Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation

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Contents

page

List of contributors vii

Preface viii

1 Introduction 1
OLE PETER GRELL

2 The travail of tolerance: containing chaos in early modern Europe 13
HEIKO A. OBERMAN

3 Preconditions of tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth-century Germany 32
BOB SCRIBNER

4 Heresy executions in Reformation Europe, 1520–1565 48
WILLIAM MONTER

5 *Un roi, une loi, deux fois*: parameters for the history of Catholic-Reformed co-existence in France, 1555–1685 65
PHILIP BENEDICT

6 Confession, conscience, and honour: the limits of magisterial tolerance in sixteenth-century Strassburg 94
LORNA JANE ABRAY

7 One Reformation or many? Protestant identities in the later Reformation in Germany 108
EUAN CAMERON

8 Toleration in the early Swiss Reformation: the art and politics of Niklaus Manuel of Berne 128
BRUCE GORDON

9 Tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth-century Basle 145
✠HANS R. GUGGISBERG

10 Exile and tolerance 164
OLE PETER GRELL

11 The politics of toleration in the Free Netherlands, 1572–1620 182
ANDREW PETTEGREE

12 Archbishop Cranmer: concord and tolerance in a changing Church 199
DIARMAID MACCULLOGH

13 Toleration for Catholics in the Puritan revolution 216
NORAH CARLIN

14 The question of tolerance in Bohemia and Moravia in the age of the Reformation 231
JAROSLAV PÁNEK

15 Tolerance and intolerance in sixteenth-century Hungary 249
KATALIN PÉTER

16 Protestant confessionalisation in the towns of Royal Prussia and the practice of religious toleration in Poland-Lithuania 262
MICHAEL G. MÜLLER

Index 282

1 Introduction

Ole Peter Grell

Within the historiography of religious tolerance the Reformation era has always been considered of paramount importance for the developments which led to the achievement of 'a liberal and tolerant society'. This was, of course, a highly valued goal for the educated elite in nineteenth-century Western Europe and has subsequently influenced a later period's scholars in their inquiries and judgements. Evidently the break-up of the near monolithic structure of medieval Western Christianity for the first time presented contemporary lay and ecclesiastical rulers with the practical problem of how to deal with religious plurality. Likewise, this fragmentation gave rise to a growing debate about aspects of religious toleration, such as freedom of conscience and freedom of worship.

Not surprisingly this field of research has been dominated by historians of ideas who have promoted the view that religious tolerance in Europe witnessed an organic growth from the late fifteenth to the late seventeenth century. With regard to the Reformation period, starting with the Christian humanists at the beginning of the sixteenth century and concluding their story in the seventeenth century, historians such as W. K. Jordan and Joseph Lecler have portrayed the period as one beginning with the tolerance of humanists, such as Erasmus and Thomas More. This brief interlude was then followed by the bigotry and intolerance of the first decades of the Reformation, especially by reformers such as Calvin, Knox and Beza. Eventually the resulting religious wars and a gradual tiredness of constant religious confrontations caused religious fervour to evaporate towards the end of the sixteenth century, thus making way for a common-sense tolerance of religious differences.[1] Within this rather 'whiggish' interpretation of the development of toleration in early modern Europe two variations on the general theme deserve to be mentioned. One focuses on the role and significance of scepticism in promoting religious toleration from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards and has won particular favour among historians of ideas.[2] The other variation has been concerned with the significance of free trade and mercantilism in promoting greater religious liberty, often claiming that the Reformation period led to increased tolerance, not as a consequence of Protestantism, but, despite the reformers, as a product of predominantly economic considerations.[3]

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[1] See W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, 4 vols. (London, 1932–40), and J. Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 2 vols. (London, 1960).

