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Introduction

Recent studies throughout much of Europe have led to what one historian has described as 'a quiet revolution' in the history of poor people and poor relief.[1] Earlier generations developed and debated the distinctions between Catholic and Protestant forms of charity, crediting Protestantism with ushering in a new form of rational, discriminating relief, directed by secular authorities, while relief in Catholic countries was seen as disorganized and haphazard, controlled by an over-indulgent church that sought to preserve a class of paupers so the rich would have ample opportunity to exercise their charitable obligations.[2] Having jettisoned the old belief that almsgiving and other good works could assure salvation to those who performed them, it was argued that Protestantism was able to concern itself with the long-term benefit of the recipients of relief and society in general by encouraging the poor, through education and employment, to be self-reliant and industrious, whereas the practice of indiscriminate charity, thought to characterize relief in Catholic societies, had the opposite effect of encouraging idleness and dependence, thus destroying the will or the need to work and demoralizing the recipients.[3]

Many of these familiar and pervasive distinctions have been displaced. In a recent study of Venice, Brian Pullan has demonstrated that this Catholic city pursued welfare policies that were efficient and highly discriminating, especially against public beggars, and were directed toward long-term social improvement by providing the poor with education and opportunities to work.[4] In two other areas of Europe, the similarities between the Aumône-Général founded in the much-studied Catholic city of Lyons and the General Hospital founded in Protestant Geneva are striking. Both institutions were created to improve welfare services by centralizing and coordinating available resources, both were controlled by secular authorities

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(though Calvin did absorb the Geneva hospital staff into his clerical establishment), public begging was prohibited in both cities, and relief was limited to deserving natives with transients given but temporary assistance.[5] Nor did Protestant societies possess a monopoly on schemes to confine and employ the poor and the idle: in the sixteenth century beggars' hospitals were founded in many Italian cities, including Rome, and they came into full flower in the seventeenth century when Hôpitaux-Généraux were founded in many French cities.[6] It appears that wandering beggars and vagabonds were viewed with fear and condemnation in both Catholic and Protestant communities.[7] Such similarities have precipitated more objective, sophisticated analyses to establish the distinctions between Catholic and Protestant welfare and charity.[8]

Spain has played little part in this 'quiet revolution'. What has received some attention is Spain's rich sixteenth-century literary tradition, which begins with the influential 1526 treatise of the Spanish exile, Juan Luis Vives, followed by the 1545 debate between Juan de Robles and Domingo de Soto, and ending with the late sixteenth-century schemes of Miguel Giginta and Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, both of whom supported the foundation of special institutions for beggars.[9] Despite the fact that four of these five men supported reforms designed to eliminate or control public begging, and that the latter two, lesser-known individuals have been the subject of recent studies, the Spaniard whose name seems to have achieved European fame is that of Domingo de Soto, the Dominican theologian who defended the right of all needy persons to beg wherever they chose.

The fame of Domingo de Soto and the lack of knowledge about what actually went on in Spain has led historians to assume that the Iberian peninsula was untouched by the events, reforms and ideas that affected much of western Europe in the late sixteenth century, an assumption that is evident in two recent surveys of European poor relief. J.-P. Gutton, for instance, has concluded that of all the countries in western Europe, only the Iberian peninsula 'perhaps escaped' the development of ideas condemning idleness and countenancing labour;[10] and C. Lis and H. Soly, who attempt to explain poverty in terms of an exploitative economic system, have concluded that because Spain lacked industrial centres of significance the need for a disciplined, controlled labour force (one of the three pre-

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requisites the authors posit as causative factors for welfare reforms) was absent.[11]

The primary purpose of this book is to explore what happened, both in theory and in practice, in sixteenth-century Spain concerning the poor and their relief and to determine if Spain did indeed remain aloof from the reforms and ideas current in other parts of western Europe. To achieve this goal, the book has been divided into two parts, the first dealing with what might be best described as national issues. These include the numerous treatises written about relieving the poor, the formulation of crown policy, the implementation of the Tridentine hospital decrees, and the growth of the new hospital orders. If the crown usually determined policy, it was translated into action on a local level and Part II is devoted to the city of Toledo. As the see of the Spanish primate; a commercial, manufacturing, and intellectual centre; and one of the largest and wealthiest cities of sixteenth-century Castile, Toledo seems an ideal place to observe poverty and welfare. This second part begins with a discussion of the city's population from 1528 to 1625 and an analysis of the distribution of wealth and poverty in the city parishes in 1561; the remainder deals with the various methods by which the city attempted to relieve the poor, the care offered by two of the city's numerous charitable institutions, a description of recipients of relief, and tentative conclusions concerning the deteriorating living conditions of the city's poorer inhabitants.

