

reactions to the proposed research were mixed. On the one hand, there was bemusement at the fact that anybody was interested at all in the study of a phenomenon that had well and truly disappeared. On the other hand, a feeling of sadness was expressed by many — a kind of sentimental yearning for a different, simpler faith and devotional life, a way of life that was all-embracing; a similar response was echoed by many to the effect that confraternal activity finished after the Vatican Council.” (148) One of the recurring themes, if not the dominant one in the collection, is thus the realization of the passage of an era and the consequent importance of retrieving the documentation still extant, of analysing it in a scrupulous, scholarly fashion, and then connecting all the dots so as to begin to form a clearer picture that might provide a fuller understanding of the role played by lay religious organizations in the maintenance not only of the faith, but also of the identity of a people. The corollary to this is, of course, the need to gain a better understanding of why, suddenly, such organizations should lose their validity and disappear from the screen. This book makes a significant contribution to exactly this purpose and is required reading for anyone interested in Irish Catholic history and culture from the Renaissance to the present day.

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Terpstra, Nicholas, Adriano Prosperi, and Stefania Pastore, eds. *Faith's Boundaries. Laity and Clergy in Early Modern Confraternities*. Europa sacra, 6. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012. Pp. xxxii, 374 + 14 ill., 1 graph, 6 maps, 2 tables. ISBN 978-2-503-53893-8 (hardcover) € 100

This volume gathers some of the papers presented at the conference on “Brotherhood and Boundaries — Fraternity and Barriers” held in Pisa in 2008, along with some articles written specifically for this book. Edited by Nicholas Terpstra, Adriano Prosperi and Stefania Pastore, the collection focuses on the role of secular and ecclesiastical associations in the early modern period in different cities in Italy and Europe, though it also contains some very interesting articles that open our perspectives unto broader horizons, from the Middle East to Latin America and the Philippines, and illustrate how the spread of brotherhoods was an element of union / conflict / social control transmitted to these new areas through the imposition of European culture and the Catholic religion.

Grouped into six sections, the various articles analyze in detail the different local and social realities and show how “the history of religious institutions is often written around lay-clerical antagonisms, and the historiography can get as heated as the original disputes” (p. xi), and yet the purpose of the

brotherhoods was, instead, to seek to re-create the perfect model, the family, in its relationship between Creator and creature.

The brotherhoods' role in civic life was not limited to bridging the secular / ecclesiastical divide, but also to mediate both politically and practically between these two complementary aspects of civic life. In so doing, they offered their members a sense of identity and status. Brotherhoods, in fact, played many roles: from the management of collective goods such as hospitals to the management and control of political life in favour or against the current government, from providing dowries for young women who would not otherwise be able to marry or assisting widows and orphans in economic distress to holding funerals for deceased brothers and sisters.

Several of the sixteen articles in the volume deal with different dynamics at play in Italian cities, such as the loss of political control in Cortona after its subjugation to Florence; the political and social factions present in mid-sixteenth-century Genoa; the 'city of strangers' that was papal Rome, which took particularly to heart the social care of women; post-Tridentine Milan undergoing its own stringent reforms; or literate Florence, where the Bible was printed and read in the vernacular and where even Machiavelli, from the age of eleven on, was part of a youth confraternity closely connected with the adult confraternity where his father was a member. In other parts of the world, be it the Mediterranean basin or the newly conquered lands across the Atlantic, be it in Jewish, Islamic, Philippine, or Central-American confraternities, we find the same features and the same prevailing social values that characterized the European reality. And if in Jewish confraternities women had a particularly important role, in Central-American ones ethnicity allowed members to 're-establish' groups that the conquest had disjointed and scattered.

This collection has the great merit of offering a complete picture of a reality in many ways still unknown or little studied in its local nuances and its social richness. Differences turn out to be similarities much more than might appear at first impression. This rich resource for our understanding of early modern civil and social life is often still little known for many Italian and European cities, even for important ones. If properly studied and analyzed, it would give us a better understanding of social and economic dynamics that are, in many cases, still unclear or difficult to approach without an understanding of the important role played by confraternities in early modern towns and cities on both sides of the Atlantic and on all the shores of the Mediterranean world.

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