

Patrick J. O'Banion

The Sacrament of Penance and Religious Life in Golden Age Spain. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012. Pp. 233. Hb, \$69.95.

Rather than taking a microhistorical approach or focusing on a specific region during a relatively short time period to analyze the sacrament of penance in early modern Spain, Patrick J. O'Banion employs a different method. He argues that confession became a significant sacrament in Spain's imperial era between 1500 and 1700; however, both participants in this sacrament and ecclesiastics who administered it approached it with their own goals. For example, secular clergy wanted their parishioners to confess to them in order to better know their parishioners' spiritual status and ensure that they were fulfilling their Easter duties. Regular clergy also offered the sacrament of penance and some confessants preferred the relative anonymity of such a confessional relationship. Rather than approaching the laity as a broad, homogenous category, O'Banion's work offers a compelling and subtle analysis of the manner in which factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity influenced confessional experience. O'Banion also demonstrates that laypeople chose confessors based on their own criteria. Whereas some wanted to confess to a busy parish priest to fulfill their obligations, others sought more time-intensive spiritual direction in the confessional. In short, O'Banion offers an excellent overview of the practice of the sacrament of penance in early modern Spain and his argument becomes more convincing due to the book's broad temporal and geographical approach. As the author explains, he chose to end the study in 1700 due to fewer surviving inquisitorial records after this date.

The introduction engages with a variety of sources, including the work of Michel Foucault, Matthew Senior, and Thomas Tentler, as well as architectural elements such as the development of the confessional box, to emphasize the importance of the agency of the laity in the confessional process. In addition, O'Banion thoughtfully reflects on the challenges posed by the sources he employs—*procesos* (transcriptions of trials, generally from the Inquisition), confessional manuals, and prescriptive literature—and also explains the manner in which he negotiates these difficulties. Chapter one considers the best practices of the early modern Spanish confessor as defined by canon law and confessional manuals, although O'Banion includes other evidence that indicates how these ideals were not always met. Chapter two examines the behavior of laypeople in the confessional and the manner in which they reacted to the continuum of clerical approaches they could encounter there. O'Banion's research offers several instances of confessors who violated the seal of the confessional, repeated information they learned there to others, and impacted the community. Not only were confessants motivated by the requirement to make

their yearly confession at Easter, but they were also interested in the possibility of earning indulgences.

The requirement for Easter confession and the expanding role of the regular clergy in confessional practice are studied in chapter three. In chapter four, O'Banion outlines the significant role that the *bula de la cruzada* and other indulgences played in confessional practice and royal finances. Finally, chapters five and six analyze the impact of class, gender, and the crucial question of whether one descended from Muslim or Jewish ancestors, on the layperson's experience in the confessional. In chapter five, O'Banion notes that the often-repeated idea that women went to confession more frequently than men "is difficult to demonstrate quantitatively" (129), but this portion of the book does offer anecdotal evidence that this was the case. Yet, as O'Banion signals, confessional manuals offered relatively little advice on confessing female penitents. This chapter also details the challenges the clergy faced in confessing prostitutes since this profession was legal and regulated by the crown in this time period, even though the sexual behavior of prostitutes was considered immoral. In terms of chapter six, considering the widespread acceptance of the highly negative connotations of the term *marrano*, I was surprised that O'Banion employed it without discussing its context.

On several occasions, after reading tantalizing translations or summaries of confessional transactions, I eagerly turned to the footnotes to consult the original Spanish-language text, only to find that it was not included. Whether the press's word limit or the author's choice caused these omissions, I found them unfortunate. On the copyediting front, in chapter five after page 137 a number of the references in the footnotes do not coincide with the items cited in the text. The book also contains a few errors in its use of accent marks in Spanish. Admittedly, these may stem from the press rather than the author. In any case, these are relatively minor quibbles with a fine study. Some readers of O'Banion's book may feel that its broad approach leaves them wanting additional information about topics of particular interest to them: I wanted to know more about the strategies women employed to deal with soliciting confessors and how they found the wherewithal to do so in a patriarchal society, both of which topics are mentioned in chapter five. Such sacrifices, however, are inevitable when taking a panoramic approach. I very much hope that Dr. O'Banion plans to develop some of these issues in his future research: I look forward to reading the results.

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