



Ruling Peacefully: Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga and Patrician Reform in Sixteenth-Century Italy

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Raised in the splendid court of Mantua, wealthy even by the standards of Renaissance cardinals, the patron of artists and scholars, the father of numerous children, an active participant in Italian and European politics as regent of the Duchy of Mantua, Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga (1505-1563) was in many respects a typical Renaissance prelate from a noble family. Nevertheless, in the course of his life he also exhibited a real commitment to reform of the Church and gave serious attention to the religious debates of his day. He reformed the diocese of Mantua, befriended reformers both Catholic and Protestant, and served as papal legate to the Council of Trent.

Ruling Peacefully provides the first in-depth study of this influential and paradoxical figure. Gonzaga emerges as a complex personality whose interests as the representative of a northern Italian ruling family could just as easily lead him to support reform in the Catholic Church as to hinder it. His career exemplifies much of the history of Italy and the Catholic Church in an era of uneasy transition. The process of change that the Church underwent in the sixteenth century only gradually provided theological clarity. This lack of definition exhibited itself not only in theology but also in the lives and works of individuals, including the leaders of the Church.

The career of Ercole Gonzaga, who does not fit easily into the categories of spiritual reformer, or intransigent inquisitor, or unreformed noble prelate, challenges stereotypical descriptions of Italian prelates and may represent the age more fully than any of these ideal types. This intermingling of the worldly and the religious suggests that he may best be understood as a patrician reformer who manifested the cultural life of late Renaissance Italy, the call for reform, and the interests of a powerful ruling family.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Paul V. Murphy is director of the Institute of Catholic Studies at John Carroll University and associate professor of history.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"In this careful, balanced study, Murphy (John Carroll Univ.) draws upon voluminous unpublished correspondence to assess the ecclesiastical career of an important but underestimated figure. . . . The book

participates in current revaluations of early modern Catholicism as complex, creative, and open to a variety of approaches to reform during the crucial decades of the mid-16th century. Summing up: Recommended." ? K. Gouwens, *Choice*

"[An] impressive and welcome book" ? Elisabeth Gleason, *Renaissance Quarterly*

"Those?like me?who have read and enjoyed Paul V. Murphy's essays in the *Sixteenth Century Journal*, in several edited volumes, and in this journal now have just what they hoped for: Murphy's thorough analysis covering the whole life of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga (1505-63). He has made a first-class contribution to the history of sixteenth-century Italy." ? William Hudon, *Catholic Historical Review*

"Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga . . . has been a neglected figure of scholarly attention, due in great part to the difficulty in categorizing him as a reformer, conservative, or worldly lord. Making good use of archival sources, Murphy faces this challenge by looking at Gonzaga through the lens, as he puts it, of patrician reform. Assuming that the cardinal's status and formation as a scion of a ruling family influenced his religious activities, this book provides the reader with a well-rounded picture of the man, allowing us to understand the sometimes conflicting elements in his lifestyle and reform activities. . . . Murphy's analysis of the political exigencies faced by the cardinal is valuable and insightful. . . . This book sheds light on the cardinal's life and character and coherently explains apparent contradictions in his behavior. . . . Murphy's interesting, authoritative work provides evidence of the us

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