Thomas F. Mayer. *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 468.

As Thomas Mayer demonstrates in this excellent new volume, Reginald Pole was one of the most important international figures of the middle of the sixteenth century. Not only was Pole at the head of the Catholic reform movement, famously coming within one vote of the papacy in the 1549 conclave, but he was also at the centre of the struggle against the Protestant reformers in his native England. In this latter capacity, though, he became inextricably entangled in the dispute between Philip II and Pope Paul IV, eventually suspected and mistrusted by both. It is these two sides of his life — the Italian reformer and the English papist — which account for the double image of Pole which dominates the historiography. But by putting together the English and Italian sides of his life, Mayer is able to present a more moderate and more human portrait of the cardinal. Gone is the “Sancte educatus, sanctus vixit, sanctissime mortuus est,” as he was described by his unidentified eulogiser in 1558, but so also is archbishop Matthew Parker’s verdict: “inglese italianato, diavolo incarnato.” Instead, Mayer presents a Pole who is theologically consistent from *De unitate* forth, albeit one who is progressively more mystical in his writings. He was a skilled rhetorician who preferred to withdraw at moments of direct conflict and write; yet he was a man decidedly uncomfortable with the authority that authorship bequeathed. Mayer states that Pole, trapped between ambition and self-abnegation, “had greatness thrust upon him and it missed” (p. 439).

This work is not just a biography of the English cardinal; it is the penultimate volume of Mayer’s quartet on Pole. As such, it provides context and structure to the arguments he has made in the series of fifteen articles recently collected and reprinted as *Cardinal Pole in European Context*, his *A Reluctant Author: Cardinal Pole and his Manuscripts*, and his calendar of Pole’s correspondence, scheduled to appear in early 2002. The fruit of twenty years of archival research, this volume bristles with detail, but because of the sheer bulk of the information that Mayer has uncovered he is forced to draw the context very tightly around the central figure in order to accommodate all that he can. As he freely admits, wider events and personalities are treated largely as tangential and only insofar as they touch Pole. While this is fair enough and partially redressed by arguments he has supplied elsewhere in the quartet, it will make the narrative dense to the reader familiar only with Pole’s English or Italian incarnation.

Mayer relies heavily on three types of evidence: the writings associated with Pole and his circle, his letters, and an array of ancillary material drawn mostly from Italian archives. By itself, Mayer argues, this evidence does not constitute history, for much of that which emanated from Pole and his circle was a consciously rhetorical product crafted to persuade. As a result, the *Pole* of these works is a corporate construction intended to cultivate a “myth of sanctity” (p. 2), which was closely linked to the agenda of Catholic reform. Pole was the archetypal literate Renaissance man, a figure who constructed his image carefully through texts and

rhetoric. It is this distinction between the historical Pole and his literary persona that sets Mayer's approach apart from the previous historiography of the cardinal. Instead of treating as equivalent the life as lived and the life as written, Mayer juxtaposes the two. By controlling the dynamic between them with sources composed independent of Pole's orbit, Mayer reverses the conventional hagiographic standard and discards any claims about Pole which cannot be verified in the archival record.

But Mayer is not interested just in recovering the "real" Pole; he also goes to great lengths to show the development of *Pole*. Having treated the relationship between Pole and *Pole* from the composition of *De unitate* onwards through the bulk of his narrative, in the final two chapters of the work Mayer explores the posthumous representations of the cardinal in both literature and art, concluding with a catalogue of visual images of Pole. These, he shows, capture and idealise Pole's virtues in a fashion parallel to the biographies.

Mayer's critical scepticism and extensive knowledge of the archival record allow him to discard the conventional teleology of Pole's life, which sees the cardinal and his party as tragically doomed. Instead, Mayer seeks to represent Pole as if at each instant he knew as little of the subsequent moment as his subject knew at the corresponding point in his life. While this does make the narrative of Pole's life considerably more complicated, as it cannot be reduced to a linear progression of simple causes and effects, it does allow Mayer to dismiss the debate over Pole's heterodoxy as anachronistic and misleading. As Mayer argues, there was no such thing as theological orthodoxy before Trent; even afterwards it did not exist in practice for a long time. Instead, Mayer situates Pole's theology within the context of the diversity of religious thought and sentiment that characterised the first half of the sixteenth century in Italy. From Pole's perspective, an irreconcilable division between the reformers and the *intransigenti* was not inevitable. Equally, this approach allows Mayer to present Pole's view of papal authority as less fatally afflicted. As he points out, Paul III and Julius II had tried to work at least in part through consensus. In this context, the permanence of Paul IV's reassertion of papal absolutism would not have seemed inevitable to Pole.

