



## Dierksmeier, Laura. Charity for and by the Poor. Franciscan-Indigenous Confraternities 1527–1700

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vibrant, and demographically burgeoning cities of the sixteenth century. The articles examined above help refine our understanding of northern European trade and religious associations by presenting the special case of guilds and confraternities in Antwerp and arguing for their unique nature and developments.

It is unfortunate, however, that such an important book should suffer from three serious problems. The first two are scholarly in nature: one is the lack of an index, which makes it impossible to locate specific individuals, associations, guilds, or confraternities in the book; the other is the lack of a bibliography of cited texts at the end of each article. These two lacunae seem inconceivable in today's scholarly world, so one is left to wonder what could have prompted such unfortunate omissions. The third problem is physical: the font size in the book is so small that it makes reading the text a burden, not a pleasure. The font size of the footnotes, in particular is so small that it is next to impossible to read them; I had to use a magnifying lens to supplement my reading glasses in order to read the notes. I asked a young post-doc (ca. 32 years old) if she could read the footnotes and she, too, could not. My recommendation to colleagues wishing to read the book is to buy the PDF version and increase the screen view as necessary in order to be able to read text and footnotes without effort.

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**Dierksmeier, Laura. *Charity for and by the Poor. Franciscan-Indigenous Confraternities 1527–1700*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press / Academy of American Franciscan History, 2020. Pp. xvi, 222 + 13 ill., 6 tables. ISBN 978-0-8061-6628-5 (hardcover) US\$55.**

In *Charity for and by the Poor* Laura Dierksmeier investigates the role of post-reformation Franciscans in the rise of the networks of confraternities and other charitable organizations in early modern Mexico. Dierksmeier shows how the Franciscan missionaries established and promoted a charity system for and by the indigenous peoples of Mexico in the early colonial period. The creation of hospitals, orphan care, releasing debt prisoners and lending money to the poor could be considered a precursor to the modern-day welfare system. Dierksmeier seeks to investigate the uniqueness of indigenous confraternities and their hybrid practices and argues that the only way to understand the significance of these institutions is to study them in the context of their basic theological principles.

Dierksmeier's study offers an insightful view into the indigenous confraternities that differs from much of the scholarship available on Latin

American and European sodalities. Dierksmeier also points out that the early colonial period is important in understanding the complex nature of Mexican confraternities, which makes her investigation an important addition in confraternity historiography. Dierksmeier's study shows that the function of confraternities differed for the indigenous and Spanish population of Mexico. She states that through these brotherhoods, the subjugated indigenous people gained spiritual authority and autonomy. Analyzing confraternity record books, legal documents, wills, correspondences, and parish records, Dierksmeier states that confraternities can be best studied within the religious framework that established them.

The book consists of a short but informative introduction, a conclusion and six chapters with a concise summary at the end of each chapter. Chapter 1, *The Context of Confraternal Charity*, is mainly a historiographical analysis that places Mexican confraternities within their historical context. Chapter 2, *Franciscan Missionary Strategies*, explores how the nature of the order that establishes a confraternity influences its operations. For example, the Franciscan order promotes humility, brotherhood, and charity so its friars encouraged confraternity members to see each other and the others in society as *cofrades* that is, as brothers and sisters in Christ despite the differences in colour, race, status, and class. Chapter 3, *Confraternity Aims, Self-Governance, and Operation*, deals with the post-Trent restrictions and laws that sought to control lay confraternities and the push-back they faced from the indigenous people. Chapter 4, *Religious Autonomy*, analyzes court documents and lawsuits and concludes that despite the many attempts by Church authorities to control local confraternities, indigenous confraternities fought back and managed to maintain autonomy over their religious spaces and finances. While popular assumption is that colonial society eradicated indigenous customs, Dierksmeier argues that the existence of hybrid practices and local religions in confraternities dismantles those beliefs. Chapter 5, *Confraternal Hospital Care*, and chapter 6, *Confrades and the Moral Economy* deal with the various forms of charitable works offered by local confraternities.

Dierksmeier's book is an important addition to confraternity studies. Scholars will find this study useful because it explores confraternity activities in a region that has yet to be fully investigated. It explores the charitable works offered through different types of confraternities that were open to both men and women as well as local populations regardless of colour, race, or status. The book offers an insight into understanding of how lay brotherhoods were formed in colonial Mexico. It shows how local indigenous cultures influenced the practices and rituals performed by these institutions. Perhaps its most important contribution is its investigation of the hybrid practices that were a mixture of local customs and Catholic rituals and gave rise to a new kind of Christianity that was not

orthodox but it was not unorthodox either. These hybrid practices formed a unique type of religiosity, which Dierksmeier calls “Nahua Christianity,” that was specific to the region. Dierksmeier’s study is thus a very valuable contribution to scholarship on Latin America, colonial, and indigenous histories.

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**Folkerts, Suzan (ed.) *Religious Connectivity in Urban Communities (1400–1550). Reading, Worshipping, and Connecting through the Continuum of Sacred and Secular*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2021. Pp. 285 + 14 ill., 5 tables. ISBN 978-2-503-59081-3 (hardcover) €80.**

Developed from a 2015 conference at the University of Groningen, convened to explore religious connectivity during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Suzan Folkerts’ edited volume seeks to examine how the titular concept evolved and operated in late medieval municipalities and how “producers and consumers” (12) of religious material objects and rites were socially and professionally interrelated.

The introductory chapter, penned by the editor, explains that the present perception of connectivity extends beyond the technological dictionary definition of the word and is more concerned with the “mechanisms” (15) of the subject area being investigated, rather than its theory. Accordingly, the essays that make up this edited collection employ connectivity “as a methodological tool to analyse and describe human relations and human communications” (16) within the complicated organism that was the medieval world. Furthermore, this methodological approach is relatively free from disciplinary boundaries. For instance, the cultural, literary and social historians who contributed to this book were given the same procedural remit as the archaeologist and the confraternity scholars: to demonstrate “cultures of shared piety and interactions between people, texts and religious practices” (17) by investigating the networks, energy, and impetuses that drove the complicated wheels and gears that powered medieval urban society. Similarly, the artificial boundaries between the sacred and the secular worlds are abandoned and viewed, not as separate entities, but as a “continuum” (12) that encouraged intricate community interrelations to flourish.

Refreshingly, the organisation of the volume also reflects the lack of disciplinary and conceptual boundaries as, between the traditional introductory chapters and the two indexes denoting the end of the volume, the ten essays that form the main research corpus of the book are