

H-Net Reviews

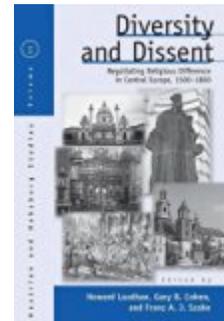
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Howard Louthan, Gary B. Cohen, Franz A. J. Szabo. *Diversity and Dissent: Negotiating Religious Difference in Central Europe, 1500—1800*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. XII, 240 S. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85745-108-8.

Reviewed by Andrew L. Thomas (Salem College)

Published on HABSBUURG (February, 2013)

Commissioned by Jonathan Kwan



Confessional Encounters in Early Modern Central Europe

This edited collection reflects the efforts of two conferences devoted to the theme of church-state relationships in early modern central Europe. These conferences were held at the Center for Austrian Studies at the University of Minnesota and the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies at the University of Alberta. Central Europe continues to offer excellent examples of the potential diversity in patterns shaping church-state relationships in the early modern era. Observing religious affiliations through the lens of central European political states, such as the Holy Roman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, is akin to looking through a kaleidoscope. For much of central Europe, religious diversity dating back to the late Middle Ages made for a bewildering array of possible confessional allegiances. At times, these could be quite fluid on both a group and individual level in the early modern era. This work serves as an important contribution to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between early modern state building and religious identity in the area of central Europe between medieval and modern times.

Howard Louthan's introduction serves as an excellent overview of the book's main themes: political and religious diversity beyond the traditional Catholic-Protestant dichotomy as well as the challenges concerning multiconfessionalism and religious toleration. He sets the tone for the text by offering a classic example of religious diversity in Poland that dated back to the Middle

Ages. He does this by discussing the religious odyssey of the Catholic priest Stanislaw Orzechowski of Poland who was criticized for his decision to marry. Louthan notes that Orzechowski did not feel the need to become a Protestant in order to find doctrinal acceptance of clerical marriage. In fact, Orzechowski reminded his Catholic critics that both Orthodox and Armenian churches supported clerical marriage long before Martin Luther.

Appropriately, the first two chapters deal with Bohemia and Poland, two regions with diverse religious beliefs dating back to the Middle Ages that only became more diverse with the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The first chapter begins with Petr Mařa's pioneering work dealing with the Bohemian nobility's efforts to navigate the confessional landscape in their diurnal affairs. He cogently explains how confessional identities among the Bohemian nobility could be quite ambiguous before the late sixteenth century. Thus, even though Catholics, Utraquists, and Bohemian Brethren predated the sixteenth-century Protestant movements, these identities could also become such hybrids as Lutheran-leaning Utraquists or Calvinist-leaning Bohemian Brethren. Likewise, it was not uncommon for families and individuals within families to switch religious allegiances before the end of the sixteenth century. In the second chapter, Paul Knoll addresses the importance of recognizing the structural limits of the Polish state to enforce religious conformity in this era. Although there were genuine advocates of religious tolera-

tion that contributed to Poland's reputation as a "state without stakes," this was not the primary reason. Essentially, this reputation was rooted in the Jagiellonian legacy of a rather large, as well as economically and religiously diverse, Polish nobility. Polish nobles became powerful enough to establish on an individual level their equivalent of *cuius regio, eius religio* with the Warsaw Confederation of 1573.

The next three chapters deal with alternative forms of confessional cooperation or managed coexistence within various groups in the Holy Roman Empire. David Luebke offers a trenchant account of how the town councils of Westphalia were able to negotiate local religious compromises without confessionalization until 1623 when the Catholic League subdued the towns. Luebke argues convincingly that the town councils were able to navigate through religious differences for eighty years by acting on what Robert Scribner once titled "practical rationality." Robert von Friedeburg offers a nuanced perspective on the legal aspects associated with confessionalized state building in the Holy Roman Empire by stating that the evolving idea of *res publica* as a legal entity for maintaining "public order" did not inevitably lead to territorial absolutism. Instead, he argues that it actually created legal parameters regulated through law courts, which had the potential to curb princes' exercise of dominion over their subjects.

Thomas Brady cogently contends that Jews, heretics, and witches, the religious groups most legally vulnerable in the Holy Roman Empire between 1500 and 1650, actually encountered what he calls the "entropy of coercion." He also argues that these groups experienced this entropy differently and that it would be erroneous to simply categorize them collectively as the "other." For example, causes for coercion concerning the Jews were related specifically to crimes connected with blood libel, usury, blasphemy, and host desecration. A gradual transition toward at least viewing the Jews as imperial subjects began with Johannes Reuchlin's 1511 judicial opinion opposing the confiscation of Hebrew texts. Although discrimination against Jews did not end with this transition, a type of legally recognized Jewish "confession" did evolve. Brady lucidly maintains that the only commonality between Jews, heretics, and witches was a "thickening" of political and legal activities encouraged by jurists, doctors, and at times theologians. Thus, the "entropy of coercion" for all of these groups must be seen in the context of the historical evolution of state building on different levels within the Holy Roman Empire.

