Introduction

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The nine articles which appear in this special edition of *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* were originally presented at the international conference, "Ritual and Recreation in Renaissance Confraternities," held at Victoria College in the University of Toronto, April 1989. The conference was organized by The Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium and was sponsored in part by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to mention that this publication is a product of the close relationship between the Colloquium, the CRRS and the journal, and that it celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of all three institutions.

The conference was inspired by a session devoted to Italian confraternity studies at the 22nd International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 1987. At that time it was apparent that there was a real need for a forum in which specialists from different backgrounds could share information and insights on confraternities. Konrad Eisenbichler and I organized the Toronto conference, reportedly the first of its kind in North America, in order to satisfy the immediate need for the exchange of ideas by providing the setting for an international and interdisciplinary meeting.

The papers which have been selected for this issue of *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* demonstrate the richness of this area of research and the broad appeal of its subject matter. From recent research it has become well-known that the laity commonly worked together, forming confraternities or comparable organizations which played a vital role in Renaissance society. The papers presented here demonstrate the geographical breadth of the field: Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish confraternities are considered. Moreover, they illustrate the variety in structure and activities of Renaissance confraternities. The reader is given concrete examples of their administrative structure, their techniques for maintaining order within the membership, and their often complex relationship to civic and ecclesiastical authority. Further, the involvement of

the confraternities with the arts is documented in studies of their dramatic, artistic and musical activities.

The individual articles reveal fascinating insights into particular aspects of confraternities in the Renaissance. Yet the strength of this special issue lies in the combined effect of the articles for, together, they present a powerful image of the confraternity as an important mechanism for mutual support and the achievement of common goals within Renaissance society.

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