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Ruth Whelan and Carol Baxter, Eds., *The Edict of Nantes and its implications in France, Britain and Ireland.* Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003. 304 pp. $50.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-85182-481-1.

Review by Michael Wolfe, Pennsylvania State University, Altoona.

This interesting collection of essays grew out of a conference held at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, in 1998 to commemorate and meditate upon the significance of the Edict of Nantes viewed in light of the experiences of the French and people in the British Isles. Serendipitously, that year also marked the bi-centenary of the United Irish uprising led by Wolfe Tone as well as the contemporaneous breakthrough in settling the "troubles" in Northern Ireland that came in the Good Friday Accords. The contributors to the volume bring an eclectic, yet most intriguing, set of perspectives to bear on this confluence of events, past and present. They include historians, sociologists, psychiatrists, theologians, and ecumenical activists, all of whom offer readers different ways to appreciate efforts, again both past and present, to quell religious passions and achieve some measure of toleration.

If commemoration is indeed a laboratory of memory, as Ruth Whelan contends in her stimulating introduction, it is an alchemical one that transmutes base passions and experiences into new, though not always nobler, identities. Part one takes up the subject of commemoration and identity, opening with Jean Delumeau's rambling and rather weak essay on the ecumenical implications of the Edict of Nantes. Readers should not be discouraged, however, for the ensuing piece by Yves Bizeul offers a fascinating analysis of the debates that swirled about French Protestant circles as the four hundredth anniversary of the Edict of Nantes approached. Some activists hoped to use the event to re-ignite the identity-focused consciousness of their co-religionists, touting the mythic belief that the Edict represented a mighty step forward toward modernity. Others, however, wanted to prompt a more open and ecumenical exchange with other Protestant and non-Protestant groups, though in the end they, too, sought to underscore the progressive nature of the original accord.

The genteel identity politics among French Protestants today stand in stark contrast to Denis Crouzet's essay on the shocking violence and mocking hatred so central to Calvinist identity from 1560 to 1570. Using Catholic semantics from the period itself, Crouzet argues that Calvinists masked this bloody-mindedness behind a veneer that professed their royalism and patriotism. This radical violence only began to recede in the wake of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres when Catholics visited these same deadly passions on the Huguenots. The deep tension between apocalyptic fury and the balm of reason thus shaped the world view of French Calvinists every bit as much as it did Catholics, a line of argument Crouzet has developed in a series of major works beginning with *Les Guerriers de Dieu*, published in 1990.[1] The effort to realize some measure of mutual acceptance only came with the passage of time and usually began at the local level, argues Olivier Christin in his excellent essay on friendship pacts during the Wars of Religion, a subject he explores more extensively in his 1997 study.[2] A long tradition of arbitration and conciliation practices existed, especially in urban communities that sought to uphold notions of communal solidarity and mutual protection, even in the face of confessional difference. These pacts grew more out of contemporary reflections on citizenship and its privileges within a monarchical framework than any Renaissance republican ideas. Indeed, the Edict of Nantes was just this sort of pact, only it was imposed by royal fiat rather than the result of negotiations between French Catholics and Protestants on the ground.

Just how much the Edict of Nantes mixed the sacred and the secular is the subject of Bernard Cottret's essay that opens part three. He reminds us of all the different kinds of cleavages that rent French society well before the advent of the Reformed religion. Yet the split bred by religious difference proved much more volatile and required, after a generation of bloody civil strife, a new kind of approach to realize peaceful co-existence. This was Henri IV's great achievement in the Edict of Nantes, which affirmed royal absolutism rather than represented, as it did for nineteenth-century French commentators, the origins of France's distinctive notion of *laïcité*. Mark Greengrass further stresses the need to see the Edict of Nantes in its immediate historical context rather than as a foreshadowing of modern ideas of religious toleration. His essay examines the edicts of pacifications that preceded the momentous accord reached in 1598, showing many of the Edict's guiding tenets went back to the conciliatory legal thinking of men associated with Michel de l'Hôpital. These royal peacemakers, as he describes them, worked long and hard in the ensuing decades to develop supporting arguments from moral philosophy, history, and even medicine to make the case for religious co-existence. Greengrass contends that despite the failure of past edicts of pacification, men in positions of official responsibility serving the king had essentially bought into this new thinking by the 1590s, a development that accounts for much of the success of Henri IV's accord.

The historical focus shifts in part four to views of the Edict of Nantes found in later centuries and places. Olivier Millet parses the subtle new forms of intolerance that grew up in the urbane circles frequented by Guez de Balzac in the 1620s and 1630s. He led the way in formulating for the new noble ethos of *honnêteté*, polite ways to say mean things about other people, like the Huguenots, who stood outside aristocratic salon society. Still, as Millet points out, Balzac's stinging barbs represented a real improvement to earlier forms of discourse about religious difference, for they at least preserved intact the humanity of the individual Huguenots with whom he conversed or exchanged letters. But such a change was far from permanent, as the horrific persecutions that accompanied the Revocation in 1685 so amply attest. John Miller examines the arguments for and against religious toleration from a cross-cultural perspective in his essay. The later image of a tolerant England promoted later the next century by Voltaire did not match the highly intolerant society and regimes that ruled England until the Restoration in 1660. Virulent anti-Catholicism and harsh discrimination against Nonconformists were constant features of the early Stuart and Commonwealth periods, which represented domestic analogs to the harsh policies those regimes pursued toward Catholic Ireland and Calvinist Scotland. Matters only slowly began to change for the positive after the Restoration, not as a result of new laws but rather a growing reluctance on the part of local magistrates to enforce these measures; this argument, incidentally, is the one also made to explain the waning of the witch hunts at the same time. Ruth Whelan's essay on "repressive toleration" (p. 179), a term she borrows from Herbert Marcuse, examines eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish perceptions of the Huguenot experience, which the Anglo-Irish came to know through the preaching of refugee ministers such as Gaspard Caillard. Caillard delivered a series of sermons in the 1720s in Dublin that went through several printings thanks to the support of subscribers. While Caillard made a strong case linking toleration with rationalism, the intolerance he denounced was that of the Roman Catholics, a stance all the more telling when Whelan analyzes the sermon he delivered on Guy Fawkes Day!

