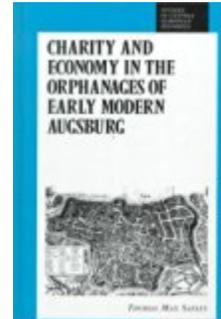


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Thomas Max Safley. *Charity and Economy in the Orphanages of Early Modern Augsburg*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996. xiii + 350 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-03983-4.

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Readers of H-German have had the benefit over the last year or two from Thomas Max Safley's insights concerning early modern central European societies.[1] This fact-filled and provocative book is the tenth volume in the series *Studies in Central European Histories* edited by Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and Roger Chickering. The series has included works by the editors themselves as well as English translations of German scholarship by Peter Blickle and Otto Buesch. Recent volumes by Miriam Usher Chrisman, John Theibault, and Peter G. Wallace have already been reviewed in this discussion group.[2] The book presently under review follows Safley's 1984 treatise *Let No Man Put Asunder: The Control of Marriage in the German Southwest: A Comparative Study 1550-1600*. In the new work, the first volume of a multi-part project analyzing archival information on orphans, Safley again utilizes a comparative method, this time while balancing the institutional developments of the Catholic and Lutheran city orphanages which were established in Augsburg following the end of the Thirty Years' War. This approach is in some ways similar to his method in the earlier book, where he compared divorce and marriage proceedings in various Catholic and Protestant jurisdictions.

This new work, Safley says in his preface, is the result of a two-year stay in Augsburg supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and sponsored by Wolfgang Reinhard. While there, Safley analyzed sources found in the *Stadtsarchiv*, together with material from Munich's *Bayrisches Hauptstaatsarchiv*. In Augsburg, the manuscript sources consulted were listed under *Reichsstadt Akten* in three categories: *Almosenamt*, *Evangelisches Wesensarchiv*, and *Katholisches Wesensarchiv*. Safley repeatedly points out that the present volume is

only one of the publications planned as the result of this research project; another volume called *Children on the Edge: Expectation and Experience Among the Orphans of Early Modern Augsburg*, a prosopographical study of six thousand Augsburg orphans between 1572 and 1806, is also in the works. Apparently this industrious scholar of early modern central European social history is undertaking still another project, based on an autobiography of a merchant.

Safley uses his archival evidence to challenge a series of important theories and theses concerning the social, religious, and economic histories of Europe. These include Gerhard Oestreich's theories of *Sozialdisziplinierung* and Michel Foucault's *grande renfermement*, ideas concerning "confessionalization," Max Weber's assertions concerning the relationship between religion and capitalism (together with the ideas of others about the roots of European capitalism), theories about the role of early modern poor relief, and even literary portrayals of the dreary life of the institutionalized orphan. He does this through a painstaking analysis of the administrative records of the Augsburg orphanages—records which show the common-sense empiricism of the orphanage administrators. These men's records show them feeling their way through daily choices in a particular historical and social context. As Safley puts it, his book "is a study of the actual relief of poverty, of piecemeal empirical choices rather than sweeping heuristic metaphors" (p. 13).

Tied to this criticism of metaphor is his specific counter to Oestreich and Foucault as well in an introductory section titled "The Perspective of History and the Limits of Theory" (pp. 7-11). There, Safley states,

“[s]weeping metaphors, such as communalization or social discipline and great enclosure, may characterize the general process and intention of early modern poor relief, but they fail to capture the mundane choices and transactions that amounted to their realization” (p. 7). This is not to say that his book is not concerned with such issues, particularly those tied to the concept of discipline: a review of the index shows twenty-five references to various types of discipline, including “prophylactic quality of,” and “punishments” (p. 343). It is to say that Safley prefers a focused concentration on the mundane.

Safley sees the placement of orphans in the Augsburg workforce after their years-long experience of the structured world of the orphanage, with its fixed menus and daily routines, as a significant influence on the labor markets and methods of Augsburg’s workers. As Safley argues, “[f]ar from segregating the poor within walls, they [the orphanages] prepared orphan children for a life of labor...they helped to create a massive system of social and economic discipline, extending throughout the entire city...” (p. 273). While “scholars,” Safley relates, “usually associate Foucault’s great enclosure of the poor during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century with a greater desire for security and discipline....[e]qually compelling, however, was the economy of enclosure” (p. 166). The harassed administrators of the orphanages, constantly looking to save money, discovered over time that the large-scale care of the children was simply more cost effective. These administrators, like their charges, were well on the way to learning the lessons that would result in modern capitalism.

