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Orest Ranum, *Les Bienfaits, la Gratitude et l'Action politique: une analyse du don et du pouvoir dans le "Testament politique" de Richelieu*. Paris: Librairie Pages d'histoire, 2018. 135 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. €60.00 (cl). ISBN 0-9660997-4-5.

Review by Jonathan Dewald, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Cardinal Richelieu's *Political Testament* has troubled readers since its first publication in 1688, forty-seven years after the Cardinal's death.[1] The text presents itself as a literal testament, a message from the grave, to be opened only after Richelieu's own death and then only by his principal heir, the king himself.[2] Like other testaments, it describes the testator's bequests and offers guidance for their future management. Richelieu has left the king a wide-ranging, successful reform program, the text explains, beginning the work of restoring France to internal health and international greatness, and he urges the king to continue that effort. Of course, the text also resembles other testaments in consistently highlighting the testator's decency and the reasonableness of his plans. But with this unsurprising limitation, the *Political Testament* appears to offer direct access to the thinking of the seventeenth century's greatest statesman, laying out his hopes, reasoning processes, political techniques, and understanding of his own achievements.

That apparent clarity dissolves on closer inspection, however. Even the text's authorship is uncertain: Richelieu apparently guided its compilation, but much of the work was done by his secretaries, some of it after his death.[3] The text itself contains multiple, discordant elements: historical narrative, sketches of prominent personalities, maxims about good government, personal boasting, and broad political reflection. Above all, readers have been troubled by the text's pervasive religious language. Its second part opens with the claim that "Le règne de Dieu est le principe du gouvernement des Estats... sans ce fondement, il n'y a point de prince qui puisse bien régner ny Estat qui puisse estre heureux." [4] How seriously can we take Richelieu's self-portrait as Christian statesman, many have asked, given what we know about his real-world practices, and indeed, given the harshness that permeates much of the text itself? For the *Political Testament* repeatedly cautions the king against allowing Christian teachings to inflect governmental decisions, and it shows no charity toward victims of those decisions. Christian forgiveness of sins may be appropriate in private life, it teaches, but those holding public power "seroient inexcusables, si, au lieu d'une sévère punition, ils usoient d'indulgence." [5]

Orest Ranum's new book offers both a close reading of this difficult, important text and a series of reflections on some of the larger issues it raises. No scholar could be better qualified to undertake this double task, for Ranum has taught generations of early modernists to think in depth about the mechanisms of early modern power and about the complex language the early

moderns used to describe their political doings. His investigations of these issues have been remarkable for their breadth of vision. On the one hand, Ranum is alert to the cultural specificities of early modern political life and to the anthropological sensitivities it demands of the historian. Early modern political actors, he has shown, cannot be understood in terms of the assumptions that govern contemporary political life. At the same time, he has also taken seriously the overlaps between the politics of Richelieu's era and our own. The otherness of the past, Ranum has shown, does not mean the absence from its political life of self-interest, calculation, or even revolutionary demands. It means only that these drives operated according to different rules.[6]

In *Les Bienfaits* Ranum focuses on only one of the multiple themes in the *Political Testament*, that of gift exchanges. The French anthropologist Marcel Mauss first brought this practice to the attention of social scientists in the 1920s, but historians took it up only decades later, following Natalie Zemon Davis's pioneering examination of gift exchange in sixteenth-century France.[7] Even now, the subject has received little attention from students of the early modern state. Yet, both Mauss and Davis noted the ways gift-giving included forms of power as well as fellowship, in that gifts create indebtedness on the part of their recipients. Gifts imply exchange, and recipients are expected to give back in one form or another, with loyalty or personal service if they cannot do so with material objects. It is this aspect of gift-giving that interests Ranum. His book explores how Richelieu used gifts to create new forms of political dependence and how he understood the effects of his choices. At times, Ranum presents this inquiry as merely a supplement to the studies of others, notably to that of Davis on early modern gifts and to Françoise Hildesheimer's on Richelieu himself. Gift-exchange in the *Political Testament*, he remarks, is a topic that is "plutôt secondaire, mais curieux" (p. 7, n. 1). But elsewhere he writes more expansively about the topic's importance. For, ultimately, exploring Richelieu's thinking about the politics of gift-giving means exploring the place of money in European theories of governance (pp. 12-13). In this respect, the book argues, the *Political Testament* constitutes an important step in the development of European political thought.

Making this argument entails a substantial effort at contextualization, and much of the book consists of short expositions of what Richelieu's predecessors said about gifts: Cicero and Seneca from the ancient world, Machiavelli and Guicciardini from the Florentine Renaissance, Lipsius and Botero from among the later sixteenth-century stoics, Bodin and Montaigne from France itself, and Hobbes, from Richelieu's own absolutist world. (Ranum notes that Hobbes in fact resided in Paris all through the 1640s and might have encountered Richelieu had circumstances been slightly different.) Ranum offers a complex interpretation of the influence these writers exerted on Richelieu. The Cardinal rarely cited textual authorities to justify his opinions, insisting instead that they came from real-life experiences rather than from books. But he also read widely, took pride in his literary culture, and occasionally echoed the terminology of other writers. His originality as a thinker, Ranum suggests, derived from his ability to recombine the ideas of others rather than from his self-proclaimed indifference to them. Ranum is especially alert to Richelieu's ability to combine the terminologies of other writers into "modalities" (p. 15), larger lexical groupings that allowed deeper explorations than his predecessors had offered. Others had noted the place of gift exchanges in politics; Richelieu analyzed their workings.