The problematical nature of the concept (never mind the practice) of toleration makes up the subject of the essay by Alan Kors that opens part five. While touting the virtues of tolerance in the abstract, *philosophes* such as Voltaire harbored intolerant views of Jews and any persons they considered to be "fanatical." For them, tolerance was less a question of mutual respect and individual rights, and more a royal prerogative to ensure civil well-being. According to Kors, this distinction came to the fore in 1767 in the controversy over Jean-François Marmontel's historical novel, *Bélisaire*. Yet the growth of toleration was not always from the top down, as Graham Gargett argues in his essay on references to Voltaire found in Anglo-Irish magazines between 1762 and 1784. A rather simplified, if not sanitized, image of Voltaire as a sort of apostle of toleration became created by the editors of these magazines to

associate their progressive ideas and agendas for change in Ireland with the French Enlightenment. Whether these ideas "exercised a genuine influence," however, is a matter requiring further research into readership and its reception of such views (p. 229).

The three essays in part six offer the views of ministers and ecumenicists active in the field of religious reconciliation and conflict resolution. Alan Blancy presents a sensitive theological and ethical appraisal of the ways to square strong convictions with mutual toleration. The Edict of Nantes represented a form of imposed toleration, and thus sprang from an ideology of power. The French notion of *laïcité*, he argues, represents an updated version of this statist approach to ensuring co-existence. Yet individuals must strive to transform toleration into a conviction itself, which in Christianity lies through affirming the relational nature of identity through communion, not isolating anomie. Alan Falconer discusses the difficulties long impeding the development of a culture of tolerance. These obstacles include the historical memories of violence and coercion that hold whole communities captive to a mythos of victimization and martyrology. Rather than deny these past sufferings, they should be squarely acknowledged and transformed through a process of forgiveness that lays the basis for the beginning of a new common history of mutual acceptance. The final essay in the collection by Cecelia Clegg and Joseph Liechty relate the lessons learned from recent efforts between 1995 and 1998 by the Moving Beyond Sectarianism project of the Irish School of Ecumenics to effect such a momentous change in Northern Ireland. These include the need to avoid reductionism when defining religious identities, a greater sensitivity to language that suggests the imposition of some kind of "liberal agenda," and a frank acknowledgement of the basic and positive human needs expressed, albeit in a distorted manner, in sectarianism. Only in this way can the space necessary to begin a meaningful dialogue between victims and offenders come to be created as the first step down the long, difficult road of lasting reconciliation.

The Edict of Nantes has meant many different things to many different persons over the centuries since its issuance by Henri IV. It was a milestone for the cause of toleration for some, while for others it stood as an awesome expression of the monarchy's absolute authority. In confronting the dynamics of conflict and co-existence, during the French Wars of Religion or in the recent troubles in Northern Ireland, these essays provide a rich variety of perspectives on the age-old problem of how to affirm our common humanity without abnegating our inevitable (and necessary) differences.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Introduction

- Ruth Whelan, "The other '98"

Part One: Commemoration and Identity

- Jean Delumeau, "From the Edict of Nantes to ecumenism"
- Yves Bizeul, "Identity and commemoration: French Protestants and the quartercentenary of the Edict of Nantes"

Part Two: War and Peace

- Denis Crouzet, "Identity and violence: French Protestants and the early Wars of Religion"
- Olivier Christin, "'Peace must come from us': friendship pacts between the confession during the Wars of Religion"

Part Three: Edicts of Pacification

- Bernard Cottret, "Religious or secular? The Edict of Nantes, reformation and state formation in late sixteenth-century France"
- Mark Greengrass, "An Edict and its antecedents: the pacification of Nantes and political culture in later sixteenth-century France"

Part Four: An Intolerant Toleration

- Olivier Millet, "Intolerance, friendship and urbanity: Balzac and his Huguenot correspondents"
- John Miller, "Pluralism, persecution and toleration in France and Britain in the seventeenth century"
- Ruth Whelan, "Repressive toleration: the Huguenots in early eighteenth-century Dublin"

Part Five: Toleration

- Alan Kors, "The Enlightenment and toleration"
- Graham Gargett, "Toleration in later eighteenth-century Ireland: Voltaire and the *Dublin* and *Hibernian* magazines, 1762-84"

Part Six: Toleration and Reconciliation

- Alain Blancy, "Conviction and toleration: a theological and ethical appraisal"
- Alan D. Falconer, "Towards a culture of tolerance"
- Cecelia Clegg and Joseph Liechty, "Moving beyond sectarianism: religion, conflict, and reconciliation in contemporary Northern Ireland"

NOTES

[1] Denis Crouzet, *Les guerriers de Dieu. La violence au temps des troubles de religion (vers 1525-vers 1610)*, Paris: Champs Vallon, 1990, 2 volumes; *La nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy. Un rêve perdu de la Renaissance*, Paris: Fayard, 1994; *La genèse de la Réform française, 1520-1562*, Paris: Sedes, 1996; and "Henri IV, King of Reason?," in Keith Cameron, ed., *From Valois to Bourbon: Dynasty, State and Society in Early Modern France*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989, pp. 73-106.

[2] Olivier Christin, *La paix de religion. L'autonomisation de la raison politique au XVIe siècle*, Paris: Seuil, 1997.

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