole, he does make a convincing case that each to a considerable degree infused the other.[1] Both in Rome and in France, institutions were imperfectly but significantly adapted to the demands of the Tridentine reform, while the reform itself appears in this account to have been, at the least, superbly adapted to its institutional climate.

In imitation of the provisions it discusses, this book takes a circular course, from France to Rome and back again. After introducing the major institutions under discussion—the papacy and its curia, the French monarchy, and the Gallican clergy—Poncet devotes a chapter to the framework that articulated them from 1516 to 1791, the Concordat of Bologna. It was not wildly anomalous. By the mid-sixteenth century, the general principle that secular rulers had a preponderant role in the selection of prelates within their territories was well established. Still, the Concordat was an outlier in the free hand it gave the Most Christian King and in the limits it set (or confirmed) to papal jurisdiction within France. Not surprisingly, the papacy was reluctant to see its terms extended as the king's dominions expanded, but in a recurring theme, Poncet shows that papal policy on this matter was flexible and realistic. While there was no practical way to prevent French kings from controlling appointments within their territories, different degrees of accommodation or obstruction could pay diplomatic dividends. Thus, for example, the extension of the Concordat to the reestablished church in Béarn was granted immediately and without conditions, while in militarily contested areas of Roussillon and Catalonia, pastoral concerns were regularly subordinated to those of high policy.

Moving from the general to the specific, Poncet then turns to the distinctly informal methods the French monarchy used to select prelates. Here, he contends, institutionalization made hardly any progress. Even the famous "conseil de conscience" was very much grafted on to a highly personalized and informal process. (One interesting tidbit Poncet has dug up is that it apparently styled itself, in its early days, "la congrégation pour les affaires ecclésiastiques" (p. 145), apparently in imitation of the Congregations of the Tridentine curia, suggesting close links to the papal program of reform). Rome was a different case. There, the provision of benefices occupied and sustained an immense and ancient bureaucracy. The process began in the French ambassador's residence, since it was here, rather than in

France, that nominations were screened for duplication or procedural irregularities. This made the French embassy in Rome (like the similarly important one at the Sublime Porte—François Savary de Brèves, one Henri IV's most effective servants, held the two posts successively) an administrative as well as a diplomatic institution. It also made the Paris-Lyons-Rome postal service (which France somewhat uncomfortably shared with Spain) particularly large and important, and Poncet documents its increasingly tight organization over the first half of the seventeenth century.

Once out of French hands, nominations could, at the pope's discretion, take several paths through the curia. The regular route was provision in the consistory of cardinals, an institution that had once served as the papacy's governing council but that Tridentine popes restricted to purely routine business, though a few cases that raised policy issues were routed through the advisory Congregation of the Consistory. Cases the pope wished to expedite could go through his own secretariat, while less favored cases requiring dispensations or other complications were sent on a long and expensive journey through the datary. Successive popes significantly tightened their control of these processes, even executing a corrupt sub-datary in 1652. In effect, the popes rewarded canonically regular provisions while imposing high costs on those requesting dispensations. These reforms were costly, reducing the revenues from the datary but leading eventually to something France would not achieve until after the Revolution—the abolition of venality. This certainly does suggest a very real commitment to the reform of the episcopate.

In his final section, Poncet returns to France to discuss the papal nunciature, which faithfully reflected the consistency and general success of Rome's policies. Although concerns about offending Gallican legal sensibilities by appearing to claim some form of jurisdiction kept the institutional profile of the nunciature low, it did succeed in taking charge of the required investigations of status, morals, and the condition of the benefice for almost all episcopal and most abbatial nominations, which was at the least a significant symbolic acknowledgment of the papacy's role in supervising Catholic reform in France. The nuncios were also successful on the diplomatic front, lobbying effectively for favored procedures and candidates while retaining good relations with the crown. Much of their success, though, was attributable to a cautious and gradualist approach and a willingness to accommodate the monarchy's evolving priorities.

