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Christie Sample Wilson, *Beyond Belief: Surviving the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France*. Bethlehem Penn.: Lehigh University Press, 2011. xii + 163 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography and index. \$60 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-61146-077-3.

Review by Mark Konnert, University of Calgary.

This relatively brief book is another welcome addition to the growing literature that paints a somewhat different picture of religious violence and coexistence in early modern Europe. The standard view has been one of unrelenting conflict and violence between mutually intolerant faiths spurred on by central governments bent on enforcing religious uniformity. While not minimizing these very real phenomena, a less monolithic picture has begun to emerge thanks to the work of Benjamin Kaplan, Gregory Hanlon, Jesse Sponholtz, Keith Luria, and others. [1] At the same time, our understanding of the power and reach of purportedly absolute monarchies has had to be qualified in the face of overwhelming evidence of just how dependent the central power was on the cooperation of local elites. In her new book, Christie Sample Wilson elucidates not only the experience of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in one town, but also what this experience reveals about the nature of religious belief and of government in the early modern period.

In the 1685 Edict of Fontainebleau, King Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes which had guaranteed French Protestants (or Huguenots) a measure of religious toleration since 1598. The Revocation was preceded by a period increasing intolerance and persecution that brought discriminatory taxation as well as the notorious *dragonnades*, the billeting of violent soldiers with Protestant households as an “encouragement” to convert. The experience of the town of Loriol described in this book serves as an instructive counter-example to the general picture of violent oppression.

Situated on the western edge of Dauphiné, Loriol was a smallish town of about 1800 inhabitants of whom about three-quarters were Protestant prior to the Revocation. Beyond its confessional mix, there was little to distinguish it from the hundreds of other such communities scattered across France. Based on a variety of sources—parish and consistorial records, tax rolls, the records of local, regional, and royal governments as well as of the Catholic Church—Dr. Wilson succeeds in illuminating the experience of a bi-confessional community under increasing stress.

Chapter one examines relations between the two faiths between 1650 and 1679 when Protestants came under increasing repression. On the whole, the experience of Loriol was relatively benign compared to many other communities. This is not to say that the differences between the two faiths were insignificant: “this clearly defined boundary [between the two confessions] did not result in significant acrimony between the groups; rather it was marked by a notable degree of cooperation that was locally crafted and protected” (p. 12). Although the Protestant majority on the city council was whittled down and then eliminated, and Protestants were progressively prohibited from a number of occupations, in practice these restrictions were routinely relaxed and even ignored on a practical basis with the connivance of local political and

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religious authorities. Whatever discrimination Protestants in Lorient faced, it was the result of outside pressure rather than local prejudice. Like local authorities everywhere, those in Lorient were determined not to attract the attention of outsiders if at all possible. Lorient was not immune to conflict, but there was an unspoken consensus that kept this conflict at a low enough level to avoid unwanted attention from powerful outsiders.

Chapter two deals with the demographic patterns that distinguished the two communities and shows precisely how Protestants could accommodate the demands for greater conformity while not compromising the essentials of their faith. Wilson exposes subtle shifts in the demographic behaviour of both Protestants and Catholics. For Protestants, while baptism of infants was important, it was not essential for salvation. Protestant parents therefore felt no particular urgency in having their newborn children baptized and prior to the 1680s, the average time elapsed between birth and baptism was 18.9 days. For Catholic parents, for whom the baptism of infants was essential to salvation, the comparable number was 8.4 days. By the early 1680s, the mean delay among Protestants had declined to 10.1 days, while among Catholics it had declined to 2.5 days. This latter figure brings up an important point, and one that deserves greater emphasis. Not only were the official structures of church and state attempting to convert Huguenots into loyal Catholics, they were also attempting to enforce greater conformity to the requirements of the Tridentine Church among Catholics. According to the Catholic Church, parents were required to present their children for baptism within three days of birth, which of course, most habitually did not, reflecting perhaps the persistence of traditional practices. Not only were Church and state attempting to transform the Huguenots into devout Catholics, they were also trying to do the same to Catholics, whose religious practices and beliefs corresponded more to the traditional Christianity so brilliantly described by John Bossy than they did to the reformed Catholicism prescribed by Trent.