Among the first historians to question this generally accepted interpretation of the development of toleration in the early modern period was Geoffrey Elton. In an article from 1984 concerned with England in general and comparing the approaches to toleration and persecution of Thomas More and John Foxe in particular, Elton rejected the accepted 'model'. In fact, in the cases of More and Foxe he turned it upside down. He portrayed the humanist More not only as intolerant, but as a firm believer in religious persecution, while the Calvinist Foxe is shown to have had a deep faith in religious toleration which had direct practical implications for his actions. Thus Foxe actively intervened to try to prevent the execution of the Catholic Edmund Campion as well as five Dutch Anabaptists who had been sentenced to be burned for heresy in 1575.[4]

Similarly, the view that it was late sixteenth century scepticism which was responsible for promoting the move towards greater tolerance has also been seriously questioned recently. Thus a leading sceptic and irenicist in post-Reformation Europe, the Leiden professor, Justus Lipsius, has been shown to have been a firm supporter of religious persecution. According to Lipsius, religious pluriformity would lead to civil strife and encourage religious fanatics who in turn would destabilise society, something which had to be prevented at all costs. Only if repression turned out to be politically too costly should toleration be contemplated. In his work, *Politicorum libri sex*, published in 1589, Lipsius argued for the repression of religious dissenters, pointing out that they were to be shown no clemency, but to be burned, since it was better to sacrifice one member rather than risk the collapse of the whole commonwealth.[5]

Lipsius's advocacy of persecution was quickly attacked by the Spiritualist Dirck Coornhert who served as secretary to the States of Holland. Coornhert published an eloquent defence of religious toleration, based on his non-dogmatic piety and firm belief that ultimate truth could be found in the Scriptures. As opposed to Lipsius he was convinced that toleration would not create religious and by implication political strife. Instead, free access to the Gospel would eventually bring harmony and concord and serve to enhance political and social stability.[6]

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[2] See for instance Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1978), 247–50.

[3] See H. Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (London, 1967).

[4] G. R. Elton, 'Persecution and Toleration in the English Reformation', in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Persecution and Toleration* (Oxford, 1984), 163–87. For the role played by the exiled Dutch community in London in the conviction and execution of the Dutch Anabaptists in 1575, see also chapter 10 below.

[5] R. Tuck, 'Sceptism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', in S. Mendus (ed.), *Justifying Tolerance: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1988), 21–35, especially 21 and 26. See also R. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572–1651* (Cambridge, 1993), 58.

In some respects Coornhert differed in his religious views from other major advocates of toleration in the early modern period, but neither he nor those with whom he differed such as the Anabaptist-Spiritualist, David Joris, and the 'libertine' Reformed, Sebastian Castellio and Jacobus Acontius, can be described as sceptics.[7] All of them were firmly anchored in a non-dogmatic, Scripturally-based type of Christianity, which owed most of its inspiration to Christian humanists such as Erasmus and Protestant theologians such as Luther. Apart from Coornhert, whose writings were published in Holland during the 1590s, it is noteworthy that all the other authors, who at some time had found refuge in Basle, chose to publish their works on toleration in that city.[8] There was undoubtedly a concerted campaign for toleration in Basle around the middle of the sixteenth century as emphasised by Hans Guggisberg.[9] The role and significance of foreign immigrants in this campaign would appear to have been significant. Castellio, Joris, and briefly Acontius, had all settled in Basle together with other exiled advocates of some form of religious toleration, such as Bernardino Ochino and Mino Celsi.[10] For Protestant individuals like these, and others such as John Foxe,[11] the personal experience of persecution and exile may well have been a formative influence on their intellectual development. To try and take this analogy further, however, would seem dangerous. In fact, the attitude of the exiled Dutch and Walloon communities in London to religious toleration in the second half of the sixteenth century would seem to argue for a reverse relationship, namely one between persecution/exile and intolerance, as can be seen from the incidents discussed by Ole Peter Grell.[12]

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[6] See G. Güldner, *Das Toleranz-Problem in den Niederlanden im Ausgang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Lübeck, 1968), especially 66–90 and Tuck, 'Sceptism and Toleration'. For Coornhert, see also J. I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), 97–9 and 372–4.

[7] For Joris, see Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation* 1, 216–22; for Castellio, see chapter 9 below and F. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre*, 2 vols (Paris, 1892); for Jacobus Acontius, see E. R. Briggs, 'An Apostle of the Incomplete Reformation: Jacopo Aconcio (1500–1567)', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, 22 (1970–76), 481–95 and J. Jacquot, 'Acontius and the Progress of Tolerance in England', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 16 (1954), 192–206.