Such a brief summary only scratches the surface of this thick volume, which is distinguished above all by its enormously careful and detailed archival work. Poncet, who teaches at the École des Chartes and is the author of a fine, simultaneously political and prosopographical study of Pomponne de Bellièvre, has few equals in his understanding of the concrete ways that individual choices and experience shaped early modern governance and governing institutions.[2] Here, he reveals how each participant, from the king and the pope through newly named prelates down to secretaries and couriers, handled the process of ecclesiastical appointment. *La France et le pouvoir pontifical* in many ways forms an essential pendant to Joseph Bergin's equally obsessive work on *The Making of the French Episcopate*. [3] Like Bergin's work, Poncet's is destined to serve as an indispensable work of reference to scholars working on the French church of the earlier seventeenth century.

At the same time, though, Poncet wants to make some more general statements about the nature of church and secular governance in the era of the Counter-Reformation. Wolfgang Reinhardt and his students are heavily present in Poncet's notes, and in many ways he advances their thesis on the relationship among the processes of confessionalization, social discipline, and state-building in early modern Europe.[4] Creating a strong, reliable, and orthodox clergy was certainly a priority shared by monarchy and papacy alike, and while the French kings maintained a quite personal and informal method of selecting prelates, they seem to have been perfectly happy to have them subjected to the at least symbolic (and financial) discipline of the massive Roman bureaucracy. Indeed, Poncet suggests that the papacy came increasingly to specialize in that discipline, sacrificing the revenue needed for power politics to the desire for an effective curia and a clergy less addicted to expensive dispensations. This

system whereby the institutionalization of a key mode of social discipline took place not only outside the French state but to a considerable extent outside of France itself suggests a slightly different understanding of the confessional state than the one historians have been used to—one, among other things, whose own logic might open the way to subsequent separation of church and state. Though somewhat buried in a mountain of (often fascinating) detail, this is a genuinely important insight.

Nevertheless, there is something about this book that I find frustrating. It is quite deliberately a study of institutional structures in a period of relative stability, and as such it is not directly concerned with the origins of the institutional configuration in question, and still less with what became of it later. In this case, however, the period chosen threatens to conceal something essential about the nature of the relationship between France and the papacy. For at least from the Concordat of 1516 to the Concordat of 1801, and in many ways from Philip IV to Charles de Gaulle, that relationship was one of recurrent crisis and intermittent breakdown. It is symptomatic of this state of affairs that the schism of 1589–1595 was neither unprecedented nor even, in a broad perspective, that severe. Already in the 1650s, the Jansenist controversy was beginning its long history of troubling the institutions of Franco-papal relations, a situation that would only grow more acute over time, and the personal reign of Louis XIV would be fruitful in conflict. Poncet does devote considerable attention both to the way French territorial expansion (including expansion as long established as the seizure of the *trois évêchés* or even the annexation of Brittany) complicated ecclesiastical relations, and on the other side to the conscious and subtle policies that the papacy adopted to manage those issues. One wonders how the papacy's decreasing ability to mount a credible foreign policy after 1648 may have contributed both to its difficulties in dealing with the Sun King and to the general collapse of its influence on church reform in the eighteenth century. To what extent, in other words, did the institutional logic that Poncet describes prove well adapted in the long run to maintaining the goals of papal oversight and regular ecclesiastical discipline? These are issues, the analysis of which would only enrich an already impressive work.

NOTES

[1] H. Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation: The Birkbeck Lectures in Ecclesiastical History given in the University of Cambridge in May 1951*, ed., John Bossy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

[2] Olivier Poncet, *Pomponne de Bellièvre (1529–1607): Un homme d'état au temps des Guerres de religion* (Paris: École des Chartes, 1998).

[3] Joseph Bergin, *The Making of the French Episcopate, 1589–1661* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), which covers almost exactly the same period but from the point of view of the bishops more than of those who appointed them.

[4] See e.g., Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, eds., *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995); and Wolfgang Reinhard, "Disciplinamento sociale, confessionalizzazione, modernizzazione. Un discorso storiografico," in Paolo Prodi and Carla Penuti, eds., *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo e disciplina della società tra medioevo ed età moderna* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1994), pp. 101–23.

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