Scholars of the “confessionalization” of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century central Europe, the establishment of separate religion-based Christian communities during and after the “Reformation” and its dark-haired twin the “Counter-Reformation,” may be particularly interested to read Safley’s insightful discussion of the relationship between doctrinal (or confessional or theological) issues and mundane ones. After 1648, Augsburg was divided legally into two separate communities, one Roman Catholic and the other Lutheran. The consequences of this for the orphanages reveal various factors affecting religious affiliation and support. Safley argues persuasively that “confessionalization cannot be reduced to a matter of confession. Economic and social disparities and aspirations played a considerable role” (p. 87). Because Catholics and Lutherans did not buy from each other, and Lutherans and Catholics had access to differing resources (the Catholics were tied more to the rural aristocracy and religious houses outside of the city, while Lutherans

controlled more resources connected to trade and wealth within the city), support for the two orphanages followed significantly different patterns, patterns not necessarily related to “confessional” issues narrowly defined.

Ruminations on related topics inevitably bring Safley into contact with the infamous and oft-cited ideas of Max Weber on topics connected to the relationship between Christian theologies and early modern capitalism. To his credit, Safley does not shy away from addressing, directly before the end of his concluding chapter, “Some Thoughts on Weber, Charity, Parity, and Capital” (pp. 285-7). He points out that the administrators of both the Catholic and the Lutheran orphanages developed and continued practices which helped to maximize their institutions’ capital and to promote “diligence, asceticism, and industry”—traits which Safley wrote summarized Weber’s concept of “bourgeois rationality” (p. 286). This appears to Safley, after his painstaking analysis of decades of administrative documents, to have had less to do with religious precepts, and more to do with desires for administrative efficiency, desires which motivated Roman Catholics and Lutherans alike.

This book has much to recommend it. Its scope goes far beyond the rather narrow implications of its title. There are some rather minor problems, and ultimately its argument raises a rather broader one. The nineteen tables which the author provides are not effectively integrated into the text. At times it seems that they are adduced only to show the positive effects of some type of software package which facilitates the creation of bar graphs. The repeated references to the second volume on this subject read at times like the conclusion to an old *Batman* episode, imploring the audience to stay tuned. (See for example p. 137, note 89, pp. 234, 285). Chapter Five, “Provisioning Augsburg: Buying and Selling Commodities in an Early Modern City,” relies heavily on references to the works of Bernd Roeck, a historian to whom reference is also made in Chapter Two. Given the apparent importance of this man’s work (the notes of this chapter refer constantly to him) one might have expected to hear more about his methods, sources, and so on. In the index, reference is made to the citations in the first chapter, but not to those in the fifth.

Perhaps more significantly, Safley’s critique of wide, sweeping metaphors and grand theories—metaphors and theories which do not hold up when faced with detailed, local analysis of administrative documents—brings to the fore the types of conclusions to be drawn from the types of evidence presented. Is it all that surprising ultimately

that a detailed analysis of the daily records of bureaucrats reveal an interest in mundane details of administration? The dialogue between grand theory and administrative evidence is what produces the tension which makes this book important. It does not lead to the conclusion that a reliance on fact-piling will ultimately produce truth.

Notes

[1]. See his review of Juergen Schlumbohm's 1994 *Central European History* article "The Land-Family Bond in Peasant Practice and in Middle-Class Ideology" which appeared on H-German on January 20, 1996 (<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~german/articles/safley1.html>) and his review of John Theibault's *German Villages in Crisis: Rural Life in Hesse Kassel and the Thirty Years' War, 1580-1720* reviewed on

H-German on October 11, 1996 (<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~german/books/reviews/safley1.html>).

[2]. Miriam Usher Chrisman, *Conflicting Visions of Reform: German Lay Propaganda Pamphlets, 1519-1530*, reviewed by Joel Harrington, October 11, 1996 (<http://h-net2.msu.edu/~german/books/reviews/harrington1.html>); Wallace, *Communities and Conflict in Early Modern Colmar: 1575-1730*, reviewed by William C. Schrader, November 22, 1996 (<http://hnet2.msu.edu/~german/books/reviews/schrader1.html>).

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