[8] S. Castellio, *De haereticis an sint persequendi* (Basle, 1554); D. Joris, *Christelijcke Waerschouwinghe aen allen Regenten unde Ouvericheden . . . : Datmen niemeant om sijn Gheloof en behoort te . . . vervolghen, veele min te dooden* (1554); J. Acontius, *Santanae Stratagemata* (Basle, 1565).

[9] See chapter 9 below.

[10] For Bernardino Ochino and Mino Celsi, see Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 1, 367–9 and 377–80. For Castellio, see chapter 9 below.

[11] For the significance of Foxe's personal experience in this respect, see Elton, 'Persecution and Toleration', 179.

Undoubtedly, toleration in the early modern period was either a loser's creed as argued by Andrew Pettegree or a belief only advocated by outsiders in both religious, political and social terms.[13] In this connection it is significant that many of those who otherwise naturally inclined towards some form of religious tolerance argued strongly against it for political reasons. The reason of state which made Justus Lipsius argue for persecution for the sake of unity also served to limit the toleration Hugo Grotius was prepared to allow his fellow citizens. Even while in exile, post-1618, Grotius continued to argue for a strong state church which in the interest of the commonwealth should control the religious life of the bulk of the nation. The only difference, but admittedly a significant one, between Grotius and his Calvinist opponents was that Grotius perceived his model for a national church to be inclusive and based on a minimum of doctrine, as opposed to the exclusive and dogmatic ideal of his Counter-Remonstrant opponents.[14]

The problem of how to reconcile the idea of some form of religious tolerance with the political realities of the day is potently demonstrated in the changing attitude to this issue by Martin Luther. In his early writings Luther had argued strongly against any use of force or direct intervention by lay authorities in matters of faith. Undoubtedly this was a typical position taken by most 'religious outsiders' in the sixteenth century. Thus, in 1523 when Luther published his now classic statement on religious toleration *On Secular Authority (Von Weltlicher Oberkeit)* he argued from a position of weakness, wanting to reform a Church which had already excommunicated him, while simultaneously being infused with religious optimism, believing that a reformation would quickly follow upon unadulterated Scripture being made available to the laity through vernacular preaching and texts. Only God could generate true, evangelical faith in man and accordingly:

> Each must decide at his own peril what he is to believe, and must see to it that he believes rightly. Other people cannot go to heaven or hell on my behalf, or open or close (the gates to either) for me. And just as little can they believe or not believe on my behalf, or force my faith or unbelief. How he believes is a matter for each individual's conscience, and this does not diminish (the authority of) secular governments. They ought therefore to content themselves with attending to their own business, and allow people to believe what they can, and what they want, and they must use no coercion in this matter against anyone.[15]

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[12] See chapter 10 below.

[13] See chapter 11 below.

[14] See Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 499–505.

[15] The translation used here is that of Harro Höpfl (ed.), *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge, 1991), 3–43, see especially 25. For the original German text, see O. Clemen (ed.), *Luthers Werke in Auswahl* (Berlin, 1967), 2, 360–94.

Luther went on to point out that lay authorities should under no circumstances try to fight heresy with the sword. This was a matter solely for the Word of God. To use force in matters of faith would according to Luther only make matters worse.[16]

> For people take it for granted that force is not being used in the cause of right, and that those who use it are acting unjustly, precisely because they are acting without God's Word and because they cannot think of any other way of furthering their aims except by mere force, like animals that have no use of reason. Even in secular matters force cannot be used unless guilt has first been established by reference to the law. And it is all the more impossible to use force without right and God's Word in such high spiritual matters (as heresy).[17]

