



Michael Questier. *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550-1640.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xxii + 559 pp. £48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-86008-6.

Reviewed by Rosamund Oates (Department of History, Manchester Metropolitan University)

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Catholic Communities in Early Modern England

The role of the community—or communities—in shaping post-Reformation Catholicism has been hotly debated by historians since the publication of John Bossy's magisterial study, *The English Catholic Community* (1975). His thesis placed the aristocracy at the heart of a changing Catholic community after 1559: as protectors, first, of Marian clerics, then as patrons of seminary and Jesuit priests. Bossy argued that these missionaries, who had trained abroad, brought with them a post-Trentine vigor which briefly changed the direction of English Catholicism. Christopher Haigh's response to Bossy also stressed the importance of aristocratic patronage, but in his model, the missionary priests, seduced by the comforts of aristocratic and gentry households, effectively became household chaplains, leaving the rest of the Catholic community to wither and slide into "Parish Anglicanism."^[1]

This debate started over 30 years ago, and yet it still shapes current historical writing on post-Reformation Catholicism in England. Why? Because it is clear that the wider community (however defined) shaped the religious and political experiences of individuals, and that debates about conformity took place with reference to a Catholic community, however vague that notion might be. In *Catholicism and the Community*, Michael Questier re-examines post-Reformation Catholicism through the lens of two coexistent communities: one, the wider "Catholic community" in England; the other, an aristocratic entourage.

At the heart of his story is the household and kinship network of the Browne family, presided over by the first and second Viscounts Montague. Questier demonstrates that this network was the forum for debates about the future of English Catholicism—debates which shaped the second Viscount's politico-ecclesiastical position. Furthermore, he argues that the Catholic households of the aristocracy shaped post-Reformation Catholicism. As missionaries became household chaplains, they exercised an influence over their patrons which was felt on the national stage; Questier shows too how, for example, the second Viscount's patronage could encourage one clerical faction at the expense of the other. From the 1580s onwards, Catholic patrons had the opportunity to influence the development of English Catholicism as a debate emerged amongst the clergy about the future of Catholicism in England. Questier argues that these disputes, which erupted in the "Wisbech Stirs" of 1594, divided the Catholic community, as clergy and their patrons argued about the best way to serve, and to increase, the Catholic community in England. At the heart of all this wrangling was, of course, a notional English Catholic community, which all protagonists claimed to represent. So, there are two communities in Questier's book, and both, he argues, were central to the development of English Catholicism and of Catholics' relationship with the Protestant regime.

Those divisions within the Catholic mission, broadly speaking between the religious orders and the seculars, were about the future of the English mission in England: the relationship between Catholics and the regime; pa-

pal influence; and pastoral care. Questier explores these divisions by looking at moments when those tensions emerged into bitter conflicts: namely the archpriest (or appellant) and approbation controversy. Often relegated to the footnotes of Catholic histories as factional spats, Questier argues that these debates had wider ramifications for the future of Catholicism in England.

The child of the Wisbech Stirs, the appellant controversy was prompted by the appointment of a pro-Jesuit archpriest to oversee the English mission in 1598. The seculars not only resented the increased influence of the religious orders, but argued that a Catholic bishop would provide guidance and stability to the mission in England. These debates rumbled on for years, and were reignited in 1626, shortly after the appointment of Richard Smith as the second bishop of Chalcedon. Smith's attempt to assert his authority over both religious and seculars in the English mission led to a heated argument when Smith insisted that all Catholic clergy in England should come to him for approbation—i.e., to be licensed to hear confessions. Lurking behind these conflicts was a power struggle between seminary priests and the religious orders as both tried to dominate the missionary effort in England. Questier, however, argues that these debates also reflected divisions which would be central to the development of English Catholicism. The secular and religious clergy's conflicts about whether a bishop and a formal hierarchy would promote or hinder the English mission reflected conflicting visions of their missionary role. There was, of course, a wider context for these struggles: the post-Tridentine Church was home to both Borromeo, the reforming bishop of Milan, and the Jesuit missions to the "Indies of Europe"—two very different styles of Catholic zeal. Questier emphasizes the political connections too, arguing that the changing fortunes of the Spanish and French directly impacted on English Catholicism: the short-lived appointment of Richard Smith as bishop of Chalcedon, for example, was seen as reflecting French influence.

If one recurring strand in histories of post-Reformation Catholicism is the role of the community, another is the relationship between the Protestant regime and English Catholics. Hopes of toleration were consistent throughout this period, and looked increasingly realistic at various points in the seventeenth century: at the succession of James I; during negotiations over the Spanish match; and at various points in Charles's reign. The prospect of toleration intensified the debates about the future of English Catholicism, and Questier outlines how various factions jostled to represent an En-

glish Catholic community. His account is of a dynamic Catholicism, certainly among the priesthood and their patrons but he shows too how the polemics spawned by the sparring parties in this intra-Catholic debate reflected wider conflicts in Stuart politics. It was widely agreed that some form of toleration was necessary, and so the political aspirations of the Stuart regime came to influence debates within the Catholic community about the process of reform, conversion, and relations with the papacy. Here, Questier develops Bossy's account of early Stuart Catholicism by emphasizing the shifting relationship between English Catholics and the regime.

Questier is most persuasive and exciting in his account of how the struggle for dominance within the English Catholic community spilled over into wider confessional politics. When toleration looked to be a possibility, for example while James I was in negotiations over the Spanish match, different factions claimed to represent a loyalist Catholicism community. The second Viscount Montague, who had refused to take the oath in 1611, is seen (after some vacillation) to support clerics who argued that a bishop for the Catholic Church in England would guarantee both loyalty and order. Questier shows how these petitioners allied their own cause with the avant-garde conformists within the Church of England. William Watson, for example, in his *Decarcordon* (1604), portrayed both the Jesuits and the Puritans as agents of disorder. Later, when Charles I faced conflict in parliament over his religious and foreign policies, the Catholic bishop, Richard Smith, used the maxim "no bishop, no King" to show how, with his vision of an ordered Catholic Church, he was a natural ally of the beleaguered King. By the 1630s, the papal hierarchy was being presented as a mirror image of royal authority. It is well established that the fear of "popery" was an important feature in the road to civil war, and Questier argues that these Catholic polemics, aligning themselves with a hierarchical and conformist Church of England, did a lot to increase fears about the Laudian program.

This account of aristocratic patronage and politics focuses primarily on the leadership, rather than the foot-soldiers, of the English Catholic community. However, as Questier argues, it was in the households and the entourage of these aristocratic Catholics that the future of English Catholicism was hammered out.

Note

[1]. For the earliest outlines of the different interpretations, see J. Bossy, "The Character of English Catholicism," *Past and Present* 21 (1962): 39-59; J. Bossy, *The En-*

English Catholic Community: 1570-1850 (1975); C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); C. Haigh, "The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation," *Past and Present* 93 (1981): 37-69.

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