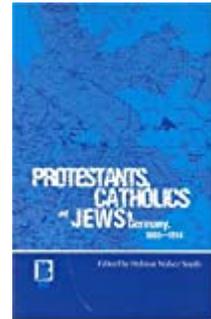


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Helmut Walser Smith, ed. *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany 1800-1914*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2002. xiii + 336 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-85973-565-7.



Reviewed by John S. Conway (Department of History, University of British Columbia)

Published on H-German (March, 2004)

These collected essays can be seen as a welcome by-product of the recent renewal of interest amongst historians in the religious dimensions of their subjects. In Germany, following the lead given by the late Thomas Nipperdey, historians are now exploring the variety and complexity of religious mentalities, and stressing the need to restore these factors as significant to the whole picture, not merely as isolated communities, but in their active inter-relationships. The nineteenth century was the period when dynamic political and social changes challenged and redefined how German religious communities related to each other. These essays depict these interactions, concentrating particularly on the political impact of the denominations' search for identity and security when faced with the transforming cultures of this mobile century. These authors therefore seek to go beyond the traditional picture of separate religious milieu, hierarchically organized, and instead stress the overlapping social structuring taking place in local communities and the rich patterns of coexistence, as well as conflict, which resulted.

The book is marked by methodological pluralism. Catholics do not necessarily write about Catholics, Protestants about Protestants, or Jews about Jews. Instead the emphasis is on making clear how the story of each denomination has to consider its relationships

to the other groups. For example, Jewish emancipation cannot be understood without reference to religious revivals among Protestants and Catholics. Some interactions were tolerant, many however were designed to guard against the danger of the "other." Such reactions can be seen as part of the struggle to define the contours of a multi-religious society, as the united Germany in fact was, even when religious motives were deployed to propagate an ideal of mono-cultural national unity, especially by leading Protestants. These complexities and countervailing tendencies are richly described by an international team of authors. The work as a whole now makes available to English-speaking audiences the insights of their German colleagues in a scholarly and interdenominational fashion. But we should also draw attention to the notably different approach to be found in a parallel volume of essays edited by Olaf Blaschke, *Konfessionen im Konflikt*, which, as its title suggests, stresses the differences rather than the similarities between the confessions, even though Blaschke shares the same desire to reinsert the religious dimension into more general secular accounts.

Despite the admirably ecumenical intentions of H. W. Smith's team, the fact remains that the religious communities of this period lived largely in a deliberate cultural apartheid, reinforced by the rigid demarcations of

their respective historians and publicists. Each group exhibited fears that the swings of political fortune could endanger their respective religious positions. But these changes in turn forced each group to be more self-conscious and more aware of its contacts with others. Hence the significance of interactions between communities very differently mobilized and inspired. These authors point out the wide variety of cooperative measures, but cannot avoid also noting the persistence of institutionalized stereotypes from the long past. To be sure the folk memory of the Thirty Years War imposed restraints on both Catholics and Protestants, and largely nullified the efforts, well described by Kevin Cramer, to turn Gustavus Adolphus into a German national hero. The Protestant dream of hegemony had to be abandoned, but only reluctantly over many years.

Some of these essays are limited in scope to a specific area, such as Dagmar Herzog's account of the struggle to obtain full citizenship for the Jews in Baden or Ulrich Baumann's illuminating contribution on interreligious contacts in the same province in subsequent years. Til von Rahden's description of the Breslau schools in the 1870s, or Anthony Steinhoff's detailed account of the rebuilding of the main Lutheran church in Strassburg, as an assertion of Protestantism in that newly "rescued" province, raise the issue of how representative such examples were. On the other hand, broad and speculative pieces such as Wolfgang Altgeld's all too brief examination of the relationship between modernization and secularization suggest the need for more research on the local levels.

The purpose of the book is clearly to draw attention to the complexity and multiplicity of both conflicts and coexistence between the religious communities. Yet, it has to be remembered that, for participants at the time, confessional alienation was the norm. Rivalry, or at least suspicion was reinforced by the unilateral writings of each group's propagandists. At best there were mixed feelings, based largely on an inherited reluctance to enter into a more positive engagement with the cultural forms of the "other." There was little or no willingness to make Germany a truly pluralistic society, especially under the impact of a triumphant nationalism with strong

Protestant overtones. As several of these essays show, the forward-looking liberals in the Protestant ranks were ambivalent. Should the official Protestant character of the establishment and monarchy be confirmed as the national religion? Or should a more neutral and impartial stance be adopted to avoid the inevitable clashes arising from a confessionally mixed population?

In Lucian Hoelscher's view, it was the unresolved religious divisions in Germany, greater than in other parts of Europe, which fueled Germany's unique political journey towards the Third Reich. Unfortunately he does not spell out why this *Sonderweg*, or its religious components, should have led to murderous antisemitism. Likewise Altgeld disappoints by devoting only one page to nationalistic anti-Judaism. The recent research of Olaf Blaschke on Catholic anti-Judaism or Wolfgang Heinrich's study of Protestant attitudes towards Jews in the latter stages of the century, need to be taken into account for a fuller, and darker, picture.

In her concluding essay, Margaret Anderson takes a positive view, obviously rejecting a teleological account drawn from later years. Living apart and together in increasingly mixed communities was institutionalized by the more benign, because more democratic, contexts. Certainly aggressive social exclusion of those of different faiths occurred, but did not lead to a renewal of religious war. She suggests that the inevitable frictions arising from having more than one religious community in a given social and political space were matched by conventionalized signs of co-operation and mutual respect. Yet these essays still leave unanswered the acute question of the extent to which the attitudes of the Christian churches in Germany towards Jews during this period were contributory, or even determinative, in causing the extremism of the later Nazi antisemitism and violence.

Copyright (c) 2004 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 other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

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

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

Citation: John S. Conway. Review of Smith, Helmut Walser, ed., *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany 1800-1914*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. March, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8974>

Copyright © 2004 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.