The most controversial part of the book will doubtless prove to be its final nine pages, where Mayer steps out of the archives to argue from much recent scholarship, "with all due caution," that Pole was a homosexual and "married" to Alvise Priuli, with whom he lived for twenty years. The evidence Mayer adduces to support this proposition is decidedly sketchy when compared to the rigorous standard of proof he demands elsewhere. His case relies predominantly on the fact that Priuli was "certainly homosexual" (p. 443), a close reading of Sebastiano del Piombo's mid-1540s portrait of Pole, an emblem for Pole by Achille Bocchi based upon *The Rape of Ganymede*, and several metaphors used by Pole and his circle to describe his relationship to other male figures central to his life. How this portion of the work is received will depend largely on how specific readers view the work of John Boswell on same-sex unions in early modern Europe. For Mayer, though, this explains Pole's tendency to withdraw at moments of crisis. Mayer sees this not

just as reflecting a failure of will on Pole's part, a retreat into a political and religious haven, but as a retreat to a "gender refuge" (p. 442).

Despite this controversial conclusion, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* is an important book and will remain essential reading for students of sixteenth-century ecclesiastical and political history for generations to come. Well illustrated and lucidly written, the work brings together the Italian and English portions of the cardinal's life on the basis of extensive archival research and in so doing sets a new standard of completeness in critical biography.

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Nicolas de Malebranche. *Conversazioni cristiane*. Éd. Alfonso Ingegno. Trad. Luisa Andriani. Coll. « Immagini della Ragione ». Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999. P. xxxvii, 183.

Le second ouvrage de cette collection nouvelle, lancée par le grand éditeur florentin, et placée sous le signe de la raison, est consacré à l'une des œuvres importantes de Malebranche, que l'on peut qualifier indifféremment de philosophique (comme l'ensemble de ses écrits) ou de philosophico-théologique. Après Pietro Pomponazzi et son *Traité sur l'immortalité de l'âme*, voici donc, dans un climat philosophique tout à fait différent (ou, pour mieux dire, opposé), le dialogue que le Père Malebranche a instauré entre trois personnages — Théodore, Aristarque et Érase — dont les échanges et les arguments lui permettent de construire sa propre dialectique sur le problème central qu'il n'a cessé de poser et de repenser : celui de l'existence de Dieu.

Saluons d'abord l'heureuse initiative de cette traduction en langue italienne. Autant que mes recherches m'ont permis de le découvrir, elle apparaît comme la première qui ait été proposée dans cette langue. Autant que ma connaissance de la langue italienne me le permet aussi, la confrontation que j'ai faite entre le texte original de Malebranche et la traduction présente, est à l'honneur de la traductrice italienne : précision, élégance, même vivacité dans les répliques des interlocuteurs. Le texte de référence est naturellement celui de la grande édition critique en vingt volumes des *Œuvres complètes* de Malebranche, établie par le philosophe français André Robinet et diffusée par la Librairie Vrin.

Je m'attacherai plus volontiers à l'examen de la substantielle Introduction dont l'humaniste et philosophe Alfonso Ingegno a fait précéder le texte de Malebranche. Avec la précision, la rigueur et la profondeur d'analyse qui lui sont coutumières, A. Ingegno souligne les modifications, additions ou suppressions que le texte a connues, à partir de l'édition originale de 1677, en raison des polémiques qu'il suscita dès son apparition et qui amenèrent son auteur à compléter également le texte de la *Recherche de la vérité* par des éclaircissements (1678), préalable à son *Traité de la nature et de la grâce* (1680, 1681). Pourquoi, et quelles polémiques ?