

Samuel Weber, *Aristocratic Power in the Spanish Monarchy: The Borromeo Brothers of Milan, 1620–1680*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 240. Hb, £70.00.

The book traces the history of a noble dynasty of the State of Milan under Spanish rule. It concerns one of the two branches of the Borromeo family, which, in 1613, before the death of Cardinal Federico (1631), divided up the family possessions around Lake Maggiore, giving the castle of Arona to the descendants of Charles III and that of Angera to the heirs of Julius Caesar III. The House of Borromeo—originally merchants and bankers—had become illustrious when Charles II (1538–84) was first chosen by his uncle Pius IV as cardinal nephew and then as archbishop of Milan. It was then that the family name began to shine, thanks to the veneration paid to that icon of the post-Tridentine bishop, canonized in 1610 to the acclaim of Madrid. Nevertheless, Charles was not loved by the court of Philip II, who, in the early years of his rule of the Ambrosian Church, had to reckon with a powerful cardinal unwilling to favor secular authority in the Duchy of Milan. A proud defender of the *libertas ecclesiae*, Charles mitigated his harshness only in the last years of his life, starting the Borromeo's march towards Spain that would culminate in the years of his cousin Federico's archbishopric.

Weber first demolishes the myth of the Borromeo family as champions of the Milanese nobility opposed to the domination of Spain, a myth to which the most famous novel in the Italian literary tradition, *I promessi sposi* (The betrothed) by the Catholic aristocrat Alessandro Manzoni, contributed in the age of the Risorgimento. In the years when Italian culture was elaborating the paradigm of "Italian baroque decadence," Carlo and Federico were portrayed as opponents of the foreign domination of Madrid over the Duchy of Milan and the Peninsula in order to build a positive image of the Ambrosian elites before the process of national unification. However, was this the case? Were the Borromeos—Weber asks—outsiders to Spain's power system in the seventeenth century? With the help of a forest of sources that include the papers of the Borromeo family of Angera, but also documents of the papal curia, Weber proves the contrary and, in the prologue (18–22), points out that the Borromeos's alignment with Spain took place. At the same time, Federico was alive when the Catholic monarchy adopted the *valimiento* system of government. In 1617, Borromeo signed a *Concordia* between the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of Milan, and in 1625, after the fall of Lerma, he wrote a treatise, *La gratia de' principi*, to denigrate the networks of the first *valimiento*, accused of corruption, and exalt the new, more "sober" balance of power introduced by Olivares. A system based on a nonchalant use of patronage, trust, and dependence that bound the "shadow of the king" and his clients, the

validimiento allowed a part of the noble elite to be enrolled in the government of a composite monarchy and legitimized itself with a rhetoric of the “common good” that Federico exploited to allow the Borromeos to join the Olivares entourage and gain office, prestige, and power over their subjects.

In keeping with the historiography that has recently revisited the paradigm of court society and the commonplace of a permanent conflict between the European nobility and the rising monarchies, and in continuity with the research that has shed new light on the Italo-Spanish networks that allowed Madrid to govern highly complex realities such as the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, Weber dedicates his research to the Duchy of Milan: the only Italian territory that did not rebel against Madrid during the crisis of the 1640s, which upset the Spanish hegemonic system. Can the story of the Borromeos of Angera explain the consent of the Milanese nobles to Spanish rule in the age of the *validos*? Can it enrich what we know of the elites’ use of “symbolic capital”? Can it peel back the veil that concealed the private interests of the nobility, “transubstantiated” through the neo-stoic language of “service” and the more traditional language of the “common good”? With research that owes much to the sociological tools of Pierre Bourdieu and the interpretative proposals of Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Weber plumbs Borromeo’s strategies of affirmation over three generations, highlighting not so much the “division of labor” and teamwork that usually allowed the noble houses to maintain prestige and patrimony (women to marry in order to weave alliances; men to become clerics or to remain laymen; to be warriors or courtiers), but how the Lombard clan served Spain to serve family interests.

Thanks to the agents sent to Madrid and the money lavished at court, the Borromeos recovered the castle of Angera and accredited themselves as convinced *olivaristas* (Chapter I). In the context of the war between Spain and France, which affected northern Italy, the Lombard clan used the Union de las armas project to its advantage and consolidated under Giovanni VII. Moreover, partially disproving what John Elliott had written, historians such as Manuel Rivero have shown that Olivares’s fiscal and military projects were conceived for and embraced by the high nobility of the provinces, eager to gain accreditation at court and to serve in the army to gain prestige (Chapter II). Giovanni did this after his father’s death and Vercelli’s capitulation (1638). Appointed governor of Vercelli and Ivrea, with the help of his subjects, Giovanni neutralized the siege of Arona. He was exalted as a hero, obtaining the role of commissary general of the Spanish army (1645). This was the peak of the Borromeo family’s rise in Angera, all the more so because to please Olivares and to help the notables of the dominions of Lake Maggiore, impoverished by the war, Giovanni proposed to house the troops in private buildings (the *case erme*), remunerating the

owner-clients with the introduction of a new tax (Chapter III). However, this system, seemingly “modern,” did not erase the abuses committed by the troops quartered in the Milanese area. At the same time, the poorer strata complained about the tax burden and corruption caused by the *case erme*. Exploiting these criticisms, in the name of the “common good,” was the branch of Arona (77), which held the office of ordinary magistrate and, in the papers sent to Madrid, evoked the risk of the Duchy of Milan rebelling, following in the footsteps of Barcelona, Lisbon, Palermo, and Naples.

