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978-1-107-08843-6 — Religious War and Religious Peace in Early Modern Europe

Wayne P. Te Brake

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## Religious War and Religious Peace in Early Modern Europe

*Religious War and Religious Peace in Early Modern Europe* presents a novel account of the origins of religious pluralism in Europe. Combining comparative historical analysis with contentious political analysis, it surveys six clusters of increasingly destructive religious war between 1529 and 1651, analyzes the diverse settlements that brought these wars to an end, and describes the complex religious peace that emerged from two centuries of experimentation in accommodating religious differences. Rejecting the older authoritarian interpretations of the age of religious wars, the author uses traditional documentary sources as well as photographic evidence to show how a broad range of Europeans – from authoritative elites to a colorful array of religious “dissenters” – replaced the cultural “unity and purity” of late-medieval Christendom with a variable and durable pattern of religious diversity, deeply embedded in political, legal, and cultural institutions.

Wayne P. Te Brake is Professor of History Emeritus at Purchase College, SUNY, and the author of *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500–1700*.

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*Purchase College, SUNY*



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*In memory of David D. Bien and Charles Tilly*

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## Preface

This work presents a novel account of religious war, religious peace, and the origins of religious pluralism in Europe. Combining comparative historical analysis with contentious political analysis, I survey the history of six clusters of increasingly destructive religious war between 1529 and 1651, analyze the very diverse settlements that eventually brought each of these wars to an end, and describe the complex religious peace that emerged from two centuries of experimentation in accommodating religious differences. Rejecting the older authoritarian interpretations of the age of religious wars, this work uses traditional documentary sources as well as photographic evidence to show how a broad range of European political actors – from authoritative elites to a colorful array of religious “dissenters” – replaced the cultural “unity and purity” of late-medieval Christendom with a variable and durable pattern of peaceful religious coexistence, deeply embedded in political, legal, and cultural institutions. I conclude with some thoughts on how we might envision and work for religious peace in our own age of religious wars.

A book this ambitious takes a very long time to research and write, and I can well imagine that it will not be easy for nonexperts to read. Thus at the end of my long journey, I am pleased both to acknowledge the many people and institutions that have helped me on my way and to offer some simple advice to readers on how to approach the consumption of this book. The latter may seem gratuitous to my scholarly peers, but I have learned from my students, some of whom valiantly read these chapters when they were still in process, that with a little help, those who are not burdened by graduate training and scholarly aspirations can find something useful in my often dense prose. Indeed, it is my students at Purchase College whom I would like to thank first of all for their patience, hard work, and creativity, which helped me enormously in shaping this book.

Generous grants from two foundations encouraged me to ask bold questions about Europe’s religious wars and their aftermath. A research grant from the

Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation (1995–1996) made it possible for me to explore the relationship between religious solidarity, violence, and large-scale political change and to complete a book on popular politics and state formation. Between 1999 and 2004, a series of exploratory and project grants from the Ford Foundation allowed me to organize an international collaboration on the theme of accommodating religious differences and to begin collecting visual and photographic evidence of peaceful religious coexistence in the most unlikely places. The collaboration took the form of a preliminary conference in 2000 at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, at Columbia University, followed by a much larger conference in 2001 at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, which confirmed for me that peaceful religious coexistence was the rule, rather than the exception, in post-Reformation Europe. I am deeply indebted to my program officer at the Ford Foundation, Dr. Constance H. Buchanan, who provided precious financing as well as a dynamic intellectual community among her grantees, which proved to be critically important in how the project developed. I am also very grateful to the Italian Academy and Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) for providing both conference facilities and a stimulating intellectual home away from home for extended periods of time.

For thirty-six years, Purchase College, which provides an extraordinary combination of liberal arts education and professional arts education within the State University of New York, provided me with an institutional context in which I could be myself and go my own way as a scholar, without disciplinary or departmental constraints. My colleagues in the School of Humanities were consistently indulgent of my requests for research leaves of absence, and in the later stages of this project, the college provided critical support in the form of the Kempner Distinguished Professorship, which provided a research stipend, and two paid research leaves toward the end of my teaching career. My *compagnon* in European history, Geoffrey Field, was not only the ideal colleague but an inspiration. I only wish that my colleague Robert M. Stein, who also defied disciplinary boundaries and helped me in so many ways, could have seen me bring this project to completion.

A very large number of scholars, most of whom I do not know personally, have made the completion of this broadly comparative book possible; their names populate the many footnotes and the large bibliography. I only hope I have not left anyone out! Several scholars deserve special mention, however. Keith Luria, Randolph Head, Karen Barkey, and Darwin Stapleton have read all or parts of the manuscript, offering sage intellectual advice as well as saving me from embarrassing errors; the mistakes that remain are all mine! My dear friend, Maxine Gaddis, will not claim to be a scholar, but she plowed through the manuscript for me nevertheless, offering valuable warnings and suggestions for improving its clarity along the way. My brother Bill, who is also a specialist on the Low Countries, was not as involved in this book as he was in its

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predecessors, but he knows his support and advice have always been treasured. Two anonymous scholars, who evaluated my book proposal for Cambridge University Press, offered extraordinarily helpful suggestions for the improvement of the book, for which I am very grateful; they may also be said to be responsible for increasing the size of the text by fifty percent and more than tripling the number of photographs. My commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press, Lewis Bateman, announced at a very early date that he would like to publish my book, and he was true to his word. That kind of confidence and support is a scholar's dream come true!