That the poor of sixteenth-century Castile were numerous is affirmed by voluminous testimonies of contemporary observers. They were numerous in terms of the accepted pyramid structure of society, which ordained that the vast majority at the bottom of the pyramid laboured long hours for low pay; they became more numerous as a result of population expansion; and, as a result of migration to the cities and towns, they became more concentrated and more visible.

For the subsistence economy of sixteenth-century Castile, increasing population meant more mouths to feed and it also meant more labour that might be productively employed. For much of the century many areas in Castile responded positively to this challenge. In some cities, commerce and the cloth industry prospered while in the countryside more land was brought into cultivation and farm labourers could supplement their meager income by performing some operation for the cloth industry.[12] Outbreaks of sickness and famine

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were, of course, common occurrences throughout the period but by the early sixteenth century most Castilian cities had attempted to mitigate the ravages of famine by establishing a grain reserve that was sold off at cheap prices when bread was scarce and expensive.

If expansion and prosperity characterized some areas of Castile in the first half of the sixteenth century, by the 1570s this was no longer the case. To explain this change in Segovia the Malthusian dilemma of too many people pressing upon inadequate resources has been suggested.[13] This explanation might also hold true for Toledo, where, in addition to finding grain to feed its own population, the city was confronted by competition for grain by the nearby expanding city of Madrid. In this same decade the city experienced a long depression caused by the crown's suspension of payments, an enormous increase in taxation that struck particularly hard at the cloth industries, and an outbreak of sickness that was one of the worst of the sixteenth century. Signs of trouble are obvious in the 1570s, but it was not until the first two decades of the seventeenth century that the economy of Toledo virtually collapsed.

And how did all these changes affect the inarticulate, long-suffering poor? The poor of early modern Europe were lucky if they managed to get adequate food on a regular basis, not to mention shelter and clothing. For those who laboured in the fields and for the unskilled and semi-skilled workers of the urban areas the struggle to earn enough money to meet expenses was continual and frequently unsuccessful. Even the better-off skilled labourers, retailers and peasants could see their reserves wiped out by one of the unending disasters that struck sixteenth-century society. It could be a work stoppage caused by a lack of raw materials, plague restrictions that prohibited the movement of merchandise and people, or a crown bankruptcy; it could be some natural disaster, whether drought, flood or locusts, that drove up the price of grain to such a high point that the poor could not afford to buy bread; or it could be a more personal problem such as sickness, the birth of another child or death of the breadwinner. These insecurities were constant in the lives of the poor of Toledo as were their crowded and insanitary living conditions, minimal to poor diets, and hard labour for very low pay.

Yet, since migrants continued to pour into Toledo for most of the sixteenth century, one must conclude that life there was better than the life they left behind. A young person might hope to learn a useful skill or to find food, shelter and clothes in domestic service, while an

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older unskilled person might hope for temporary employment. Toledo also boasted an abundance of charitable institutions and wealthy charitable givers who attempted to help the poor through periods of hardship. While it might have been more difficult for the poor in Toledo to find employment and bread from the 1570s to the end of the century, it was not until the first two decades of the seventeenth century that the inarticulate poor gave physical evidence that the city could no longer support them. After a hundred years of migrating to Toledo, the poor reversed the process and migrated away in search of the employment, cheap bread and charitable assistance that Toledo could no longer give them.

While the relationship between poverty and economic developments might seem obvious to a modern observer, this connection was not usually made by sixteenth-century welfare reformers. They were convinced that the poor should work but this conviction was not based upon any stated observations that a pauper's labour could be utilized by an expanding textile industry or that such labour would bring material well-being to the pauper. The employment of the poor was urged on moral and religious grounds, with occasional references to political expediency, public health and aesthetics. The reformers also shared the conviction that institutional changes – a new hospital, a reform of the old hospitals, a consolidation of charitable funds, or the elimination of public begging – would resolve the problem of the poor and their relief.