In any case, Giovanni’s decline was determined by the arrogance he exhibited in demanding great recognition from Madrid, the rout of Valencia (1657), and the upheaval that occurred at court with the end of Olivares’s government and the *valimiento* of Luis de Haro (Chapter IV). At this point, the second son of Giulio Cesare II, Federico, who bore the name of his illustrious uncle, emerged (Chapter V). Destined for an ecclesiastical career, Federico understood the changes that had taken place in Rome after the death of Innocent X, the end of his sister-in-law Olimpia Maidalchini’s rule, and the crisis of nepotism. Taking advantage of the rise of the group of cardinals of the *squadron volante*, and the favor of Alexander VII Chigi, Federico donned the robes of a papal official and, under the cloak of neutrality, played in favor of Spain, first in the Grisons and then as leader of the Congregation for Ecclesiastical Immunity, after a parenthesis as governor of Rome. Renouncing the right of asylum in the Duchy of Milan and the dominions of Spain (Chapter VI), he did not follow in the footsteps of St. Charles, supported the fight against the undisciplined clergy, and ordered Francesco Rivola to draw up a biography of Cardinal Federico that extolled his uncle as the architect of a compromise between civil and ecclesiastical authorities (127).

Appointed apostolic nuncio to Spain (Chapter VII), he opposed the rise to the court of the Jesuit Johann Eberhard Nithard, confessor to the regent Mariana of Austria, supporting the party of the great nobility led by Luis Guillén Moncada and Juan José, the half-brother of Charles II. With dexterity, Federico promised the regent to favor the appointment of Nithard as cardinal (maneuvering covertly so that this did not happen, at least for the next two years). He obtained the removal of the confessor from Madrid to the applause of the Apostolic See, the grandes, and Mariana herself. In Rome, Federico obtained the cardinalate and briefly headed the Secretariat of State under Clement X. However, his premature death in 1673 prevented the Borromeos of Angera from continuing their ecclesiastical career and membership of the papal court to consolidate relations with Madrid. The third brother, Antonio Renato, led the Borromeo clan as a client of Prince Juan José, who, in the meantime, dominated the court of Madrid after getting rid of another rival, the

parvenu Fernando de Valenzuela, and consolidating the image of a monarchy that operated as a “republic of the great aristocracy,” in the center and the periphery (Chapter VIII). To increase the family’s prestige in that political context, Antonio Renato adopted a new strategy by exploiting the memory of his ancestors, the “cultural capital” of the Ambrosiana collections, and artistic patronage. As Weber relates, in the Pinacoteca, the portraits of cardinals Federico the Senior and Federico the Junior (painted by Cesare Fiori) were placed next to each other; in Angera Filippo Abbiati produced *quadroni* that antiquated the history of the family, extolled the fasti of the Borromeos and their dedication to the common good and charity;

In contrast, one of the canvases in the Milan residence, painted by Ercole Procaccini the Junior, depicted the family’s connection with Juan José and the court of Madrid. However, with the death of Antonio Renato (1684) and immediately afterward of the fourth brother, Paolo Emilio (1690), the Angera clan became extinct. The coveted Golden Fleece fell to the rival cousins, the Borromeos of Arona, who, after the War of Spanish Succession, would align themselves with the Viennese Habsburgs, the new rulers of the Duchy of Milan.

Weber’s clearly and elegantly written book is an investigation that reconstructs the strategies by which the nobility of the ancien régime managed to perpetuate their power in the years of the *valimienta* and the rise of the great monarchies, concealing private interests with a language of “service” and the “common good” that clashed with a reality in which patronage networks and terrible social inequality continued to dominate (29).

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Axel M. Oaks Takacs and Joseph L. Kimmel, eds., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Comparative Theology: A Festschrift in Honor of Francis X. Clooney, S.J.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2024. Pp. xxvii + 526. Hb, \$195.00.

This weighty volume—forty-four articles and over five hundred pages of intense theological engagement—tries to do two things. As a “Companion,” it fits within the now ubiquitous handbook genre of theological publishing and is intended as a critical survey of comparative theology, a close reading of themes, ideas, and symbols of all kinds that cross religious borders. As a