

Polecritti, Cynthia L. *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy. Bernardino of Siena & His Audience*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000. xi, 271 pp. ISBN 0-8132-0960-9.

In this engaging and highly narrative work, Cynthia Polecritti undertakes the challenge of uncovering the relationship between preacher and audience by examining the popular fifteenth-century preacher, Bernardino of Siena, and his sermons. The sermons of Bernardino are perhaps the best source for this type of study, particularly the Sienese cycle of 1427, during which a literate cloth cutter recorded the words of the preacher verbatim. What emerges from her investigation is a complex and colorful picture of a talented, practical preacher and a volatile yet reverent audience, torn between secular and spiritual concerns.

After introducing the preacher and his style, Polecritti discusses Bernardino's probable audience. Readers familiar with other studies of premodern preaching will not be surprised by her findings: women comprised the majority of listeners, and the size of the crowd varied according to the day, time, and topic of the sermon. Subsequent chapters examine the process of peace negotiations, including legal documents, public oaths, witnesses, and financial sanctions, and the role that a preacher like Bernardino played in these precarious and highly ritualized events. As men of God, preachers were considered to be ideal, impartial judges with impeccable moral sense. Unlike some preachers, however, Bernardino refused to partake in the actual negotiations, preferring his role as preacher to that of administrator. His duty, as he saw it, was to convince his audience to forgive vendettae and ignore political factions. His goal, Polecritti argues, was internal conversion rather than outward gesture towards peace. Without the inner desire, external peace would only be temporary. In her conclusion, the author suggests that there is irony in Bernardino's message of social unity considering his intense focus on individual souls. Yet, as she herself argues earlier in the book, ideas that we consider irreconcilable or distinct may not have seemed so to a Renaissance audience.

Polecritti provides an in-depth study of the peacemaking work of Bernardino in the 1427 Siena sermons. Called to save the city from political strife, he emphasized the sin of hatred and the danger in expressing it. Polecritti notes, however, that the vibrant and normally direct preacher became tempered when discussing faction and vendetta. Careful not to offend individuals, Bernardino condemns factions without mentioning names. Through his unusual tact, the Franciscan conveys to the historian that his audience could become violent at the slightest provocation. Polecritti suggests that feuds in Renaissance Italy do not fit neatly into anthropological models of describing feuding through its function in society. She argues that the differentiated social strata, complex legal systems, and high population density in urban areas, characteristics not found in other feuding societies, complicate the matter beyond its functional mode; she rejects the idea that feuding worked as a 'self help' mechanism.

Confraternitas readers, in particular, may appreciate her brief discussion of the Bianchi and their role, similar to that of the preachers', in the peace-making process. As is to be expected, the audience receives less attention than the preacher himself;

the audience, as always, remains implicit in the sources. Polecritti's use of the Italian sermons, particularly the 1427 Sienese cycle, is to be commended, but one wonders what else would have emerged from more time spent with his *Omnia Opera*, mentioned here only twice. Aware of the limits of the historian and sensitive to modern misinterpretations, Polecritti argues that the best way to learn from the past is to accept the information in its own context. For this reason, she relies substantially on the words of Bernardino himself to describe fifteenth-century Siena and the Sienese, which makes for a book as lively and entertaining as the preacher himself.

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Sá, Isabel dos Guimarães. *As Misericórdias Portuguesas de D. Manuel I a Pombal*. Temas de História de Portugal. Lisbon: Libros Horizonte, 2001. 149 pp. ISBN 972-24-1149-7.

The author explores the role of the *Misericórdias* – unquestioned rulers of charity in Portugal and its administrative territories – since their foundation in the kingdom of Dom Manuel I up until the era of the Marquis de Pombal, in light of the most recent studies and documents. After the second half of the 20th century, many innovative studies were conducted by Portuguese scholars on the *Misericórdias*, partly in the wake of the computer revolution that invaded Portuguese historiography and allowed for research and data collection that until that time had been impossible to carry out.

Isabel dos Guimarães Sá not only analyses the *Misericórdias* as institutional tools of the Kingdom and its Empire, but also studies the role they played in Portuguese local life. Particular attention is given to the initial years of these confraternities during the reign of Dom Manuel I (1495–1521). Chapter 1 starts by discussing the myth that the origin of *Misericórdias* is to be attributed to Queen Dona Leonor; it also examines the context in which they first appeared. Chapter 2 studies the structure of the institution both in Portugal and in its Empire (privileges, finances, administration, etc.). Chapter 3 peruses the recruitment of brothers, leadership, and internal and external conflicts. Chapters 4 and 5 enlighten the reader on the complexity of the numerous confraternity rituals and on their charitable practices. A thorough list of liturgical and non-liturgical rituals and the corresponding acts of charity is provided. Finally, Chapter 6 raises the issue of the impact on the *Misericórdias* of the Marquis de Pombal's legislation. The marquis' attempts to restrict vagrancy and mendicancy, and his repressive measures and work ethics influenced the future role of these confraternities.

In this volume Isabel dos Guimarães Sá successfully illustrates how the *Misericórdias*, which acted according to the same rules and values across such a vast territory, reigned without competition over such a long period of time while building a stable presence in Portugal. She demonstrates how the *Misericórdias* performed an