As for the great mass of humanity who comprised the poor, they were usually lumped into three groups: the deserving poor, those unable to maintain themselves by labour; the undeserving poor, those who were physically able but preferred not to labour; and, in Catholic countries, the *envergonzantes*, those people in need of relief who did not beg publicly. These first two groups were well-nigh universal in western Europe as was the opinion that the former should be helped and the latter punished. Discords arose, however, in determining the means by which the deserving poor should be relieved, with some cities or countries adopting a system of licensed begging and others prohibiting begging. If and when public begging was outlawed, funds were necessary to support the poor. Frequently the existing charitable resources were consolidated into one central fund or institution, which charitable givers were urged to support, and, in many cases, the wealthier citizens of the community were taxed to support the poor. The usual corollary to such welfare reforms was that under

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normal circumstances poor relief was limited to natives or long-term residents of a community, though outsiders might receive a donation for their journey when they left a town and a sick person might be taken into a hospital. This brief explanation of the sixteenth-century ideas, terminology and reforms will be amplified by Juan Luis Vives, the first of a long line of Spaniards who wrote about the poor and their relief.

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PART ONE: CASTILE AND THE RELIEF OF THE POOR

1

Castilian legislation, debates and innovations

JUAN LUIS VIVES AND THE EUROPEAN REFORMS

Within the vast domains of the Emperor Charles V, it was the Netherlandish cities that were among the leaders in providing welfare controversies in the 1520s and 1530s. As a resident of one of these cities, the Spanish humanist, Juan Luis Vives, was able to keep abreast of the latest welfare reforms, hear the debates, and formulate his own ideas. Vives is an important figure in the history of sixteenth-century welfare because in his 1526 treatise, *De subventione pauperum*, he crystallized and articulated what are usually known as the 'new' ideas about the poor and their relief, ideas that were to enjoy, in one form or another, success throughout much of western Europe.

Though a Spaniard by birth, the Iberian affiliations of Vives should not be overemphasized since he left his native Valencia in 1509 and never again set foot on Spanish soil. It is now well known that the humanist suffered the stigma of Jewish blood; his father was arrested by the Inquisition in 1522 and executed three years later,[1] so Vives' life of exile was dictated as much by necessity as by choice. After several years in Paris and then in England at the court of Henry VIII, Vives settled amidst the congenial colony of Spanish merchants who inhabited the city of Bruges where he met and married the daughter of another Jewish refugee from Valencia. His treatise about poor relief was dedicated to the magistrates of Bruges but the book gained a European audience. It was reprinted several times in Latin and translated into Italian and German though apparently not Castilian.[2] In 1527 it achieved the dubious notoriety of being declared heretical by the Franciscan vicar of the bishop of Tournai, much to the disgruntlement of Vives who considered the treatise extremely moderate.[3]

It is easy enough to understand why a Franciscan would consider

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the treatise as objectionable if not heretical. Though Vives makes no direct reference to the Mendicant Orders, he is clearly outraged by poverty, especially the most visible aspects of it: 'It is certainly a shameful and disgraceful thing for Christians . . . to find so many needy persons and beggars in our streets' ('Del socorro de los pobres', p. 280). The Valencian argued that in a truly Christian city the poor should be relieved so that they were not reduced to the humiliating and degrading spectacle of stretching out their hands to those more favourably blessed in the distribution of wealth. Poverty was a condition into which one might fall, but it was by no means an estimable condition, nor should the fallen linger there any longer than necessary. As Vives explained it, 'these our councils do not remove the poor, but help them; they do not preclude that someone should be poor, but that he should not be poor for much time' (p. 287). Melioration of poverty was not only the moral obligation of a Christian community, it was also an expedient measure for those who governed the city since poverty fostered uncivil and asocial behaviour. It sowed the seeds of discord that led to sedition and rebellion, and it led men, women and children into wicked and immoral activities by depraving their morality. Vives shared the contemporary belief that contagious diseases were transmitted through the infected breath of the poor, so poverty was also considered a threat to the physical health of a city. Finally, the humanist found beggars offensive to the eyes, ears and nose.