A couple of years later, however, social, political and religious realities forced Luther to limit his original tolerant stance, not least because of the increasingly serious challenge mounted by the more radical reformers such as Müntzer and Karlstadt and their growing number of followers and the outbreak of the Peasants' War in Germany in 1524. These experiences led Luther to believe that his rigid distinction between the two kingdoms – the spiritual and the temporal – could not be upheld in extreme cases. Instead, lay authority had an obligation to step in to prevent blasphemy, an act which according to Luther could have serious implications for the peace and stability of society in general. Similarly, he expected lay authority to take action against sedition; in both cases civil authority had an obligation to intervene against 'outward' manifestations of false belief to prevent civil disorder and protect the new evangelical churches. By establishing these categories Luther was able to justify suppression of the mass and persecution of Anabaptists, while he increasingly sought to encourage the princes to intervene in order to protect and promote the evangelical cause.[18] Within less than a decade Luther had moved from an outsider's position, hoping and wanting to reform the whole Church to that of an insider who sought to protect and secure the existence of the Protestant churches already established. Political considerations had forced him to modify his theology on this point. In other words, the reason of state which later determined the views on toleration of Justus

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[16] For Luther's attitude to toleration, see W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Sussex, 1984), 155–62. I should however emphasize that I disagree with Cargill Thompson's conclusion that Luther's support for toleration in the early 1520s was essentially based on negative principles, namely that repression was counterproductive. I think Luther's statement that 'the faith is free and no one can be compelled to believe' is a positive belief in freedom of conscience and as such an essential part of his theology of faith and grace.

[17] See Höpfl, *Luther and Calvin*, 30–1.

[18] For this development, see Cargill Thompson, *Political Thought*, 158–62 and Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 1, 152–64. See also C. Hinrichs, *Luther und Müntzer ihre Auseinandersetzung über Obrigkeit und Widerstandsrecht* (Berlin, 1962).

Lipsius and Hugo Grotius also served to change the views of Luther more than half a century earlier. However, Luther's original, more tolerant views from the early 1520s found an extra lease of life when they were taken over by Sebastian Castellio, who included a translation of a substantial part of Luther's tract, *On Secular Authority*, in his, *De Haereticis an sint persequendi* . . . (1554).[19] Thus, it was not only the ideas of Erasmus who inspired the writings of Castellio and others towards the middle of the sixteenth century. Moreover, the debate on freedom of conscience in France between 1559 and 1561, which according to Philip Benedict was so innovative, undoubtedly had roots in the writings of Luther and Erasmus from the beginning of the century.[20]

It is significant that most, if not all, of this period's writers on toleration, at least until the third decade of the seventeenth century, only argued for freedom of conscience and occasionally for some limited freedom of worship out of the conviction that this tolerance would eventually serve to establish true peace and concord. For all of them religious diversity was nothing positive in itself and was only to be tolerated in the short run, in order that true faith might eventually be victorious. This concord could be based on a limited dogmatic formula as was the case for Castellio and Acontius, or be founded on the firm belief that everyone would eventually see the light through evangelical instruction and preaching, as was the case for Luther until 1525.

It was, however, not until the publication of the writings of Dutch Remonstrants, such as Johannes Uyttenbogaert and Simon Episcopius who had found themselves marginalised after their Arminian theology had been rejected at the Synod of Dort in 1618 that this inherently negative view of religious diversity changed. Confronted with the intolerance of their victorious Counter-Remonstrant opponents, the leading Remonstrant theologians became forceful promoters of religious toleration. Considering the ruthlessness with which they had pursued their original political advantage in the years before the Synod of Dort and suppressed their Calvinist opponents, as pointed out by Andrew Pettegree, this was a significant transformation.[21] According to Uyttenbogaert and Episcopius religious persecution was detrimental not only to human freedom but also to economic prosperity.

Episcopius developed his view on toleration from the principles of his theology. In two tracts from the late 1620s *Vrye Godes-dienst* (1627) and *Apologia pro Remonstrantium* (1629) he pointed out that most theological disputes were about adiaphora, non-essential questions, for which no consensus was needed. A wide variety of views could, according to Episcopius, be deducted from Scripture. Accordingly diversity of belief was a positive thing which might contribute to greater insight and strengthen true faith.

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[19] Höpfl, *Luther and Calvin*, xi and xxiv–xxv.

[20] See chapter 5 below.

[21] See chapter 11 below.

