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**Keith P. Luria**, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005. xxxviii + 357 pp. Map, bibliography, and index. \$69.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8132-1411-4.

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In recent years, a number of studies have deepened our understanding of the dynamics of relations between and within the faiths in seventeenth-century France. I am thinking chiefly here, in the anglophone context at least, of the work of Philip Benedict, Gregory Hanlon, and Keith Luria.<sup>[1]</sup> This, Luria's first book-length engagement with the topic, sheds new light both on the complexity of the daily interaction of Huguenot and Catholic and the topical subject of conflict resolution. Taking as his time-span the period from the promulgation of the 1598 Edict of Nantes to its revocation in 1685, Luria adopts a consciously thematic rather than chronological approach. Specifically, he makes clear his intention to operate at the level of the community, the household, and the individual. Although he draws frequently on detailed case studies relating to the regional focus of his research, the confessionally-variegated province of Poitou, Luria does a skilful job of convincing the reader of the wider applicability of his findings. After all, differences between regions, individuals, social groups, and so on when it comes to issues of confessional choice and identity, two of the main foci of the book, are universal. Furthermore, there was sufficient variation in confessional balance between local communities in Poitou to provide both a broad and nuanced picture for the historian. More impressive still, Luria successfully integrates the value of the regional study with the importance of the national context and a sustained focus on the impact of royal policy.

This is a well-presented, fluently-written and carefully-organized work which draws on a wide range of archival and printed primary sources to present its thoughtfully-crafted case. The chapters and their subsections are connected by neat, linking paragraphs which sustain the book's coherence. In addition, although the thematically-organized chapters can be seen in some sense as free-standing, they are effectively linked by the overarching theme of boundary transgression, negotiation, and enforcement. This tripartite explanatory framework is fully elucidated in the reflective introduction which also deals with issues of historiography and methodology, including engagement with the work of sociologists, such as Pierre Bourdieu and Fredrik Barth (pp. xxv-xxvi). A discussion of the different sources used and a full breakdown of the content of the six chapters of the book are also provided. Above all, in his exploration of areas of confrontation and co-operation between the faiths, Luria emphasizes that "other means of self-definition cut across those of confession and helped maintain ongoing connections between people" (p. xxvii).

Chapter one addresses the familiar theme of coexistence: how it was negotiated within Poitevin communities and the arbitration of disputes by the crown and its officials in the wake of the Edict of Nantes. Striking here are the continuities with the problems of enforcement and causes of conflict during the sixteenth-century religious wars, and the emphasis given to the decisive role of the monarchy, which "guaranteed and policed religious difference" (p. 10), and shifted to a more hard-line pro-Catholic stance as the seventeenth century wore on. The second chapter focuses on the affirmation and reinforcement of confessional boundaries, chiefly through the work of Catholic missions, represented in Poitou by the Capuchins. Once again the influence of the monarchy is highlighted as well as the steady erosion of Huguenot support networks, principally through targeting the nobility and castigating Protestant ministers. Crucially, persuasion and coercion were combined to greatest effect. In

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particular, Catholic devotions and demonstrations of piety were used to reclaim “sacred and secular space” (p. 58), as well as to ostracize Huguenots and to reinforce their separation from the Catholic community. Another aspect of this policy of exclusion is explored in chapter three on the provision for Protestant burial (discussed in detail by Luria in a 2001 article in *French Historical Studies*, but expanded upon here). Poitou, with its unusually high number of over eighty confessionally-shared cemeteries, provides an instructive model of boundary construction and negotiation. We are reminded also of the gradual nature of the diminution of Huguenot rights and the complexity of local negotiations. The simultaneous practices of sharing burial space, of establishing adjacent but distinct sites, and of exclusion according to locality, demonstrate most vividly the physical reality of Luria’s three-fold boundary demarcations. The peculiar dynamics associated with the accommodation of the dead, involving financial and other practical considerations, kinship ties, social status and custom, are also addressed.

Such prosaic concerns also came into play in the construction of bi-confessional households, the subject of chapter four. Although mixed marriages can best illustrate the permeability of confessional boundaries, Luria argues, they were not necessarily unproblematic. He underlines the difficulties of calculating rates of such marriages since they were often preceded by conversion (particularly of the female spouse), but he also demonstrates the meticulous research involved in reconstructing what the historian can from the available evidence. The complexities of the arrangements involved are exemplified by the high-profile history of the confessionally-divided La Trémoille family. However, others further down the social scale had to contend with the same issues, including pressure from the state. Luria interprets increasing royal interference, particularly in encouraging young children to convert, as prioritizing confessional conformity over the notion of the “family-state compact” so central to early modern concerns with social and political stability. Patriarchal attitudes on both sides of the confessional divide continue this theme and form the focus of chapter five, foregrounding the issue of gender more systematically than has usually been the case in studies of early modern confessional relations to date. The ambiguities of the position of women were highlighted in their celebration and denigration (even sometimes of the same individual) in contemporary rhetoric according to the agenda of either faith. Thus, the transgression of gender boundaries through the inappropriate behaviour or assertiveness of women, particularly on the Protestant side, was employed to reaffirm confessional boundaries. The role of aristocratic women as champions of the Protestant faith, such as the duchesses of Rohan and La Trémoille, are discussed in particular, as too the importance of converted or possessed nuns to the Catholic side, including the ambiguous impact of the controversial and ultimately discredited case of the convent at Loudun. Above all, Luria stresses that, whilst some exceptional individuals were able to seize the agenda, for the most part, due to their peculiar status, the contribution of women functioned primarily as a rhetorical weapon in the ongoing confessional conflict.

The final chapter deals with the role of conversion in cementing confessional division and the influence of various factors on the individual conscience. Published conversion accounts are the main source exploited here to highlight the polemical battle between the churches. The ecclesiastical models and language of conversion used by both faiths were similar, although the Protestants were disadvantaged politically as, despite their protestations, a difference of faith with their monarch rendered them suspect. The public nature of printed declarations made any relapse all the more embarrassing and damaging to the church concerned, and highlight the continuing instability of confessional boundaries bound up as they were with an individual’s sense of identity. Once again the La Trémoille provides the starkest example of the flexibility of confessional choice, but mixed marriages also provided a common instance of the social convenience of conversion and subsequent relapse. The book concludes with an upbeat interpretation of Protestant resilience, confessional coexistence and the role of royal authority in defusing conflict, despite the eventual enforcement of the confessional divide and subsequent Revocation. In particular, Luria emphasizes the practical realities of coexistence and the need for the crossing of boundaries for the day-to-day function of confessionally-mixed communities. Ultimately, the

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reader is struck by the durability, yet also the adaptability and sheer contingency of French confessional identities in a changing situation.

This is not a book that makes grand statements that shift our understanding of the functioning of the early modern French state or the contribution of confessional conflict within it. Nevertheless, in its own quietly self-assured way, it argues a well-supported case which is more persuasive on both these fronts than any number of grandiloquent assertions might prove. In addition, its thematic organization works well both as a research resource for scholars and a teaching tool for honours students taking specialized courses in French history. It makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge not only of confessional identities, but also of the political realities and social dynamics prevailing in seventeenth-century France.

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## NOTES

[1] Philip Benedict, *The Huguenot Population of France, 1600-1685: The Demographic Fate and Customs of a Religious Minority* (Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1991), and *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-85* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2001). Gregory Hanlon, *Confession and Community in Seventeenth-Century France: Catholic and Protestant Coexistence in Aquitaine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

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