Poverty was then a multifarious evil calling for action on the part of all Christians, but where should action begin given the 'multitude of poor'? Vives began by dividing the poor into several groups. Beggars were placed in one of three categories: the impotent, the able bodied, and the foreigners, that is those not born in Bruges. Persons who fell into the latter category were to be banished from Bruges to their place of origin though they would receive a small travel allowance 'because it would be an inhuman thing to send away a needy person without provision for his journey' (p. 282). The exclusion of foreign beggars from relief did not apply during periods of famine or warfare when the residents of nearby afflicted villages could be taken into Bruges and treated as natives. Native-born beggars who did not have a domicile would be housed in the city hospitals or specially designated houses, while those who had a place of residence would be relieved there. Public begging was prohibited except for brief periods when a person had not yet been placed in a house or with a master. Beggars were not

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the only persons in need of relief for there were many needy citizens who were too proud to take to the streets as public beggars. These individuals, known as the *envergonzantes* or shamefaced poor, would be noted and relieved secretly by parish deputies.

With the exception of the *envergonzantes*, all persons who sought or needed relief were to be inspected by the city council or its deputies. Those who had a domicile would be visited there by two parish deputies and a scribe who would record their needs, the number of children, and their manner of living; they would be provided for according to their 'quality, estate and condition'. People in the city hospitals were also subject to inspection. Beggars were to be convened in a public square, 'so that such rabble does not enter a house or a room of the government' (p. 284), where they would be registered and interrogated as to why they begged. Anyone who claimed infirmity as a cause for begging was to be inspected by a doctor, and anyone who resisted these proceedings was to be put in jail.

After the inspection process was completed and the list drawn up, Vives was confronted by the troublesome issue of supporting all these people, a problem he never adequately resolved. The only concrete proposal he offered was a reform of the city hospitals which were to be taken over and administered by the city magistrates. Vives seems to have believed sincerely that the hospitals were extremely wealthy: 'It is said in each place that the wealth of the hospitals is so great that if it were administered and dispensed properly it would be enough to relieve all the needs of the citizens' (p. 282). In addition to their great wealth, Vives also believed that the hospitals were crowded with malingerers, 'drones maintained by the sweat of others' (p. 282), who would be ousted and their places filled by homeless beggars. But if the hospitals of Bruges were filled with beggars, there is the question of where the sick were to find relief, a question Vives never addressed.

Aside from the hospital reform, the humanist made vague suggestions about money contributed by prelates, collected in poor boxes, given by testators, or earned by the labour of the poor; temporary loans from the rich; and money that the city could donate if it would eliminate its expenditure on such frivolous items as festivals and receptions for dignitaries. Vives' final resort was Divine Mercy which had recently helped the city's school for poor children to increase its enrollment from eighteen to a hundred.

The lack of adequate financing may be explained by the author's fear of making any suggestions that might be considered heretical. On

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the other hand, Vives had, at least in theory, eliminated most of the conspicuous welfare candidates. Foreign beggars were sent home and the natives were put to work. Vives was convinced that labour was the cure for poverty and few of the city's poorer residents were omitted from the humanist's suggestions for employment. Native-born beggars of an appropriate age and disposition would be taught a trade; those who did not meet the age and disposition qualifications could dig ditches, draw water, or carry things in baskets or wheelbarrows. Then, too, there were the numerous public works projects of the city such as repairing walls, buildings and statues. Even the blind would be employed in cultivating their musical talents, while the lame would take up basket weaving. If the ideal city of Vives bears a great resemblance to a giant anthill, all the activity was not justified in terms of the expanding economy of Bruges[4] or the amount of money a hard-working person could earn for his labour. In fact Vives suggested that some of the unemployed should be sent to a nearby town that had a booming woollen industry, and the silk weavers of the city, who needed young boys to assist them, could find no candidates because the parents of the boys said their children made more by begging than they did by working.

But if Bruges had no need of workers and parents found it more profitable to send their children out begging than to work, why should Bruges eliminate public begging and initiate a complicated reform that entailed an expensive public works programme? This was to be done in the interests of the poor themselves who would be spared the vice of idleness and be led to a more civil, purer, and wiser life. As Vives explained, when the unemployed were 'occupied and working, the evil thoughts and inclinations born to them by being idle will cease' (p. 280). They would be taught habits that would make them useful rather than pernicious to themselves and others, and in the end, when the poor had been transformed, they would say, 'The senate of Bruges saved us even against our own will' (p. 288). Of course it was not just the poor who benefited from this reformation but also the city of Bruges: 'The city will have an incomparable benefit and imponderable gain with so many citizens made more modest, more civil, well bred and more social . . . the poor will not think of changes, seditions and tumults' (p. 290).

It need hardly be said then any charitable relief dispensed by the city was to encourage virtue in the recipients. If Vives is silent on such technical points as who should distribute the relief and whether it

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