

**Papacy, Religious Orders, and International Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.** Ed. Massimo Carlo Giannini.

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Massimo Carlo Giannini lays out the problem this book intends to address in his introduction. The study of Catholic religious orders has been fraught with problems of interpretation and analysis. Scholars from Hubert Fedin forward have portrayed the new orders of the early modern period as “principle vehicles for the diffusion of the post-Tridentine Church mandates (11). In this reading, the monastic and mendicant orders function as examples of decadence, while those such as the Jesuits function as the more-or-less passive instruments of papal policy and the renewal of the Church. Giannini derides these piecemeal approaches as well as the assumption that either the new or the old orders were monolithic. Instead he stresses the religious orders dual and often contradictory aspiration to carry out a universalistic mission while simultaneously dealing with conflicting desires on the part of popes and local powers—as well as the individual missions of the leaders of the orders. According to this approach, the political, social, and religious roles of the Catholic orders in the early modern period can only be understood as a tug of war between interpretation of papal directives in light of local concerns and the agendas of individual members of the orders. After reading the essays contained in this volume it is hard to dispute that understanding.

The geographic areas under consideration in these essays are quite broad. The studies appear to be ordered with a general west to east framework in mind, with the first essay in the volume dealing with “The Franciscans of Mexico” and the last focusing on “Bosnian Franciscans between Roman Centralisation and Balkan Confessionalisation”. Throughout the volume one may find consistent memes: while Catholic orders never dominate politics in any of the areas (in spite of claims made to the contrary against the Jesuits), they often affect and are always affected by political concerns; furthermore, what many have mistakenly seen as decadence in the ranks of the traditional religious orders are instead variations in the way members of these orders understood and expressed their religious commitments in light of local influences and conditions. Reading this volume makes it clear that in order to understand religious orders in the early modern period one must contextualize their history—and in so doing, one will gain an enhanced understanding of the cultural and political history of the period.

For example, Benoist Pierre’s contribution, “Religious, the Pope, and the Kings of France during the Wars of Religion,” offers a number of pleasant surprises. In Pierre’s argument, Henry III (r. 1574-89) of France was a much more astute and intelligent leader than he is often portrayed as being. During the king’s reign the concept of a mystical kingship in which the king’s role is to act as the spiritual guide of his kingdom emerged, as seen in Edmond Auger’s 1584 *Metanoologie* (36-37). This was also a time in which there was an explosive growth of penitential brotherhoods, driven by the unsettled nature of a nation riven by religious war. King Henry III placed a number of these brotherhoods under royal protection in hopes of using this “network of penitents to ward off bad luck” while channeling “to his own advantage the spontaneous penitential fervor that gripped the kingdom” (37). This was the beginning of a period of domestication of these religious extremists, a policy that Henry IV (1589-1610) advanced. The result was an alliance allowing the building of a mystical monarchy that balanced the religious extremism of the penitential brotherhoods against that of the Catholic League.

An even better example of the importance of contextualizing any study of the religious orders of the early modern period is found in Antal Molnar’s essay on Bosnian Franciscans between “Roman Centralisation and Balkan Confessionalism”. In a little more than eighteen pages he demonstrates that not only is it impossible to understand the development of national identities in the Balkans without understanding the confessionalization of the region, but it is also impossible to understand how religious identity developed in the Balkans without considering the geography and the history of the region. In early modern Bosnia we find “Catholics, with their roots in the Middle Ages, the Orthodox, settling after the Ottoman invasion, and the Muslims, emerging with Islamisation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (211). That part of the story is well enough known, but what is far less well known and perhaps more interesting is the way Bosnian Catholics developed during this period. Theological views and daily practices “suffered severe distortions” when compared to mainstream Catholicism (212). This was in part due to separatist tendencies of the Bosnian religious orders and in part due to their geographic positioning. The Bosnian Church existed within an “essentially rustic” society, members of which maintained folk practices often misunderstood by outside observers (214). The result was a church that developed a “slightly dualistic heresy” that proved resistant to Roman reform (215). After the fall of the Bosnian kingdom to the Ottoman Turks in 1463, these “distorted” theological views and daily activities continued to diverge from mainstream Catholicism, though there is scant evidence of programmatic heretical intent.

Needless to say, not every chapter of this volume is equally strong. For example, Boris Jeanne’s “The Franciscans of Mexico. Tracing Tensions between Rome and Madrid in the *provincial del Santo Evangelio* (1454-1622)” provides little in the way of analysis. He does suggest “an analytical framework of three distinct periods” for understanding the history of the Franciscans in Mexico between 1454 to 1622, but the value of this framework is not altogether clear, nor is it obvious why or how one might apply it to any broader understanding of the religious orders in early modern Mexico. However, the reason why this chapter stands out for its weakness is because of the strength of the other essays in the volume. Giannini has done an admirable job of assembling a fine body of scholars who clearly demonstrate the complex positioning of religious orders in early modern Europe.

