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Jaap Geraerts

The various networks of the Catholic gentry in early modern England

Susan M. Cogan, Catholic social networks in early modern England. Kinship, gender and coexistence (Amsterdam: AUP, 2021, 296 pp., index)

The question of how the politico-religious changes wrought by the Reformations affected the position of religious dissenters and members of religious minorities in society continues to spur new research. Susan Cogan analyses the various networks of several (branches of) English Catholic gentry families, including the Brudenell of Deene, Throckmorton of Coughton and Thresham of Rushton, in order to understand how these families 'navigated the social, political, and religious changes that threatened their very existence' (p. 18). Indeed, it was through being part of several networks and the careful cultivation of patron-client bonds that these families managed to remain an integral part of society at large, exert political influence, and preserve a degree of social harmony and peaceful coexistence.

The first chapter of the book, which comprises five chapters in total, shows that many of the networks which tied several gentry families to one another predated the Reformation. Such networks often were the result of family members rubbing shoulders when serving the crown in various capacities, (strategic) marriages between families, and sociability on the local and county level. While the networks were porous and changed over time, they continued to offer common ground even when the nodes of these networks started to become divided by faith to an increasing extent. The second chapter looks at the evolution of such networks in the period after the Reformation, thereby making a distinction between family networks and women's networks. Although there were overlaps between the two types of networks, e.g. in terms of the people of which such networks consisted, both networks were governed

by various norms and aims. While the former tended to be patriarchal in nature and reflected the goals of the pater familias, the latter centred on powerful noblewomen and 'were formed mainly from ties within the household or connected to women's roles and careers' (p. 70). In spite of some dissimilarities between these two types of networks, they often complemented one another and together served the needs and strategic aims of Catholic gentry families.

Being part of and being able to tap into family and women's networks could be very advantageous for the Catholic gentry. For example, a branch of the Tresham family that became Protestant, the Treshams of Newton, could offer protection to their Catholic cousins, the Treshams of Rushton. Such relationships counterbalanced the sometimes rather inward-looking nature of the networks that were mainly based on religious affiliation, and that originated from the endogamous marriage strategies of the Catholic gentry and the need to create a support network consisting of other Catholic families. Over time, though, the networks of the Catholic gentry may have become less open and more closed due to the heightened importance of religious difference. Cogan argues that this at least was the case for some female networks: they became predominantly Catholic and based on kinship relations. Still, in spite of such developments, through their networks and patron-client relationships with Protestants, 'Catholic families remained integrated in gentry and noble culture' (p. 127).

In addition to networks which existed because of kinship relationships, or which emerged due to office-holding and other forms of sociability, ties were formed in response to shared cultural interests as well. This is the topic addressed in the fourth chapter, which focuses on cultural networks that arose as gentry families from across the confessional divide continued to be united by a noble culture that valued the expression of one's social status. This could be achieved through cultural statements of various sort, including architecture and gardens. In these contexts, it was the primacy of social status rather than religion which glued the gentry together. Although some cultural expressions betrayed one's religious affiliation – the most prominent example being the well-known architectural projects of Thomas Thresham (1543-1605), a nobleman who constructed several edifices, such as the Triangular Lodge, which contained complex textual and architectural references to various theological doctrines – in general this was not the case. Not only was the message articulated through architecture and gardens relatively uniform and indicative of the existence of a noble culture which transcended religious divisions, the involvement and interest in such activities fostered interconfessional interaction among the gentry. Moreover, as Cogan makes clear, patron-client relationships could be strengthened due to deliberate imitation, a form of flattery which counted as an important gift.

Chapters five and six focus on how certain (military) networks and patron-client relationships with powerful Protestants allowed the Catholic gentry to remain integrated with the English state to a certain extent. This integration was reflected by the service of members of the Catholic gentry in the army as well as by the response they received from the state to their petitions. Indeed, 'through their clientage to powerful patrons at court and in proximity to the monarch, Catholics ensured that they remained connected to the state' (p. 246). Indeed, it was because the Catholic gentry was part of various networks, they had access to certain patrons (and could act as patrons themselves and thus expand their power base). However, as was typically the case in patron-client relationships, which were based on

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the idea of reciprocity and mutual benefit, the English state profited from such relationships as well. Through dispensing certain favours, the loyalty of influential figures within a religious minority could be secured, while these patron-client relationships also provided the English state with inroads into Catholic networks and thus offered a certain degree of oversight and control.

Cogan's book succeeds in showing the importance of family and social networks for the survival of the Catholic gentry. These networks provided access to powerful patrons on whose services the Catholic gentry relied in order to weather the powerful changes set in motion by the Reformation and the challenges they faced living under a Protestant regime. Through the examination of the different networks of which the Catholic gentry formed part, Cogan is able to show the range of connections which tied them to their Protestant counterparts and the English state. Moreover, the concept of gender is effectively used to uncover particular (gendered) dimensions of these networks. Cogan makes clear how men and women 'forged their networks differently' (p. 26) and shows how members of the gentry sought to live up to and affirm notions of manliness and femininity. However, the ways in which the networks overlapped and intersected, could have been made clearer. The structure of the first chapters is based on individual families and counties, and although the family trees in the appendix are helpful, network visualizations would have been able to show the composition of the various networks as well as their overlap, also with the other networks (cultural, military) that are introduced in subsequent chapters. In this way, the examination of several families spread across various countries, one of the strengths and a central feature of the book, could have been enhanced.

Whether the material Cogan amassed in her book supports the conclusion that the 'Catholic gentry identified as gentry more than they identified as Catholics' is debatable. While the examples of interaction between Catholic and Protestant gentry are plenty and the existence of a transconfessional noble culture is convincingly shown, the prevalence of religiously endogamous marriage strategies and the development of more 'closed networks' based on religious affiliation and kinship relations with other Catholic gentry families, questions the primacy of status over religion. As the chapter on architecture and gardens shows, the importance of these variables depended largely on the context in which interconfessional interaction took place. Moreover, in order to better understand the nuances of such interaction as well as the wider relationships between the Catholic gentry and the Protestant part of society, the book might have benefitted from a more sustained engagement with the extensive literature on religious toleration, in particular in relation to terminology. Now the terms 'accommodation', '(official) toleration', 'harmonious and acrimonious coexistence' are used, sometimes in relation to each other (e.g. pp. 30, 197), but without providing a clear definition of each of them. Still, because of its thorough analysis of the various networks of a number of Catholic gentry families, this book is a welcome addition to the scholarship on confessional coexistence and the English Catholic gentry.

Leibniz-Institute für Europäische Geschichte – Geraerts@ieg-mainz.de