

**Éric Suire, Catholiques, protestants, minorités religieuses en Europe (1500–1700), Bordeaux (Presses universitaires de Bordeaux) 2024, 294 p., ISBN 979-1030010503, EUR 25,00.**

rezensiert von | compte rendu rédigé par  
**Marc R. Forster, Connecticut**

Éric Suire's study of religious developments in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provides an excellent overview of French language historiography in this field. The vast majority of works cited are in French, with some English language works and a smattering of studies in Italian, Spanish, and German. The focus on French works is in many ways salutary, since this book illuminates the originality, variety, and high quality of current French scholarship. Suire has written an overview of religion in this period, but many of the 19 chapters go into more depth on particular subjects, from the governance of the Papal States, to the conversion of Henry IV, and the experience of »renegades« and others living in the borderlands between Christianity and Islam. The focus is on Western Europe, especially France, Spain, and Italy. Eastern Europe and Scandinavia are not really discussed. A strength of the book is that Suire does not try to cover every subject and every region, but rather focuses on areas where there have been important recent studies.

The book is organized in five larger sections of three to five chapters each. The structure is loosely chronological. The first two sections examine the Protestant Reformation and the creation of a religiously divided Europe. The third section contains three chapters about Rome as the capital of the Catholic world. Part Four examines developments in France, England, and Spain, particularly in the seventeenth century. Part Five is entitled »Particularisms, dissidences, and minority groups«. This last section is quite diverse, examining Gallicanism, divisions within Catholicism, coexistence in Christian communities, the experiences of Muslims and Jews, and the »porousness of religious frontiers«. This last section highlights one of the overarching themes of Suire's study, that despite growing religious divisions, coexistence and toleration were common in everyday life, especially by the later seventeenth century.

This theme is found in Chapter 17, which looks at religious coexistence among Christians, with a focus on the Holy Roman Empire, the United Provinces, and England. Suire is correct about the decline of confessional conflict after the Thirty Years' War in the German lands, but here his limited use of non-French literature misses the extensive English and German language scholarship on this subject, although he does cite the excellent study of Augsburg by Étienne François from 1993. The section on England makes for an important argument that religious toleration grew there after the Restoration, but with severe limits on Catholic rights.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Confessional unity was in theory almost universal in Europe in the seventeenth century, yet Suire shows how on the ground religious diversity both persisted, for example in France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), or grew, as it did in Dutch and German cities. Suire also engages this theme in Chapter 18, about non-Christian minorities. Here the story seems less encouraging. Toleration of the Muslim minority in Spain gave way to persecution and expulsion in the early seventeenth century. The story of the Jewish communities of Italy, well researched in recent years, is one of the forced concentrations of the Jewish population in urban ghettos, with Venice and Rome as the models, and the end of Jewish life in the countryside and small towns. Suire is right to emphasize the diversity of Jewish life in Western Europe, from the small and impoverished (and barely tolerated) rural and small-town communities in Germany, to the wealthy Jewish merchants of Amsterdam. Here Suire's geographical choice limit his study, since the largest and most important Jewish communities in Europe were in Poland and Russia and in the Ottoman Empire and those communities are not discussed here.

Suire's book really shines when he engages particular issues that are the focus of French historiography. In Chapter 8, »Restoring the peace. The conversion of King Henry IV«, Suire argues persuasively that Henry understood exactly what he was doing when he took the »perilous leap« to convert to Catholicism in 1593. He examines the historiographical debates around the »sincerity« of Henry's conversion and how important political (and other »non-religious«) factors were in this decision. Quoting the historian Christian Desplat, Suire says that Henry was »neither a bigot nor a hypocrite«. Suire goes on to argue:

»Henry IV was above all the king of religious and political modernity. If he was not the precursor of *laïcité* as we conceive of it today, he knew, as a man and as sovereign, how to put into practice the disassociation of the public forum from the private forum in the matter of the freedom of conscience. His assassination plunged the French into disarray, arousing the fear of a return to the religious conflicts that had ravaged the kingdom for 40 years« (119).

This very French discussion, with its references to the hotly debated principle of *laïcité* – the exclusion of religion from the public sphere, a bedrock idea of Republican France – draws on a deep and sophisticated historiography of the period. On the one hand, the fact that Suire dedicates three chapters to the Papacy and Rome seems excessive. On the other hand, these chapters are another example of the kind of nuanced history this book offers. Chapter 9, on the Papacy itself, traces the complex evolution of the institution. Individual popes are given some significance, but this chapter is about the ways the institution of the Papacy evolved, gaining leadership of the wider Church in the sixteenth century, only to retrench as the ruler of an Italian state in the seventeenth century. One important finding here is that the cultural politics of the Popes in the aftermath of the Sack of 1527 were probably



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

more influential across Europe than political maneuvering or ecclesiastical reforms. Chapter 10 is about the governance of the Papal States. Governance practices there had a great influence over the rest of Italy, but Suire also points to the complexity of relations between the Papal government and local communities. Finally, Chapter 11 looks at how pilgrimage worked in Rome itself. Several studies have examined the origins of pilgrims and above all their experiences in Rome itself. Pilgrims stayed for weeks in Rome and an infrastructure of hostels and ways of feeding people developed in the city. Suire shows how meaningful these pilgrimages were for believers and how important they were for the reputation of the Papacy. Interestingly, more than a few pilgrims chose to stay on in Rome, making the city more diverse and dynamic than many other places in Europe.

*Catholiques, protestants, minorités religieuses en Europe (1500-1700)* provides a valuable survey of contemporary historiography in French. The book also has a strong narrative line, tracing the breakdown of Christian unity in the sixteenth century, with the accompanying theological and political conflicts, followed by the gradual decline of religious conflict and tension in the seventeenth century. Suire presents those trends, while insisting on the complexities and nuances within wider developments.



Herausgegeben vom Deutschen  
Historischen Institut Paris |  
publiée par l'Institut historique  
allemand



Publiziert unter | publiée sous  
[CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)