Two extraordinary scholars, teachers, and mentors were crucial to the course of my life as a historian: David D. Bien (1930–2015) and Charles Tilly (1929–2008). Together, they sponsored my work as a graduate student at The University of Michigan in a field of specialization that neither knew very much about; in the process, they showed me how to ask and answer important questions, comparatively and historically, without getting hopelessly entangled in the intellectual politics of received traditions. And while I could never come close to matching the precision of David's scholarship or the enormous breadth of Chuck's knowledge and analysis, their intellectual fingerprints are all over this work. It is my fond hope that both of them would have found it "interesting" and been proud of the fact that I finally got it done. For my part, I am proud to dedicate it to their memory.

My family – my wife, Nelva Lagerwey; our grown children, Martin, Maria, and Nicholas; and now our first grandchildren, Carter and Jenna – have, in various configurations, always been my anchor, both in my private and in my professional life. They have put up with me, nursed me through some significant challenges, and always brought me immense joy. I suppose I could have dedicated this work to them, but I think they will understand the choice I made; besides, they got the last one.

\* \* \* \*

And now some advice for the reader. I have always taught my undergraduates that reading an academic book like this one requires a strategy – one that doesn't necessarily involve reading every word from the beginning to the end. In general, one should start with the introduction and then turn to the conclusion for the simple reason that academics are not very good at alerting their readers to where the book will actually take them; how one then reads what comes in between depends on one's purpose, interests, and background. In this case – a book aimed at multiple audiences – the strategic choices are especially important.

In the body of this work, I am principally concerned with three problems: (1) How did Europe's religious wars start, and how did they develop over time? (2) How did the wars end, and what did their settlements look like? (3) What did religious peace actually look like, and how did it come into being? I try to answer each of these questions in each of the three parts of the book, which

cover, roughly, the first half of the sixteenth century, the second half of the sixteenth century, and the seventeenth century, respectively. Altogether, the central chapters of the book tell a story of dramatic cultural change, account for similarities and differences that were evident in the various cases that are discussed, and suggest “who done it,” not in the sense of a mystery with a surprise ending (go ahead and read the conclusion early on), but in the deliberate identification of the kinds of historical actors, many of whom remain nameless, who made the story unfold the way it did.

In order not to get lost in the historical weeds, I encourage readers to skip ahead or around if the story or analysis gets too dense at times; after all, one can read beginnings and endings of particular chapters just as one reads the beginnings and endings of books. For those who are particularly interested in the religious wars and how they changed over time, Chapters 2, 5, and 9 will be most important; those who are interested in military history, as such, will be disappointed because the emphasis here is on how the wars started and ended and not on how they were prosecuted. For those who are specifically interested in how wars end and what successful settlements look like, Chapters 3, 6, 7, and 10 will be most interesting; those who are interested in the peace-negotiation process, as such, will be disappointed because the emphasis here is on the outcome or product of negotiations, broadly defined as both formal and informal, lasting and ephemeral.

Those who are interested in the historical experiences of particular polities or places or in specific conflicts or peace agreements can use the index to read these chapters selectively. Those who are interested in how specific, recurrent mechanisms combine differently to produce different kinds of wars or peace settlements can also use the index to read selectively. Throughout the text and, by extension, in the index, I have italicized the various mechanisms that recurrently combined to produce politically salient religious identities, religious conflicts (including wars), and peace settlements of various kinds; I have done the same with the mechanisms that account for the survival of religious dissenters under active repression.

My hope is that all readers will be especially interested in my description and account of the variant forms of peaceful religious coexistence that emerged during these two centuries of religious controversy and conflict and constituted a durable and pervasive religious peace in Europe north of the Alps and Pyrenees. In order to envision a more peaceful world for ourselves, I believe that we need to develop a more realistic – that is, historically informed – understanding of what religious peace actually looks like. In this regard, Chapters 4, 8, 11, and 12 are most important, and while I would like to think that all the historical details are important, even these chapters can be read selectively, using the index to focus on the nature of religious peace in particular polities or places, or to explore the prevalence of the variant forms of religious coexistence. In both the text and the index, I have used **boldface** to highlight the principal forms of religious coexistence that were widely dispersed throughout Europe.

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In some sense, I have lived and wrestled with the questions that inform this book my whole life. I distinctly remember being haunted as a teenager, growing up in a Dutch Calvinist household in rural Minnesota, by the words of Luke 19:42: “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes.” What *are* the things that make for peace, and why should they be *hidden*? Isn’t it our responsibility to seek them out and make them visible? As a young adult at Calvin College, I was confronted by the moral ambiguity and the grim reality of the Vietnam War; despite the bellicose example of my Dutch forebears, I decided to become a conscientious objector, having reached the conclusion, under the pressure of the draft, that in our time, war is the problem, not the solution to our problems. As a graduate student, I began a career-long study of the role of violence, in its various collective forms, in the process of political and social change – first in the age of democratic revolutions, then in the process of early modern state formation, and now in the cultural transformations of Reformation and post-Reformation Europe. At the end of this journey, then, all I can do – having chosen to approach the problems of our world, not as an activist, but as a teacher and a writer – is offer this work to you, the reader, in the hope that it will encourage you to question the facile association of “religious diversity” with “disorder” and “violence” and to envision a more peaceful future.

*Ossining, New York  
November 2015*