



**Louthan, Howard. Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion  
in the Catholic Reformation**

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substitue une nouvelle dimension parodique et ironique de la comédie, inouïe jusqu'alors (p. 460). La peinture de la mentalité bourgeoise présentée avec un détachement souriant, qui fait de ce nouveau genre comique une comédie de mœurs, ce que l'auteur souligne à plusieurs reprises.

L'ouvrage de Madeleine Kern est une réussite. Cet excellent travail a le mérite de s'attaquer à un sujet neuf, original, peu traité, la séduction sur la scène comique. Mené avec une grande rigueur, le développement suit un plan logique, convaincant. Il faut admirer la précision dans l'information, la large connaissance de ce théâtre comique et des ouvrages critiques qui s'y sont attachés, la finesse de l'analyse des ressorts de l'intrigue et des sentiments des personnages. Des notes, très abondantes, sont fort utiles. Une bibliographie très complète, bien organisée, un index *nominum* et un index *rerum* complètent cette étude qui apporte une importante contribution à la connaissance de la comédie française de la Renaissance si longtemps et si injustement tenue dans l'oubli.

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**Louthan, Howard.**

***Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation.***

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiii, 351. ISBN 978-0-521-88929-2 (hardcover) \$120.

In February 1694 a Jewish glove maker named Lazar Abeles was arrested in Prague, along with a teenage accomplice named Kurtzhandl, for having murdered the glove maker's child, Simon. Abeles committed suicide in prison; his youthful sidekick was tortured and put to death, receiving baptism as a Catholic in exchange for an end to his sufferings. Rather like the good and bad thieves of the Gospels, Abeles was subsequently depicted (figuratively and literally, in prints) as a damned villain, Kurtzhandl as a repentant sinner pulled back from the brink of hellfire at the eleventh hour. It fell to the initial victim, Simon, to become an instant Christian martyr as according to rumour he had been receiving instruction from local Jesuits with a view to conversion. He joined a fourteenth-century martyr, the newly canonized St. John Nepomuk,

as among the homegrown holy heroes created in the Bohemian counter-reformation.

The Abeles episode features prominently in the final chapter of Howard Louthan's perceptive book on the winning back of Bohemia from the Protestant heresies (the plural is important) that had dominated this central province of the Habsburg monarchy since the time of Jan Hus. Louthan's chronological range is considerable, stretching back to the fifteenth century and forward to the climax of Catholic reform under Charles VI in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Religious tension provides the red thread through a series of chapters devoted to the various means used by secular and ecclesiastical rulers and activist clerics (above all, the Jesuits) to win back town and country. Much of the analysis concentrates on the seventeenth century, where the Thirty Years War and its aftermath provide a political backdrop but do not distract the author from his focus on the ways in which a combination of persuasive carrots and forceful sticks were employed to religious and sometimes other ends.

The process was largely successful. Between Prague's famous defenestrations, two centuries apart, in 1419 and 1618 respectively, the religious advantage lay first, with post-Hussite Utraquists (to many Catholics, less heretics than misguided schismatics) and, in the sixteenth century, with more thoroughly reformed groups. The grip of the reformers, who had enjoyed limited and sporadic toleration rather than outright freedom, was shaky: when Frederick the Elector Palatine assumed his 'Winter Kingship', the efforts of his wife, Elizabeth Stuart, to purge local monuments of superstitious elements met with resistance. Nevertheless, the majority of the population would not have been taking Catholic communion by the time of the second and more memorable defenestration. A century later, the situation was quite the reverse, so effective had been the efforts at reconversion.

Louthan studies a variety of ways in which re-Catholicization occurred, ranging from rituals of violence, such as the celebrated mass execution of some of the ringleaders of the 1618 revolt (among them the unfortunate university rector Jan Jessenius), to more subtle means. As he points out, if resourceful missionaries stood at the vanguard of the reconversion, they were backed up (often literally) by armed troops or the spectre of the local headsmen. The Catholic counteroffensive was aided by considerable divisions among Protestants, and the ephemerality of Protestant reform values and practices—the more 'advanced' the heresy, the less purchase it had acquired

in popular consciousness. The ambitions of the Bohemian nobility, several of whom thought Prague, like Paris, worth a mass, also contributed to the ultimate success of the reconversion, as a number willingly rejoined the Roman fold.

Among the tools of force and those of persuasion, the latter are the more interesting. Louthan examines the work of antiquaries, historians, printers, cantors, artists and others who sought to heal the rupture that Hussitism had created between Bohemia's medieval Catholic past (epitomized by the tenth-century martyr Good King Wenceslas, and, a few centuries later, by John Nepomuk) and its heretical recent history. They did this through a combination of scholarship and invention, including the outright importation or creation of relics (such as Nepomuk's miraculously preserved tongue), the reinvigoration of the cult of the Virgin Mary, and an aggressive campaign of church-building and monument-erecting. As elsewhere in Europe during these centuries, the past was no 'objective' field to be researched but an armory to be raided in search of the weapons of propaganda. For a leading antiquary such as Bohuslav Balbín, the work of scholarship and the work of reform were inseparable.

Louthan's thoughtful study is cautious in generalization and in some ways its title is unduly modest. Apart from filling a gap in our understanding of the process of reform and counter-reform in central Europe (an under-studied region given that relatively few Western scholars have mastered the multiple languages necessary to the task), he has offered something like a concise *Kulturgeschichte* of Bohemia during the decades when it turned from a troublesome and rebellious part of the Habsburg domains into a faithful part of the imperial heartland, a stance it would retain until the nineteenth century, when newly aroused sentiments of nationalism, now based on language rather than religion, reignited dissent.

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