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Anne Bonzon, *La paix au village: Clergé paroissial et règlement des conflits dans la France d'Ancien Régime*. Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2022. Collection "Epoques." 347 pp. Tables, notes, and index. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9791026710707.

Review by Stuart Carroll, University of York

As Anne Bonzon correctly states at the beginning of *La paix au village*, "la pacification a laissé moins de traces que des conflits" (p. 9) in the archives. She is principally concerned with the peacemaking initiatives of priests, but the relative poverty of the sources means that she has had to cast her net widely and, in addition to the normative literature, she includes soundings in the diocesan archives of Beauvais, Châlons, Auxerre, and Montpellier. The principle focus is the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The source material becomes rich only after 1660 and she avoids going too far into the eighteenth century in order to avoid getting entangled in the debate about dechristianisation. Chapter one explores thirty-five settlements carried out in the village of Songeons (Oise) between 1655 and 1673. Chapter two builds on this by looking at four priests' diaries, which allow us to follow the vicissitudes of the peacemaking process in detail. Some of these diaries are fairly well known, but in bringing attention to the richness of the voluminous diary of the Auvergnat, Hugues Aulanier (1638-91), only parts of which has been published, Bonzon has done us a great service. French bishops, following Borromeo's model, were at the forefront of the Counter-Reformation, and Bonzon stresses that, alongside the drive for conformity and discipline, they also encouraged priests to pay greater attention to pastoral care. Priests were expected to investigate the social problems troubling their flocks and settle disputes amicably. Chapter four explores the expansion and diffusion of normative literature on peacemaking during the third quarter of the seventeenth century, and in this process she summarizes the abundant literature on the role played by *dévot* institutions, such as the *Compagnie du Saint Sacrament* and the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. More original material is provided on a chapter devoted to the missions, although given the nature of the sources it is difficult to evaluate their success. Her findings are expertly brought together at the end of the book, which shows how the wave of reforming zeal was coterminous with the reformation of the state in the 1660s and 1670s. Priests were the footsoldiers in a wider campaign conducted by Louis XIV and his ministers to pacify a kingdom torn apart by violence and civil war. The normative discourse that condemned litigation as a form of enmity was part of the armoury of ancien régime ideological justification promoting peace before justice and the maintenance of existing social relations and hierarchies.

Bonzon's research is an important contribution to the growing work on peacemaking in early modern Europe. In particular, using new archival sources to explore the pastoral role of the clergy, she has given us a more nuanced perspective of the French Counter-Reformation and the manner in which it touched the everyday lives of the laity. She points the way to further research and reflection. For example, as Paolo Broggio has recently pointed out in reference to Italy, being a peacemaker does not entail being peaceable.[1] Italian *padroni* were and are men dedicated to vendetta, but their lives of violence also revolve around peacemaking and attempts

to uphold the peace in the feud. Bonzon tends to see the process from the point of view of her priests, but we do occasionally get the impression that their efforts may have been neither disinterested nor entirely welcome. Chronologically speaking, her emphasis on the glorious years of Louis XIV's reign in the 1660s and 1670s seems accurate. But, as many historians have pointed out, this did not lead to an inevitable process of pacification, especially in the countryside. One of her diarists, Alexandre Dubois, curé of Rumegies (Nord), recorded three murders in a six-week period in 1696 and there were twenty-five homicides between 1613 and 1739 in a village that contained only eighty-four families.[2] This astonishing level of violence is only partly explained by the fact that Rumegies was situated on a militarized frontier; the village was also riven by vicious feuds. One reason why Dubois struggled to contain the factional violence in Rumegies was that the church was part of the problem. Rumegies was in the possession of the abbey of Saint Amand, which exercised the right to offer refuge for outlaws.[3] In Rumegies the very high rates of violence were a consequence of the fact that it was relatively easy to get away with murder with the connivance of the church. While there is good evidence for a decline of violence in the middle of the eighteenth century, as Jean Nicolas and Nicole Castan have shown, the rising tide of popular protest and interpersonal violence after 1760 contributed to the profound sense of crisis that characterised the final decades of the ancien régime.[4]

Bonzon is keen to avoid contributing to the debate over dechristianisation, but the material she provides offers insights into the paradox of the Counter-Reformation. Her four diarists were rigorists. But since we have no contextual information on how the laity responded to their attempts to discipline them by using the sacrament of confession and by withholding communion, we are forced to read against the grain of the evidence presented. Two of her diarists recorded significant levels of lay hostility. The presbytery of Rumegies was burned down in 1670 by a disgruntled parishioner. And Hugues Aulanier, the curé of Le Brignon (Haute-Loire), who owned a pistol and arquebus, was not above the factional violence that was a feature of the Auvergne in the late seventeenth century. Several of Aulanier's parishioners refused to take Easter communion, a problem common to Protestant and Catholic rigorists across Europe and a reason why their congregations often dwindled to the benefit of those who were more accommodating. But France persevered with Borromeo's unpopular bureaucratic and disciplinary model long after Italians had abandoned it.

The scrapbook of another priest, Léonard Delsol, from Montagnac (Hérault), which Bonzon alludes to, is instructive in the ways in which resurgent clerical power could be abused. In the Midi resistance to the imposition of clerical authority was particularly fierce due to the power bestowed on civic elites by the region's quasi-democratic system of local government. Delsol's arrest in 1687 was partly due to the many feuds in which he was engaged in the small town of Montagnac. This embroiled him in litigation. In 1682 he was charged with denouncing his enemies in print, fabricating evidence, and withholding the sacraments from witnesses unless they altered their testimony.[5]

Bonzon gives us an impressive account of the French Counter-Reformation's promotion of peace and its campaign denouncing litigation as an impediment to salvation. But the sources she consults are silent about the hypocrisy that this entailed: the Christian obligation to make peace does not seem to have applied to the Catholic Church. Alexandre Dubois viewed his flock as quarrelsome. He was indignant in 1714 when they mutinied against paying the tithe. But when

church property was at stake it was a question of litigation and not arbitration. A lawsuit was launched against the villagers at the Parlement of Flanders and after three years they were forced to relent and pay costs. The women and children of the village responded by throwing stones and shouting insults when the tithe-collectors arrived.[6] This example reminds us that the role of priests as tax collectors, creditors, and landowners cannot be disentangled from their pastoral role. We will not understand early modern France, indeed, arguably all of French modern history, if we do not understand the roots of anti-clericalism. The story of the Counter-Reformation's promotion of social peace at the expense of social justice is a good starting point.

NOTES

[1] P. Broggio, *Governare l'odio: Pace e giustizia criminale nell'Italia moderna* (Rome: Viella, 2021).

[2] Henri Platelle, ed., *Journal d'un curé de campagne au XVII^e^ siècle* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Septentrion, 1997), p. 29.

[3] Platelle, ed., *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, pp. 16-17.

[4] Jean Nicolas, *La rébellion française: mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, 1661–1789* (Paris: Seuil, 2002); Nicole Castan, *Les criminels de Languedoc: les exigences d'ordre et les voies du ressentiment dans une société pre-révolutionnaire (1750–1790)* (Toulouse: Association des publications de l'Université de Toulouse Le Mirail, 1980).

[5] Stuart Carroll, *Enmity and Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p. 420.

[6] Platelle, ed., *Journal d'un curé de campagne*, p. 167.

Stuart Carroll
University of York
stuart.carroll@york.ac.uk

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