However, of greater significance were Episcopius's and Uyttenbogaert's economic and political arguments in favour of toleration. They pointed to the severe recession which had affected the provinces of Holland and Zeeland in particular during the 1620s as indisputable evidence of the damage caused by religious persecution. In this instance it was seen to have been caused by the repression of Arminian merchants and craftsmen, many of whom had chosen to emigrate. Instead, Episcopius and Uyttenbogaert argued that religious toleration, even of Catholics, whom many considered to be potentially dangerous to the Republic, would benefit society economically as well as politically.[22] Evidently where 'reason of state' had hitherto provided ample justification for repression, by the third decade of the seventeenth century predominantly economic considerations had caused some writers to reverse such arguments, providing a strong political rationale for religious toleration.

By then the practical experience of successful and peaceful co-existence of several confessions within a number of cities would have provided considerable support for this change in political thinking. Excluded from the *cuius regio eius religio* clause of the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 the imperial cities had been left to pursue a policy of *pax et concordia* in the interest of trade and prosperity which had characterised most of them since the late medieval period,[23] The result had been that a peaceful bi-confessionalism had been allowed to develop in several imperial cities in Swabia, such as Ulm, Ravensburg and Augsburg. Even in confessionally Lutheran cities, such as Nuremberg and Frankfurt-on-Main, both amongst the most prosperous mercantile centres of the Empire, a pluriformity of confessions were quietly 'tolerated' or allowed to exist. In fact, the magistrates of both these cities actively encouraged exiled Calvinist merchants and artisans from the southern Netherlands to settle during the second half of the sixteenth century, in the case of Nuremberg the immigrants were offered economic inducements, such as tax exemption.[24]

Further evidence of this change in contemporary political and economic thinking, based on 'reason of state', with regard to religious tolerance can be seen in the number of foundations of new cities in the German-speaking world offering religious toleration, including freedom of worship, to prospective settlers, which came into existence from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards. Among the first was Frankenthal in the Palatinate which in 1562, when the country turned Reformed, among others attracted a considerable number of Dutch and Walloon immigrants who had previously settled in Frankfurt-on-Main; Neu-Hanau, which was founded in 1595 in order to attract many of the Calvinist refugees who had recently settled in Frankfurt-on-Main where the city's Lutheran clergy had become increasingly antagonistic towards the growing number of foreign residents within its walls; or the two new cities Altona and Glückstadt founded in 1602 and 1617 in order to attract some if not all of the growing number of Reformed, Mennonite refugees or Jews who had settled in Lutheran Hamburg where the toleration granted them was often tentative at best due to the hostility of the city's Lutheran clergy.[25]

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[22] Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 502–3; see also D. Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration: A Study of the Disputes in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650* (Cambridge, 1938), 102–7.

[23] See M. Heckel, *Deutschland im konfessionellen Zeitalter, Deutsche Geschichte 5* (Göttingen, 1983), 33–99.

[24] R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* (London, 1989), 73–88; for Nürnberg, see G. Pfeiffer, *Nürnberg – Geschichte einer europäischen Stadt* (Munich, 1971) and H. Neiddiger, 'Die Entstehung der evangelischer-reformierten Gemeinde in Nürnberg als rechtsgeschichtliches Problem', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, 43 (1952), 225–340; for Frankfurt, see A. Dietz, *Frankfurter Handelsgeschichte*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt, 1910–25).

A similar mercantilist 'reason of state' lies behind the actions of the government of Elizabeth I of England. It was economic not religious considerations which moved Elizabeth and her chief adviser and Secretary of State, William Cecil, to renew the charter of the Dutch and Walloon Reformed communities in London in 1560. They had no need of a model Protestant congregation, as had been the case ten years earlier in the reign of Edward VI.[26] However, even in 1550 different motives were at play among the foreign communities's English supporters, as Diarmaid MacCullogh demonstrates in the case of Archbishop Cranmer. Cranmer's motive for backing the strangers was not rooted in theological agreement with them, but was based on his ambition to achieve concord and toleration within Protestantism through dialogue and persuasion.[27]

