Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain
Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain

*edited by*
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**Preface**

Confraternities go back to the church of the patristic age; they flourished during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and they have continued to survive into the modern era. Today the Knights of Columbus and the St. Vincent De Paul Societies in thousands of American Catholic parishes continue the work of medieval confraternities in combining fellowship, piety, and charity. During the Catholic Reformation, confraternities flourished not only in Catholic countries but even in hostile soil—in Elizabethan Dublin and in Japan—amid persecutions harsher than any in Europe.

The chronological limits of this volume were easy to set—roughly 1500 to 1650, which embrace the greatest activity of the Catholic and Counter-Reformation. Geographical limits were also needed if the volume was to have coherence; from Ireland to Japan and including Latin America would not do. The two countries that contributed the most to the Catholic Reformation before 1600 were Italy and Spain; after 1600 France increasingly took the lead. This volume focuses on those three countries. Most scholars writing in English about confraternities work with Italy or France, thus Spain is somewhat underrepresented here.

Several questions were put to the scholars who contributed to this volume: What were typical confraternities like before Trent? Who were the objects of their charity before and after Trent? What was the role of patronage and how did that role change after Trent? How did confraternities reshape and/or adapt to popular devotion? How were confraternities used to promulgate and promote Tridentine reform? Did the role of women in confraternities change between 1500 and 1650? How did various groups in society view confraternities? These questions were meant to stimulate contributors and not to be prescriptive or exhaustive.

The essays in this volume often do not deal with the questions as originally formulated. The Council of Trent is usually seen as a watershed of Catholic Reform, but the essays here suggest that Trent had little direct effect on confraternities. It is often said that all politics is local politics. Even more, all religious reform is local reform. If the essays in this volume lead to any one generalization, it is that generalizations about the Catholic Reformation must be cautious and must pay close attention to the local conditions that encouraged, discouraged, and shaped the direction of reform efforts affecting confraternities. Of the twelve essays in this volume,
seven deal with a specific city, while five have broader geographical focus. The arrangement of the chapters juxtaposes essays that look at a single city or a single confraternity with those that are more interpretive.

The volume begins with Italy, whose confraternities have attracted the most attention among scholars writing in English. Christopher Black, whose *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (1989) is the most comprehensive study of the subject, here carries his research a step farther by examining the relationship between confraternities, parishes, and Italian religious reform. Relations between the lay people who ran the confraternities and the parish clergy were often tense. Black’s essay provides general background for the essays on Italian confraternities that follow. Konrad Eisenbichler’s essay is centered on Florence and examines a specific kind of confraternity that is too often overlooked, youth confraternities. Paul Murphy’s study examines how religious reform, fostered by the Gonzaga family, who controlled both state and church at Mantua, affected lay religiosity and Mantuan confraternities. Arguably the most important church in Italy (technically not a parish) was the Gesù at Rome. Best known for its baroque architect, the Gesù was the mother church of the Jesuit order, and it set patterns for Jesuit pastoral activity throughout Catholic Europe. Michael Maher examines how the Jesuits used several congregations housed at the Gesù to foster frequent communion, a major thrust of Catholic Reformation piety. Michelle Fontaine’s essay examines the challenges faced by a confraternity in Modena that had to deal with Italy’s largest underground Protestant community outside Lucca. Of the essays on Italy, Fontaine’s best illustrates the interplay of Catholic Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Nicholas Terpstra’s essay, “Confraternities and Public Charity: Modes of Civic Welfare in Early Modern Italy” concludes the Italian section and examines how the confraternities in several cities from Florence to the Po valley tried to help people in need.

The section on France opens with a tour of the horizon—Andrew Barnes reflects on how confraternities changed in the 150 years between the Wars of Religion and the Enlightenment. Ann Ramsey and Christopher Stocker examine two Parisian confraternities that were both militantly Catholic at the high point of the French Wars of Religion. Their subjects are very similar; their methodologies are very different. The last essay on France is by Susan Dinan, who shows how two wily saints, Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, used a confraternity framework that evolved into the Daughters of Charity to evade successfully the decrees of Trent against active religious orders for women. It is worth noting that Trent figures
more prominently in this essay than in any other; however, the story is not one of blind compliance but of evasion.