In the next chapter, Mikhail Dmitriev returns to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He maintains that the Union of Brest (1595/96) actually destabilized the religious settlement established by the earlier Warsaw Confederation of 1573. He also describes the Union of Brest as a "cultural misunderstanding" between the Roman See and the Orthodox Ruthenian bishops. Likewise, the confessional disputes erupting after the Union of Brest exposed the reality that there were few actual champions of religious toleration in this era. Hence, both Dmitriev and Knoll contribute to an important revised version of the history of religious toleration in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In the following chapter, Debra Kaplan focuses on the relationship between confessionalization and the Jews in the city of Strasbourg. Similarly to Brady, Kaplan argues that the Jewish experience can offer insights into certain aspects of confessionalization in the Holy Roman Empire. Although Jews were not legally residing within Strasbourg when magisterial confessionalizing activities began, they did enter the city and were part of the commercial life. By examining *Polizeiordnung* in Strasbourg in this era, Kaplan asserts that there was a gradual transition in the legal language used to describe Jews after 1570. The language reflected re-hardened religious stereotypes of Jews that coincided with confessionalizing activities attempting to regulate members of different beliefs.

The final four chapters concentrate on the Holy Roman Empire, but they focus primarily on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bridget Heal demonstrates persuasively that during the seventeenth century there were considerable similarities between the development of a *pietas bavarica* by the Bavarian Wittelsbachs and what Ann Coreth described as the *pietas austriaca* by the Austrian Habsburgs. Nevertheless, she recognizes the important claims made by others that the top-down confessionalization model by itself does not adequately describe the rise in popular piety associated with the cult of the Virgin and the Eucharist. The numerous agents involved led to nuanced versions of seventeenth-century Catholic piety in such places as the Imperial Free Cities of Augsburg and Cologne. In Augsburg, magistrates embraced a form of Marianism very influenced by the Bavarian Wittelsbachs. In contrast, Cologne retained many pre-Tridentine characteristics because the city council felt their municipal authority challenged by the Bavarian Wittelsbachs acting as archbishop-electors there. In the next chapter, Regina Pörtner explores the dynamics between Austrian Protestant religious dissenters and

literacy during the eighteenth century. She contends that the importance of literacy activities with an intellectual component became an essential habitus of crypto-Protestants living in eighteenth-century Austria. In addition, by looking at interrogation records, Heal demonstrates well the importance of females in establishing this habitus among the youth of these groups.

Alexander Schunka then successfully contends that even though eighteenth-century attempts at confessional reunification failed, they are still worthy of study. In particular, Schunka examines the attempts made by Protestants in Brandenburg-Prussia and other areas of central Europe. He discusses the role of such prominent figures as Samuel von Pufendorf and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, but Schunka also gives us greater insight into lesser-known characters. An example of this is his treatment of the Reformed Prussian court preacher Daniel Ernst Jablonski, a grandson of John Amos Comenius. In a sense, Jablonski's efforts echoed attempts by Comenius in the early seventeenth century. Finally, Schunka provides substantial evidence that the early Enlightenment still reflected an age where church and state were closely connected. In the last chapter, Ernst Wangermann underscores the similarities between Maria Theresa's later reign and the early years of Joseph II due to the profound influence of the chancellor of state, Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz. In agreement with Pörtner and others, Wangermann acknowledges that between the 1670s and the 1770s, Brandenburg-Prussia's military ascen-

dency and its ability to take advantage of religious issues within the Habsburg Monarchy were important factors in determining Habsburg religious policies. Wangermann also notes that the October 1781 Patent of Tolerance by Joseph II only legalized the freedom of private worship ("*Privat-Exercitium*") as opposed to public. He concludes by claiming that complete religious tolerance as advocated by the Austrian poet and Freemason Johann Baptist von Alxinger in 1785 did not happen in the Habsburg Monarchy until 1867 as part of the new constitution.

To a certain degree, this book's regional coverage, themes, and conference origins share similarities with the earlier work *Crown, Church and Estates: Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, edited by R. J. W. Evans and T. V. Thomas (1991). Both books cover eastern central Europe well, especially by integrating the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, for practical reasons, on the one hand, less treatment concerning Hungarian lands made their way into *Diversity and Dissent* than into *Crown, Church and Estates*. On the other hand, *Diversity and Dissent* defines central Europe much more broadly by encompassing all of the Holy Roman Empire. Concomitantly, it covers a broader chronological range by including the eighteenth century. In conclusion, *Diversity and Dissent* provides a rich variety of valuable historical perspectives on the nature of church-state relationships in early modern central Europe broadly conceived.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

Citation: Andrew L. Thomas. Review of Louthan, Howard; Cohen, Gary B.; Szabo, Franz A. J., *Diversity and Dissent: Negotiating Religious Difference in Central Europe, 1500–1800*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. February, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37620>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.