Elizabeth was not the only European ruler who pursued such policies around 1560. One of her suitors, Erik XIV of Sweden, also tried to encourage Reformed refugees to settle in his kingdom. In his case the role of his Huguenot advisors and Reformed tutors may well have caused him to undertake what eventually proved an unsuccessful attempt to encourage Reformed immigration into Sweden.[28]

In the case of France, where bi-confessionalism was legally guaranteed by the Edict of St Germain in 1592, the toleration introduced was the consequence of the growing political and popular strength of the Reformed religion. As such it was in tune with the political thinking of Justus Lipsius and others who argued that tolerance should only be granted as a temporary, political measure of containment. As Philip Benedict points out, such an interpretation explains the many shifts of peaceful co-existence between Reformed and Catholics interchanged with periods of religious wars and bloody persecution which eventually led to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.[29]

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[25] Hsia, *Social Discipline*, 85–8, for Hamburg, see J. Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg 1529–1819* (Cambridge, 1985).

[26] See O. P. Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London* (Leiden, 1989), 10–11.

[27] See chapter 12 below.

[28] See chapter 10 below.

As an example of religious toleration being granted as a purely political concession developments in France bear many similarities to events in Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland, in spite of the obvious political, economic and social differences, not to mention the significant variations in chronology. Thus Jaroslav Pánek emphasises that the *Compacta of Jihlava* in 1436, which provided the legal framework for bi-confessionalism in Bohemia and Moravia, granting freedom of conscience and worship to both Catholics and Hussites/Utraquists, was a purely political concession. The toleration granted was a natural consequence of the political and social strength of Utraquism. Similarly, it is noteworthy that the more radical Bohemian Brethren or Unity of Brethren remained outlawed until 1609 when the charter which legalised the Bohemian Confession was issued. By then, however, active persecution of the Brethren was more or less non-existent due to the significant support they had been able to mobilise among the Estates since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Despite religious tolerance and pluriformity being firmly ensconced in Bohemia and Moravia well before the advent of the Reformation, it was neither unlimited nor secure but always remained dependent on political factors.[30]

Similarly, in the case of Hungary in the sixteenth century Katalin Péter underlines the delicate political balance between rulers and Estates, which made it possible for individual nobles and cities to pursue a policy of toleration of evangelical preachers and communities via their roles as patrons of the parishes and churches on their estates. This policy had already commenced well before the Reformation in order to accommodate subjects of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, Péter, while rejecting the traditional view within Hungarian historiography that the Turks were more positively inclined towards Protestantism than Catholicism, points to the indirect positive effects the Ottoman threat had for Protestantism in Hungary, in effect making it difficult, if not impossible, for the country's secular rulers to take action against their evangelically inclined subjects, had they wished to do so.[31]

Likewise, religious toleration in Poland developed along lines which had already been introduced by the monarchy in the fifteenth century in order to secure the integration of feudal elites from Catholic as well as Orthodox areas. Furthermore, the success and failure of Protestantism in Poland depended totally on the degree of toleration the magnates who supported the new faith were able to extract from the country's rulers. Lack of institutional and political power towards the end of the sixteenth century saw Protestantism in retreat in most rural areas and smaller towns, while the growing confessionalisation of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries eventually caused a total break-down of the religious co-existence and practical tolerance between Catholics, Reformed and Lutherans in the major towns such as Danzig. Here German-speaking Lutheranism came to dominate with the resulting loss of a religious tolerance which had been based on an older socially and politically determined tradition of *pax et concordia*, as pointed out by Michael Müller.[32]

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[29] See chapter 5 below.
[30] See chapter 14 below.
[31] See chapter 15 below.

Securing peace and co-existence in the local community had been of paramount importance to most city magistracies long before the Reformation, as emphasised in several of the chapters in this volume such as those by Lorna Abray, Hans Guggisberg, Bruce Gordon and Bob Scribner.[33] However, the need to establish religious concord added a new and difficult dimension in the Reformation period to this traditional area of magisterial concern; and it is noteworthy that where and when some form of religious toleration was granted, it was never offered as a policy of choice but as a pragmatic, 'politique' solution, as was the case in Erfurt and Strassburg.

