Book Reviews


When the fifteenth-century popes returned to Rome after exile in Avignon, schism and crisis, they had to reclaim that city. A pope’s authority derived from his status as bishop of Rome and successor to Peter, and with the restoration of papal power came responsibility for Rome’s renewal. This was not a matter for the pope alone, but involved the cardinals too; while individual popes often ruled for only a few years, the College of Cardinals provided continuity from one to the next. In this ambitious interdisciplinary study, Carol Richardson makes a convincing case that a focus on the cardinalate over several papacies can offer a valuable perspective on the historical development of the Catholic Church. Careful to avoid a teleological approach, *Reclaiming Rome* does not seek the roots of the Reformation in the activities of fifteenth-century cardinals but tries to understand those activities on their own terms, and in the context of the calls for church reform and renovation motivated by the conciliar crisis. The cardinals here are not principally of interest for the nepotism, corruption or venality that might have provoked subsequent reformers, but rather in relation to their concerns for their titular churches, for their immortal souls and for their *dignitas*. As an art historian, Richardson emphasizes the material expression of these ideas, but her work also draws on historical, theological and liturgical explanations. Alongside a cogent and thorough synthesis of the secondary literature, she marshals a remarkable array of primary evidence, ranging from archive manuscripts to the physical remains of churches and tomb monuments. This volume will prove a treasure-trove of references and resources for students of topics from Renaissance sculpture to the institutional history of the papacy.

*Reclaiming Rome* is divided into three sections. The first deals with cardinals and popes, beginning with an invaluable account of the conciliar crisis as it delineated relationships between the papacy and Rome, and
between pope and cardinals. Chapter Two considers the issues raised by
the merger of the three colleges of cardinals from Avignon, Pisa and Rome
into a single institution, while Chapter Three addresses the question of
cardinals’ dignity and dress, building a picture of increasing splendour as
the fifteenth century wore on. Here the sumptuous illustration of the vol-
ume comes into its own, though it is unfortunate that the discussion of
cardinals’ dress, where colour proves so significant, could only be portrayed
in black and white. Part Two of the book focuses on cardinals’ engagement
with the fabric of Rome: the need for restoration after decades of neglect,
the question of titular churches and their allocation, and cardinals’ prop-
erty portfolios. A rich series of case-studies, including of the churches of
San Pietro in Vincoli, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, San Clemente and San-
tissimi XII Apostoli, illustrates the process of reclaiming the physical city.
Part Three, ‘Cardinals and Eternity’, takes as its point of departure Old
St Peter’s. Here Richardson’s detective work is at its most impressive, as she
pieces together fragments of evidence for the lost basilica. She questions
the primacy accorded to the pontificate of Nicholas V in studies of fif-
teenth-century St Peter’s, arguing for a broader view taking in not only an
extended time-period, but also the activities of cardinals, who played a
central role in commissioning the monuments that filled the basilica. Yet
even as they made their mark on their spiritual home, the cardinals were
losing the power they had enjoyed at the height of the conciliar crisis,
becoming dependent for their authority on the re-established popes. The
study convincingly illustrates how this changing position of the cardinalate
can be discerned in the design of tomb monuments.

Studies of Renaissance Rome necessarily engage with a problematic his-
toriography, and this one is no exception. While the competing Protestant
and Catholic traditions of the nineteenth century are no longer dominant,
debate now focuses on Paolo Prodi’s theory of the ‘papal prince’, and in
particular his emphasis on the temporal preoccupations of the early mod-
ern papacy. Here, Richardson largely endorses the approach of Anthony
D. Wright, who has argued that Prodi’s analysis is skewed by a concern to
account for the nineteenth-century consequences of papal temporal gov-
ernment. As a study of the cardinals, Reclaiming Rome is not in the busi-
ess of tackling Prodi head-on, although underlying its thesis is a
characterization of the papacy as ‘complex and, ultimately, paradoxical’,
and an apparent desire to redress the balance of study in favour of the
liturgical and religious aspects of Roman life, as against the ‘political and
partisan’. In light of the important roles played by many individual cardi-