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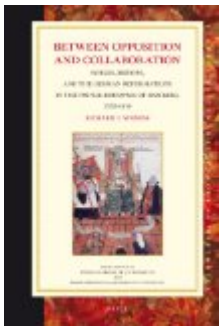

Richard J. Ninness. *Between Opposition and Collaboration: Nobles, Bishops, and the German Reformations in the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg, 1555-1619.* Leiden: Brill, 2011. xii + 224 pp. $136.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-20154-5.

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Commissioned by Amy R. Caldwell (CSU Channel Islands)

In his splendid *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400-1650*, Thomas A. Brady Jr. argues that the "confessionalization thesis," which was developed in the sixties and seventies, "holds that the three German confessions--Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed--developed together from the 1570s as a system in which each developed characteristics that became, mutatis mutandis, common property of all."[1] The "confessionalization thesis" to which Brady refers has for some years been challenged by historians of German history interested in finding those interstitial spaces that large historical models, such as this one, simply cannot address. This is the case for Richard J. Ninness in his new book, ***Between Opposition and Collaboration***. Ninness proposes in this careful study that the confessionalization thesis has been "too mechanical, in that it assumed the subject peoples seamlessly adopted the imposed confessions, and as too top-down, in that it ignored the confession-related behaviors of mid-level authorities almost completely and never did a good job in considering the role of nobles" (p. 14). To support his argument, Ninness focuses on the imperial knights in the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg as he examines how this particular group of powerful, often Lutheran, knights negotiated with the Catholic Prince-Bishopric, and how together they maneuvered through the confessional tensions that arose as the result of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. To Ninness's credit, he has discovered that noble, familial alliances were the true authorities of this prince-bishopric. Patronage, not confession, was the top priority of this "aristocratic republic." Nepotism, cronyism, and long-standing alliances among families were the true paths to power, making it possible for the prince-bishopric and the cathedral chapter to continue to appoint their relatives to "the secular administrative positions, even if they were Protestant" (p. 19).

Ninness builds his case first with a history lesson of the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg. Chapter 1 emphasizes the nobility's influence in Bamberg, showing that, historically, noble families had important roles as canons and secular officeholders.

Chapter 2 gets to the heart of Ninness's argument when he analyzes the effect that the Reformation had on Bamberg, and he maintains that, in the end, it remained family ties and influence, not confession, that determined who would enter the cathedral chapter. Chapter 3 provides a broader analysis of the effects of the Reformation on Bamberg following the Council of Trent. As pressure mounted from Rome to force conversions and dismiss Protestant officials, Ninness makes a convincing argument not only for the continued resistance of the imperial knights, but also for the reluctance of the prince-bishop to upset the apple cart. While he was able to eliminate a few Protestant officials, his was a feeble effort at best. Until 1594, the imperial knights steadfastly maintained their positions. The subsequent chapters chart, however, the slow but steady strengthening of the prince-bishopric's Counter-Reformation policies between 1594 and 1599. The surprise here is that the Catholic efforts to enforce church reform and conversion of Bamberg's Protestant subjects were aided by Protestant officials. In these chapters, perhaps more convincingly than anywhere else, Ninness demonstrates the complexities and nuances of the reform process. Authority, the author argues, was not synonymous with confession. Again, he suggests, it was noble alliances that held strong, in particular among the imperial knights, that is, at least, until 1619, when, as Ninness relates in chapter 6, the Franconian imperial knights could no longer maintain the precarious balance of neutrality. In the end, defeated by the increasingly militant pressures building between Catholics and Protestants, the imperial knights found that they simply could not remain united.

The eventual fissures that finally divided the imperial knights along confessional lines at the outset of the Thirty Years' War will surprise no one who has studied this later period. More tantalizing, however, and exactly to Ninness's point, were the webs of negotiation that complicated all aspects of the power relationships within the Prince-Bishopric of Bamberg between 1555 and 1619. Noble families and church authorities, Catholics and Protestants, the prince-bishop and Rome, and, in particular, the imperial knights and the cathedral chapters, created alliances that served their own best interests, most often regardless of confession. To this end, Ninness reminds us that this a fascinating and complex moment in early modern German history, one that is well served by this fine study.

Note

[1]. Thomas A. Brady Jr., *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 258.

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