In this connection the legal context often proved important. The significance of the rule of law in both secular and ecclesiastical matters, as emphasised by Luther in 1523, was of the highest importance in guaranteeing some form of tolerance in a number of places, even in times of crisis, as can be seen from the chapters of Heiko Oberman and Philip Benedict.[34] However, even if the law appears to have been applied and to have protected heterodox individuals and groups in certain areas at certain times, it may not have been as decisive in securing and promoting religious toleration in the longer term as argued by some contributors to this volume. The examples of Basle and the Dutch Republic, two of the most successful cases of peaceful co-existence between religiously heterodox groups in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, owe little or nothing to the legal protection provided. Instead, a mixture of the medieval ambition to secure *pax et concordia*, political pragmatism, and what Bob Scribner has termed 'the tolerance of practical rationality' was what mattered.

In a period where politics and religion were closely interwoven some groups found toleration more difficult to come by than others. This was certainly the case for the Anabaptists who after the 'Kingdom of Münster' found themselves persecuted and marginalised in most of Europe throughout the sixteenth century. Likewise, the strong political connotations of Catholicism in Britain and the United Provinces in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth excluded Catholics, often perceived as a papal/Spanish fifth column, from both the official and practical toleration accorded to other Christian denominations in these countries, as can be seen from the chapters by Norah Carlin and Andrew Pettegree.[35]

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[32] See Müller, *Zweite Reformation und städtische Autonomie im Königlichen Preussen: Danzig, Elbing und Thorn in der Epoche der Konfessionalisierung 1557–1660* (forthcoming) and chapter 16 below.

[33] See chapters 3, 6, 8 and 9 below.

[34] See chapters 2 and 5 below.

The aggressive religious polemic which characterised the Reformation period should not always be taken at face value, as pointed out by Euan Cameron with regard to the inter-Protestant confessional divisions during the second half of the sixteenth century. Bitter confessional strife proved no barrier to Protestant solidarity when faced with a common enemy such as the Catholic Church. Cameron finds proof for this interpretation in the non-confessional attitude to the education of Protestant ministers, many of whom attended universities which differed confessionally from the creed of their own region or country. Likewise, he finds considerable and often contradictionary differences between the dogmatic and historical writings of Reformed and Lutheran clergy, the latter demonstrating a far more accommodating attitude to fellow-Protestants than the former. Bob Scribner, on the other hand, sees the negative influence of the aggressive polemical discourse of the reformers as contributing significantly in arousing popular religious passion and violence, causing the 'virus of intolerance and persecution' to be kept alive.[36]

Apart from William Monter's chapter on the heresy executions in Reformation Europe, which highlights the years between 1520 and 1560/5 as the period of persecution and repression par excellence, and thus indirectly supports the traditional view of toleration as growing gradually between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, interrupted only by an interlude of extreme intolerance during the first three or four decades of the Reformation, most of the chapters in this volume have followed the line taken by Heiko Oberman, offering a revisionist interpretation of religious toleration in this period. This places toleration and persecution firmly in the proper local, social, religious and political context. Consequently, a far less homogeneous and less idealistic picture, of how tolerant European societies were during the reformation periode, emerges in chronological, as well as, geographical terms.

Most of the contributors to this volume will undoubtedly find it difficult to accept without qualifications the liberal tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which has portrayed the advent of Protestantism as a major step towards creating the tolerant society it cherished. Thus, Elton's statement from 1984, that Protestantism 'did not preclude genuine toleration for varieties of the faith, whereas the attitude of Catholics did',[37] will only be accepted with modifications by most of the present contributors. However, the example of cities such as Strassburg and Basle would indicate that Protestant authorities were more likely to grant freedom of belief to individuals than were their Catholic counterparts. But perhaps the significance of the Reformation for religious toleration does not lie primarily in its insistence on the right of individuals to exercise private judgement, an ideal which, after all, belongs to the intellectual baggage of nineteenth-century rationalists such as Lecky,[38] but in its questioning of authority and blind obedience.

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[35] See chapters 11 and 13 below.

[36] See chapters 3 and 7 below.

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[37] Elton, 'Persecution and Toleration', 185.

[38] W. E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols. (London, 1865).