

Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain, eds. John Patrick Donnelly and Michael W. Maher. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 44. Kirksville, Missouri: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999. 262 pp. ISBN 0-943579-60-4. US.\$40.

This recent collection of articles about the relationship between confraternities and Catholic reform brings some of the best-known names in confraternal studies (Christopher Black, Konrad Eisenbichler, Nicholas Terpstra) together with a variety of new and up-and-coming scholars. The collection focuses on the role of confraternities in "Catholic Reform"—the internal process of reform within the Catholic Church—rather than on the "Counter-Reformation"—the struggle against Protestantism. As a result, it focuses on three nations that were at the heart of Catholic reform and which remained predominantly Catholic: Italy, France, and Spain. Italy is the subject of half of the articles, France of four, and Spain of two.

The articles are a mixture of five general studies and seven case studies, providing a pleasing variety of perspectives on the issues at hand. Although the contributors were asked to address the impact of the Council of Trent on confraternities, most of the articles (with some exceptions such as Maureen Flynn's survey of Spanish Baroque confraternities) focus on other issues, suggesting that Trent was merely part of an ongoing process of reform. It becomes clear over the course of the various essays that the impact of Catholic Reform varied widely according to the local circumstances of city, region, and confraternal devotion.

If there is one overarching theme that emerges from all of these articles, it is the issue of control. The basic thrust of Catholic reform efforts was to bring the dangerously autonomous confraternities under the control of parish and bishop. This thrust was subject to many variations, and could have unintended consequences. The main themes of this issue are ably set out by Christopher Black in his opening survey of confraternal-parish relations in Italy, and the reader can then witness these issues being played out over the course of the subsequent articles. In some places, as one might expect, confraternities were indeed brought under the control of parishes and reformed through the efforts of bishops. In others, however, it was secular authorities who took control of the functions of confraternities (as in the case of Modena, studied by Michelle Fontaine), or implemented a reform program (as in Allyson Poska's study of Ourense in Spain). All of these themes could even be combined, as in Paul Murphy's Mantua where the Gonzaga bishop also wielded secular authority for a period, and both Church and State took control of and reformed the city's confraternities.

On the other hand, as Konrad Eisenbichler points out in his study of Florentine youth confraternities, in many cases it was confraternities themselves who were eager to be reformed. Confraternities could furthermore serve as a prime instigator of reform within a parish, or even effectively take over a parish, a reversal of the intentions of Trent. As Ann Ramsey and Christopher Stocker demonstrate in their studies of French confraternities in Paris during the period of the Holy League, at the end of the French wars of religion, confraternities could be a vehicle for Catholic reform and zeal that went far beyond the comfort level of the Church hierarchy.

Increased control over confraternities, whether it be by ecclesiastical or secular authorities, could have unintended consequences. After all, their autonomy had always been one of the primary attractions of the confraternal model. When it was reduced, enthusiasm and participation in confraternal life could decline. On the other hand, in some cases (such as the Jesuit confraternities studied by Michael Maher and the French penitent confraternities studied by Andrew Barnes) the more rigid structure and control introduced by Catholic reform could increase the appeal of confraternities to the most devout sector of the population. Furthermore, even tightly-structured Catholic reform confraternities could still offer a vehicle with which to escape ecclesiastical control. Susan Dinan demonstrates that in seventeenth-century France St. Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity used confraternal status as a way to escape both episcopal control and the cloistering imposed on all female orders after Trent.

Although each of the articles in this collection focuses on specific locations or issues, the fundamental importance of confraternities in early modern Catholic society, not only as actors but also as models of organization and behaviour, becomes subtly apparent over the course of the collection. Nicholas Terpstra's statement that, no matter how poor relief was organized in any given Italian city, it was fundamentally based on confraternities, whether as "models, vehicles, or expropriated resources" (p. 119), could easily be applied more broadly to the other issues and nations studied in this collection.

Moreover, while the role of confraternities in social life and charity is well known, their importance in the exercise and struggle for power, whether economic or political, emerges indirectly in many of these articles. In Italy and Spain, they often served as a battleground between secular and religious authorities, or a vehicle for the expansion of power by a ruler or group. This role in the expression of political power is most apparent, however, in the two articles on French confraternities during the Holy League. Stocker explores the use of conflicting confraternities as a means of political organization and propaganda in the struggle between the civic and aristocratic factions within the Catholic Holy League, while Ramsey emphasizes the role of the public social activities of confraternities, such as civic processions, in sacralizing the civic space and creating an actively Catholic cityscape.

While each of the articles in this collection is fairly focused on its own problematics, the accumulation of so many different perspectives on confraternal activity during the period of Catholic reform points to the fundamental role of lay religious confraternities in Catholic societies, not only through their own activities, but also as models of organization and as vehicles for a wide variety of political, economic and social action. By helping to move confraternities to centre stage in early modern history, this collection reflects the continuing maturation of confraternal studies as a historical field.

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