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# (Review) The World Catholic Renewal 1540-1770 by R. Po-Chia Hsia

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## (Review) The World Catholic Renewal 1540-1770 by R. Po-Chia Hsia

### **Keywords**

Catholicism, religion, politics, Council of Trent

### **Comments**

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general thesis opening their conference, at the end of the volume appears another of its real highlights, Jonathan Israel's pithy overview of the changing relationship between "Germany and Its Jews." This tour de force provides a fitting capstone to a volume sure to stimulate new, more thoughtful approaches to the study of Jewish-Gentile relations in European history.

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*The World of Catholic Renewal 1540–1770.* By R. Po-Chia Hsia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. Pp. xi + 240. \$54.95. ISBN 0–521–44041–6.

R. Po-Chia Hsia has written an immensely valuable synthesis of the history of Catholicism in the two centuries after the Council of Trent. Not only has Hsia written a book that fills an important need for general readers and students, but he has produced a study that will also challenge experts in the field. Clearly and eloquently written, this book is broad and nuanced and should replace Jean Delumeau's *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire* (originally published in 1971) as the definitive work on this subject.

Readers of *Central European History* know Hsia as a historian of Germany. *The World of Catholic Renewal* shows his breadth as a scholar. Hsia bravely engages four themes, all of which require extensive knowledge of many national histories. Several chapters focus on the effort, which began with the Council of Trent, to reform doctrine and the church from above. The second theme is the interplay of religion and politics in Europe, while the third looks at the social and cultural impact of Catholic reform on the wider population. Finally, several chapters analyze the expansion of Catholicism in America and Asia, a process that Hsia shows is integral to the history of the church in this period.

Hsia strongly emphasizes the variety within Catholicism in Early Modern Europe. Chapters on "The Triumphant Church" (Portugal, Spain, Italy), "The Militant Church" (Germany, Poland, France, the southern Netherlands), and "The Martyred Church" (England, Holland, Ireland) demonstrate the geographical diversity of the Catholic experience within Europe. There were other internal contradictions within Catholicism, for example between elite and popular visions of proper religion, or between the efforts to convert people by coercion and the desire to convince people of the truth of "the true faith" through sermons, devotional writings, or personal example. For instance, in the chapter on "The Militant Church", Hsia moves the reader from Poland, to the Catholic Netherlands, France, and Germany. He effectively juxtaposes the rarely told story of Catholic revival in the southern Netherlands with the often related history of Catholic victory in seventeenth-century France. For the Netherlands, Hsia points to the mixture of persuasion and coercion that created a Catholic province loyal to the Spanish crown. The Belgian Jesuits were very important in this process, organizing sodalities and teaching the Catholic elite, but their

efforts were underpinned by the decrees, ordinances, and punishments executed by the ducal government in Brussels.

In his discussion of Germany, Hsia emphasizes three different aspects to Catholic renewal. Church interests coincided with the needs of Catholic states, particularly between about 1570 and 1700. This "confessionalization" was reinforced in the same period by a Catholic elite located both in state institutions and in the religious orders. Finally, there was a revival of popular Catholicism, which really took hold in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The chronological differences between the elite and the popular experience of Catholic renewal led, in the eighteenth century, to the serious clash between popular Catholicism and Josephine reformers.

Although this book is not primarily an institutional history, it does not neglect the role of the papacy and church institutions in this period. Detailed chapters on the Council of Trent, the papal curia, and the role of the episcopacy, seek to identify some of the unifying aspects of Catholicism. Using the time-honored example of Carlo Borromeo, Hsia shows how a model Tridentine bishop was expected to act. Yet he knows as well that "the waves of reform failed to reach many stagnant pools," and that the rationalizing spirit of the Counter-Reformation met many obstacles in a traditional society. One obstacle was the social world from which the highest members of the church were recruited and Hsia uses recent scholarship on patronage and clientage to show the ways in which the real world (rather than personal failure) could undermine reform. Yet some important changes took place across Europe, especially among the clergy. Clerical celibacy took hold in the seventeenth century while clerical incomes rose, as did the number of priestly vocations and the quality of clerical education. Although reform of the clergy was uneven, it did take place and led, Hsia argues, to a "clericalization in the life of the Church."

In chapter 9 Hsia turns his attention to the problematic place of women in Catholicism. Here, of course, the leading figure is Teresa of Avila, one of four women to achieve sainthood in this period. Hsia discusses the "struggle between male control and female autonomy," a struggle which brought Teresa before the Inquisition several times and caused her much personal agony. Although Hsia emphasizes the strategies women employed to resist the control of male confessors and clerical superiors, many would-be holy women suffered in silence before finding themselves accused of witchcraft or treated as victims of demonic possession. As Hsia points out, "what mattered was control," and the Tridentine Church only sanctioned those mystical experiences and saintly lives which stayed safely within proscribed norms.

Two chapters take the readers away from Europe. In this part of the book, Hsia contrasts the forceful conversion of the native populations of the Americas with the mostly peaceful missionary work in Asia. One important goal of these chapters is to examine Catholicism from the perspective of both the missionaries and the societies they tried to convert. Hsia's detailed discussions of the Catholic experience in Japan and China highlight the different ways in which Catholicism was received by the state and by the wider population. The suppression of Christianity in Japan had both European and Japanese roots. On

the one hand, the Jesuits lost their support by failing to ordain non-European priests. At the same time, the new Tokugawa regime linked the Christians to rebellious Buddhists and increasingly regarded them as potentially disloyal. Between 1614 and 1639 the regime undertook a savage repression, executing over 2,000 missionaries and Japanese Christians.

Scholars in particular areas of the history of Catholicism may disagree with some aspects of *The World of Catholic Renewal*. I found the breadth and the erudition of this book very impressive. The bibliography demonstrates that Hsia has consulted works in at least eight languages. Hsia's extensive reading, for example of local and regional histories on German, Spanish, and Italian Catholicism, provides a valuable comparative perspective even for experts on European Catholicism. This book is essential reading for scholars of Early Modern Europe and for all scholars of Catholicism.

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*Jewish Emancipation in a German City: Cologne, 1798–1871.*

By Shulamit S. Magnus. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1997.

Pp. xii + 336. \$49.50. ISBN 0-8047-2644-2.

Over the past two decades, the political and legal emancipation of German Jewry has been one of the dominant topics of modern European Jewish historiography. Particularly well covered is the legislation on Jewish rights of individual German states and the intellectual debate behind the emancipation process. While many studies have a regional framework, comprehensive research on emancipation as it was experienced in the major urban communities is still somewhat of a desideratum. Shulamit Magnus attempts to fill this gap with a detailed inquiry into the circumstances of Jewish emancipation in Cologne. Jews had been excluded from settlement in Cologne between 1424 and 1798, a year after the city had been annexed by France. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, Cologne became part of Prussia but constantly endeavored to assert a measure of independence. Nineteenth-century Cologne Jewry, a community without early modern traditions, was, by means of residence permits, "hand-picked" and thus solidly middle class. This, as Magnus demonstrates, aided its quest for equality and accommodation with society at large. Of particular interest is her detailed analysis of the transition period from French to Prussian rule, something that applies to a number of German territories but is rarely explicitly regarded in German-Jewish history. Equally useful, especially for urban historians and those interested in comparing Jewish populations, are the statistical data Magnus has assembled to profile the community.

The study claims to regard the "complex human drama" that unfolded during the emancipation process and not only, as so much other research has done, merely to chronicle legal and ideological aspects and the positions taken by the elite of non-Jews and Jews. While it is true that many emancipation histories