

Maria Crăciun and Elaine Fulton, eds. *Communities of Devotion: Religious Orders and Society in East Central Europe, 1450–1800*.

Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011. xvii + 284 pp. \$124.95. ISBN: 978–0–7546–6312–6.

This welcome collection of essays seeks to bridge the later Middle Ages and early modern Europe as a whole by examining “the role played by religious orders in the formation and implementation of reforms within the Church, particularly in the context of Catholic renewal” (2). The focus is upon a region, somewhat oddly defined by the editors as east central Europe, “taking in Hungary, Transylvania, Austria and Bohemia” (4). The contributions to this volume enrich our knowledge of the period in this region, complementing the growing scholarly literature available to an Anglophone audience, important elements of which have been provided by Maria Crăciun herself.

Following a helpful introduction by the editors, nine chapters examine various aspects of the book’s topic. The first three deal with the impact of various orders upon lay society prior to the mid-sixteenth century. Using textual and iconographic evidence, Crăciun looks at Eucharistic and Marian piety among the Saxon towns of Transylvania. She argues convincingly that Franciscan and Dominican influences were particularly important in shaping lay piety. Marie-Madeleine de Cevin focuses on Hungary and analyzes the sermons of two Franciscans. While she finds their impact significant in some ways, she concludes — somewhat at variance with Crăciun’s conclusions — that lay religion, containing many popular elements, was resistant to the influence of the friars. Carmen Florea, however, in her chapter on charity and devotion in three Transylvanian towns, makes a strong case for the success of mendicant, especially Dominican, efforts.

The following four chapters are devoted to elements of conflict and reform in the sixteenth century. Gabriella Erdélyi examines the fate of a convent in Western Hungary and efforts to reform it. In this process the local landlord and the laity took an active, and sometime controversial, role. Erdélyi suggests that this reflected “a telling moment in the process of the laicization of religion in this region” (152). Rona Johnston Gordon’s study of jurisdictional disputes between princely and episcopal authority over the reform and control of monasteries in Lower Austria in the late sixteenth century effectively analyzes the tensions between varying approaches to Catholic reform in this period and place. She shows that the initiative of the regular clergy had, in significant ways, been superseded by the power and ambitions of bishops and lay rulers. The next two chapters of this book deal with the role of the Jesuits in the region. Elaine Fulton demonstrates how this new and influential order was able to

establish its influence in Vienna. She focuses upon the order's relations with a powerful and influential layman, Georg Eder, in the second half of the sixteenth century. Explaining Jesuit failure, in this case in its mission to Cluj in the 1580s, is the topic of Christine Peters, who is particularly good at teasing out both the weaknesses and the strengths of the order's efforts to revive and spread Catholic practice in Transylvania.

The last two chapters of this book deal with chronologically later material. Martin Elbel looks at pilgrimage in the Bohemian Franciscan province. His insights into the development of the *Via Crucis* practice nicely complement Howard Louthan's recent broader treatment of pilgrimage in his *Converting Bohemia* (2009). Greta-Monica Miron focuses on the monks of the Basilean Order in a Transylvanian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) diocese in the eighteenth century. Though their activity was short lived, she shows that the educational activity of the monks among the laity left a lasting imprint upon the Uniate Church in this region of the Habsburg Empire. This book concludes with a brief epilogue by Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, whose previous contributions to our understanding of Catholic renewal are considerable.

For the most part the contributions to this volume are first-rate pieces of scholarship. Some represent truly fresh approaches and insights. Others move more deeply into subjects that have already been explored. But there is one significant weakness to this book. For a volume that purports to treat the region of "east central Europe," a major omission in coverage is Poland and Poland-Lithuania in these centuries. Even in the editors' introduction, except for a few passing references, there is no substantial attention paid to this part of the region. Thus, valuable as this book is, it could have done more.

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