As with baptism, so also with marriages. Catholic teaching discouraged marriages during Advent and Lent, while Protestants faced no such restrictions. In the years leading up to the Revocation, Protestants conformed increasingly (though never completely) to Catholic practices. At the same time, so did Catholics, most notably after the 1675 arrival of Father Lamy, a new and more stringent priest. In other words, Protestants were comfortable conforming to some Catholic practices that did not violate the basics of their faith; after all, there was no prohibition against not marrying in Advent or Lent, or against having one's child baptized within three days of birth.

Chapter three examines the years of increasing oppression leading up to the Revocation and the immediate impact of the Revocation itself. Once again, Lorient stands out for its relative peacefulness and for the ability of Protestants to satisfy the demands of the government while maintaining their own confessional identity. There were no mass conversions, nor mass exiles; the majority of Protestants stayed in town. They satisfied the requirements of outward conformity without compromising the essentials of their faith, at least in their own minds. "The community looked as if the Revocation had indeed achieved its goals of producing religious conformity to Catholic ideals, as long as one did not look too closely" (p. 83). This was accomplished only with the cooperation of local political and religious authorities, demonstrating the limits of central power when faced with local elites determined to preserve their autonomy. Lorient also benefitted from the fact that other towns in the region were not nearly so peaceful nor their Protestants so accommodating, with the result that by comparison, Lorient escaped much official attention.

This pattern of stubborn local accommodation persisted in the decades after the Revocation. Indeed, the former Protestant pastor who presumably had fled France, had returned to Loriol by 1691 and was hiding in plain sight. Such accommodation was abetted by local political and religious authorities who were much more concerned about preserving the tranquility and independence of their town than they were with enforcing uniformity of religious practice. Indeed, the Revocation placed clergy in a difficult situation and there is a good deal of evidence that clergy passively tolerated Protestant belief, rather than administer the sacraments to those whom they knew to be Protestant in their inner beliefs. "The Revocation brought about many things, but not true unity in the Catholic tradition. In this respect, the Revocation was a thorough failure, aided by the unwillingness or inability of local authorities to enforce its provisions" (p. 93).

By 1715, the demographic behaviour of Loriol's inhabitants shows no trace of the former distinctions between Catholics and Protestants. At the same time, however, a substantial number had died and were buried outside of the Catholic Church, indicating that while they may have satisfied demands for outward conformity concerning baptism and marriage, many *nouveaux convertis* did not live a sufficiently Catholic life and were therefore not entitled to a Catholic burial. If any further proof were needed that the Revocation was a failure, Protestants in Loriol played an active part in the (illegal) revival of Reformed worship shortly after Louis XIV's death.

On a relatively minor stylistic level, there are some unfortunate word choices in the translations from French. Yes, Huguenots called their churches "*temples*," but in English the use of the word is jarring. Likewise, the soldiers sent to terrorize Huguenots were dragoons, not dragons. While the French word is indeed *dragons*, nowhere else have I seen this rendered in English as dragons, rather than dragoons. On p. 69, we find that the inhabitants of Loriol complained that they were reduced to "mendacity" by the costs of lodging soldiers. I suspect that the author meant "mendicancy," although it is certainly plausible that they lied about their means as well.

There is much to like about this book: the convincing analysis of the demographic data; its sensitive and subtle analysis of behaviour and belief; and its presentation of everyday life which qualifies the received interpretation of unremitting coercion and violence. The author's use and conception of "confessionalism" is, however, simplistic and untheoretical, seeming to denote little more than groups who believed different things. In addition, the author overlooks a substantial secondary literature that would have bolstered her argument. Works on other countries and on France during the Wars of Religion, such as those by Benjamin Kaplan, Jesse Sponholz, Christopher Marsh, and myself have shown that the kind of passive tolerance that was on display in Loriol was not unique to France, nor to the later seventeenth century. [2]

## NOTES

[1] Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007); Gregory Hanlon, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005);

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Jesse Sponholz, *The Tactics of Toleration: a Refugee Community in the Age of Religious War* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

[2] Kaplan, *Divided By Faith*; Sponholz, *The Tactics of Toleration*; Mark Konnert, *Civic Agendas and Religious Passion: Châlons-sur-Marne during the French Wars of Religion, 1560-1594* (Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997).

Mark Konnert  
University of Calgary  
[mkonnert@ucalgary.ca](mailto:mkonnert@ucalgary.ca)

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