Hence Ranum's comparative examples are intended mainly to illuminate the specificity of Richelieu's thinking, rather than to locate its sources. That originality is especially clear-cut with regard to the ancients. Both Cicero and Seneca, Ranum shows, offered mainly idealized versions of human nature and gift-giving, as a practice that unproblematically united self-interested

individuals into a social whole. Lipsius, Botero, and Bodin offered more incisive analyses, but in the end they too provided heavily moralized views of how benefits affect the workings of power. Lipsius and Botero were mainly concerned with defending political morality from the Machiavellian assaults it had suffered over the sixteenth century; Bodin wanted mainly to eliminate money from political life, rather than accepting it as a fundamental reality. They thus followed Cicero and Seneca in thinking more about the world as it ought to be than about its real functioning.

It is no surprise that Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and Montaigne fit more closely with Richelieu's modes of thinking. Like Richelieu, they all brought a hard-edged realism to the analysis of public affairs, and they all shared his awareness of the complexity of the social realities with which political actors had to contend. With the possible, ambiguous exception of Montaigne, they also reasoned like Richelieu, emphasizing the importance of experience over literary authority and the gaps in the statesman's knowledge. Yet in important respects, Ranum suggests, even these theorists failed to match Richelieu's insights. Machiavelli and Guicciardini had only a slight interest in the role of money as a force holding society together. They both also described gift-giving in fundamentally tactical terms, as a way of gaining favor with specific individuals in specific circumstances, rather than as a pervasive component of social and political life. Montaigne focused on the isolated individual, and offered little help for managing society. For Ranum, only Hobbes fully shared Richelieu's rich understanding of how material rewards function in political society.

*Les Bienfaits* is thus partly a work of reassessment, an effort to raise Richelieu's standing as a political theorist. It presents a Richelieu who thought more deeply than his predecessors about the place of material exchanges in politics, perhaps because, Ranum suggests, he was more thoroughly immersed than they in the practicalities of money management, personal and public alike.[8] There is a twist in this argument, however, for Richelieu, unlike most of Ranum's comparison cases, was in important ways a conservative thinker. His religious proclamations were sincere, Ranum argues (pp. 9, 50), and so also was his commitment to a rigidly hierarchical social order, one marked by visible distinctions, deference to superiors, and respect for inherited advantages (p. 109).[9] Ranum does not fully explore the apparent contradiction between Richelieu's innovative thinking about material life and his insistence on respect for religious and social traditions. On this issue as throughout the book, his formulations are nuanced, subtle, and allusive. But despite its cautious language, *Les Bienfaits* (like so much of Ranum's other work) proposes a significant reworking of our histories of political modernity, by showing the contributions that traditionalists like Richelieu made to it and the complex forms their contributions might take.

## NOTES

[1] The standard edition of the text is now that by Françoise Hildesheimer (*Testament politique de Richelieu* [Paris: Champion, 1995]); Henry Bertram Hill, *The Political Testament of Cardinal Richelieu: The Significant Chapters and Supporting Selections* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961) provides a clear and accurate translation of about one-fourth of the text. In introducing the text, Hildesheimer twice identifies the original publication date as 1668 (pp. 14, 19), but provides the correct date in her bibliography.

[2] Hildesheimer, ed., *Testament politique de Richelieu*, p. 32.

[3] For a convenient summary of these issues, see Hill, *The Political Testament of Cardinal Richelieu*, pp. ix-xiv.

[4] Hildesheimer, ed., *Testament politique de Richelieu*, p. 241.

[5] Hildesheimer, ed., *Testament politique de Richelieu*, p. 258.

[6] Especially important examples of Ranum's scholarship include *Richelieu and the Councillors of Louis XIII: A Study of the Secretaries of State and Superintendents of Finance in the Ministry of Richelieu, 1635-1642* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); *Paris in the Age of Absolutism: An Essay*, rev. and expanded ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); "The Refuges of Intimacy," in *A History of Private Life, Volume III: Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier and trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 207-263 (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1989); and *The Fronde: A French Revolution, 1648-1652* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993).

[7] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000). As Davis notes (pp. 175-176), she had presented her ideas about gift exchanges for almost two decades before her book appeared.

[8] In emphasizing Richelieu's financial skill, Ranum follows the pathbreaking work of Joseph Bergin, *Cardinal Richelieu: Power and the Pursuit of Wealth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[9] In emphasizing Richelieu's religious sincerity, Ranum follows Françoise Hildesheimer, *Relectures de Richelieu* (Paris: Publisud, 2000), pp. 31-70 and 240-245, and William F. Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), esp. pp. 502-505.

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