The volume presents two essays on Spain. In the first, Allyson Poska explores the decidedly mixed success of churchmen who tried to reform confraternities at Ourense. The volume concludes with Maureen Flynn’s “Baroque Piety and Spanish Confraternities,” which touches on a wider range of topics than any other in this collection and therefore provides a fitting conclusion.
Acknowledgments

More than three years ago Robert V. Schnucker urged me to edit a volume for the Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies series dealing with the Catholic Reformation. Such a volume, Bob noted, would complement recent volumes in this series on the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations. I declined the invitation because of work on other projects and because such a volume would lack focus. Catholic Reformation research has grown so much over the last three decades that a volume which mixed together essays on the council of Trent, the new religious orders, missionary work, the second scholasticism, and half a dozen other topics would lack coherence.

But Schnucker is nothing if not persistent, and it is not easy to turn down someone who has contributed so much to sixteenth century studies. Recent meetings of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference have featured a growing number of sessions and papers dealing with confraternities, especially by younger scholars, so that a volume presenting their research would serve both them and early modern studies. Since my own research has centered on Jesuits and Calvinist theologians, I asked Michael Maher, S.J., who was residing at Marquette University and writing a dissertation for the University of Minnesota on the Jesuit congregations at Rome, to serve as coeditor. This volume has had the unfailing encouragement and help of two established confraternity scholars, Konrad Eisenbichler and Nicholas Terpstra. Without their help this project would have been stillborn. Also valuable was the advice of W. Fred Graham, emeritus of Michigan State University, and of Albert Rivero and Carla Hay, my colleagues at Marquette, about the toils and travails of editors. My research assistant, Joseph Persivale, contributed his considerable computer skills.
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Christopher F. Black is a senior lecturer in modern history at the University of Glasgow. His early research on Perugia in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and on the notorious Baglioni family and power struggles within the Papal State, led to a number of influential articles. He is the author of a major study of confraternities throughout Italy, Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century (1989; rev. Italian translation, Le Confraternite Italiane del Cinquecento, 1992). He is currently completing A Social History of Early Modern Italy.

Susan E. Dinan recently completed her doctorate at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where she wrote a dissertation under the guidance of Professor Robert M. Kingdon. Her dissertation examines the Daughters of Charity in seventeenth-century France and she has given conference presentations based upon this research.

John Patrick Donnelly, S.J., professor of history at Marquette University, is a past president of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference and of the Society for Reformation Research. His work has centered on Jesuits and on Calvinist theologians such as Peter Martyr Vermigli and Girolamo Zanchi. He has edited and translated works by Vermigli, Savonarola, Melanchthon, More, and Bellarmine. He is currently writing a biography of Antonio Possevino.

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Christopher W. Stocker is associate professor of history at the University of British Columbia. He has written articles on the Parlement of Paris and royal officialdom in France, and on the religious affiliation and political activities of the civic elite in Orleans during the French Wars of Religion, the subject of his current research.

Nicholas Terpstra is associate professor of history at the University of Toronto, and president of the Society for Confraternity Studies. His research into confraternities in early modern Italy has resulted in a number of articles and a monograph, *Lay Confraternities and Civic Religion in Renaissance Bologna* (1995), which was awarded the 1995 Marraro Prize of the Society for Italian Historical Studies. He is editor of *Confraternities and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*. He has been a fellow at the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tratti), and is currently conducting research on confraternities, orphanages, and conservatories in sixteenth-century Bologna and Florence.
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Notes: Confraternities are sorted under their individual names; see also “fraternities,” religious orders,” and entries beginning with “Compagnia” on “Congregation”; popes are sorted under “popes.” Saints are sorted by personal name, e.g. Vincent de Paul

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