



Kaspar von Greyerz, Manfred Jakobowski-Tiessen, Thomas Kaufmann, Hartmut Lehmann. *Interkonfessionalität - Transkonfessionalität - binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität: Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese.* Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003. 290 S. ISBN 978-3-579-01760-0.

Reviewed by Marc R. Forster (Department of History, Connecticut College)

Published on H-German (May, 2005)

Confessionalization and Everyday Life

This collection of essays comes out of a 2000 conference at the Max Planck Institut für Geschichte and contains the contributions of a group of younger German-speaking scholars to the ongoing discussion of the “confessionalization thesis,” originally popularized by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard. As the foreword to the volume states, this volume deserves a place alongside the three large volumes that came out of a series of conferences on confessionalization sponsored by the Verein für Reformationsgeschichte in 1986, 1992, and 1995. This collection is especially valuable since it contains essays from younger scholars who did not participate in those earlier conferences and because a number of the essays make important methodological and theoretical critiques of confessionalization.

The debate over the confessionalization thesis—which states that confessional identity in Germany is primarily the result of a program by the state and church to enforce religious and political unity through the application of social discipline—has grown somewhat stagnant in the last decade. Both proponents and opponents of the thesis have begun to repeat the same arguments, often without deploying new research or new perspectives. Some of the essays in this volume also rework this same old terrain. The better ones, however, deploy the perspectives of *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) and micro-history in fruitful ways. Despite modest claims by the authors, most of the essays provide telling critiques of the broad claims of the proponents of the confessional-

ization thesis.

The somewhat ponderous title illustrates the main theme of the book. Confessional boundaries in early modern Germany were remarkably porous and individuals transgressed them frequently. Essays on military communities, religious indifference, conversion, and *multiple* conversion all illustrate how people crossed boundaries. Many of the essays contained in this volume are heavy on theoretical elaborations and historiographical excursions, which are designed to explain the differences between, for example, “interconfessionalism” and “transconfessionalism.” Such exercises are sometimes interesting, often less than original, and frequently repetitive.

On the other hand, some of the concrete examples provide valuable new perspectives. Nicole Grochowina’s essay “The Boundaries of Confessionalization—Dissidents and Confessional Indifference in East Frisia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” demonstrates that people in this part of Germany had multiple religious options, including the option to behave indifferently toward official religion. The public presence of dissident groups, especially the Anabaptists, left a great deal of space in Ostfriesland for individuals to make a range of religious choices. Furthermore, even in the seventeenth century there was considerable confusion about both the theology and practice of communion, despite official efforts to make communion a defining moment in the pub-

lic demonstration of confessional loyalty. In East Frisia, Grochowina concludes, confessionalization had a limited impact on the population at large.

Frauke Volland discusses conversion and “social drama.” This essay focuses on several conversions from the Reformed religion to Catholicism in the 1660s in the Thurgau region of northern Switzerland. Volland shows that some members of the social elite converted for political reasons, as did the wealthy merchant Peter Kappeler in 1662. As a Catholic, Kappeler was able to gain some important offices in this confessionally mixed region. In some ways, crossing the confessional boundary was easy for Kappeler; in other ways, as Volland emphasizes, the consequences of this conversion were difficult. In Kappeler’s case, the “social drama” occurred when his wife left him and began a lawsuit aimed at recovering her dowry. The conversion of Josua Schlatter to Catholicism in 1666 led to an even wider drama. His Reformed father disinherited him, his wife left him, taking their daughters with her, and one of his brothers tried to take his son away from him as well. Josua appeared to have suffered from this break with his family, seeking throughout his life to restore relations with various relatives. Volland’s point is that, on the one hand, conversion was neither uncommon, nor particularly difficult, but on the other hand the consequences for individuals could be far-reaching. Furthermore, to really understand the way in which the “invisible frontier,” the confessional boundary that ran through the German-speaking lands, functioned, one must study these small-scale individual and family dramas.

Ralf Pr  ve’s essay on “military communities” shows one of the first places in early modern society where confessional distinctions began to lose their importance. Pr  ve shows that the “internal logic” of the military system, which emphasized rationality in creating the most effective military force, led quickly to religious toleration. Both the mercenary armies of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries and the standing

armies of the period after 1650 were religiously mixed. Furthermore, the practice of quartering armies among civilians meant further religious mixing. Pr  ve has studied the day-to-day experience of the 600-man garrison of the Lutheran town of G  ttingen (population. c. 5,000) in the first half of the eighteenth century. This force was about 30 percent Catholic, 4 percent Reformed, and 65 percent Lutheran. Army regulations guaranteed freedom of worship for the non-Lutheran soldiers and their families: “This meant that people of different confessions and mentalities lived close together, learned from each other, discussed religious practices and everyday experiences, and made comparisons: the ‘German cultural duality’ was overturned in not a few G  ttingen B  rger houses” (p. 88).

Pr  ve argues that his study highlights several limits to current thinking about confessionalization. On the one hand, modernizing and rationalistic tendencies within the military made confessional exclusion undesirable. Furthermore, day-to-day religious coexistence led to the gradual “wearing down” of the importance of religious difference among common people.

This latter point, that in daily life pragmatically inclined regular folks, faced with the demands of making a living and living together in communities, will tend to downplay religious difference, is frequently asserted in this collection. I sympathize with this view as well, but no one has yet produced a detailed study of everyday life in the seventeenth or eighteenth century that supports it convincingly. In this area,   tienne Fran  ois’s *Die unsichtbare Grenze* remains unchallenged, as does Fran  ois’s conclusion that the confessional boundary in Augsburg was deep and lasting and divided Augsburg residents of all social classes into two communities and two cultures. Perhaps one of the young scholars who have contributed to this book will present us with an in-depth study of a more tolerant and open early modern German community.

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

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

Citation: Marc R. Forster. Review of von Greyerz, Kaspar; Jakubowski-Tiessen, Manfred; Kaufmann, Thomas; Lehmann, Hartmut, *Interkonfessionalit  t - Transkonfessionalit  t - binnenkonfessionelle Pluralit  t: Neue Forschungen zur Konfessionalisierungsthese*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. May, 2005.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=10561>

Copyright © 2005 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.