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Michel de Waele, *Réconcilier les français: la fin des troubles de religion (1589-1598)*. Paris: Hermann, 2015. 380 pp. 36€ (pb.). ISBN 978-2-7056-9069-4.

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This book is a paperback edition of a book first published five years ago, under a slightly different title: *Réconcilier les français: Henri IV et la fin des troubles de religion (1589– 1598)* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010). H-France does not normally review re-issues, but since it did not commission a review of this important study when it first appeared, it is good to have an opportunity to bring it to the attention of H-France readers.

Specialists will already know Michel de Waele as a leading expert on governance in the reign of Henri IV. In this study, he places that subject in a broader chronological and comparative perspective. Taking his cue from political science and the now established discipline of peace and conflict studies, he asks how the process of wrapping up the Wars of Religion can be understood in the field of possible ways for civil conflicts to end. His basic conclusion is that this was very much a negotiated resolution—certainly much more so than Bourbon propaganda would have had it—and one that looked back to the ideals of the sixteenth-century collaborative monarchy rather than forward to any recognizable form of “absolutism.” There is no shortage of studies and interpretations of the Wars of Religion, but this one makes a notable and original, if occasionally slightly ungainly, contribution. It combines an interesting and cohesive introduction to the conflict as a whole with a detailed analysis of royal policy in its final years. While at times it seems that de Waele may be imposing a bit too much order on circumstances that were poorly understood and decisions that were poorly considered at the time, his overall story is convincing. Not that it can escape from the black hole of Bourbon propaganda: it does not quite reinscribe, but at least takes seriously Henri IV's own self-presentation as a man dedicated to welcoming back the prodigal sons of the French nation.

Since the end of World War II, the world order has been extremely fertile in civil conflicts, which in turn has naturally given rise to a great deal of systematic inquiry into the nature and progress of such conflicts. It is only recently that historians have begun to make use of this perspective, but it certainly holds promise: the obvious point of comparison is the study of revolution, which has played a significant role in historiography for many years. A very recent roundtable in the *American Historical Review*, organized by Robert Schneider and including an essay on the Wars of Religion by Allan Tulchin, both testifies to the relevance of this approach and provides a convenient point of reference when reading this book.[1]

The first thing everyone (starting with the Romans, who invented the term) notes about civil wars is their interminable character. It is not entirely clear to me that this distinguishes them from foreign conflicts: Rome, after all, plausibly managed to maintain an intermittent war with Persia for the better part of two millennia through major changes in regime, religion, and ethnicity on both sides. Closer to our focus, the Habsburg-Valois conflict lasted around sixty years, and did not particularly stand out in late medieval and early modern Europe for its longevity. Be that as it may, the Wars of Religion certainly did drag on in ways that have perplexed both contemporaries and historians. De Waele

suggests that one reason for this is that France serially underwent several conflicts that differed in type, even if they shared many of the same protagonists. Specifically, the conflict moved from sporadic acts of rebellion, not necessarily violent, to much more organized noble and communal revolts—mainly by Protestants, but also by Catholic *malcontents* and to some extent by the ultra-Catholics of the first League. These he understands from the perspective of Arlette Jouanna’s “devoir de révolte,” and he believes that they were distinctive both in their composition and their resolution.^[2] They did not produce truly distinct parties, representing instead rather conservative attempts by various political actors to restore what they saw as correct royal governance. The monarchy, in turn, could draw on a long tradition of negotiated settlements to such uprisings. This may be a bit of an oversimplification: the “United Provinces of the Midi” and to some extent the First League seem like rather more radical enterprises, but they did remain largely subordinate to magnates, magistrates, and civic bodies in this period.^[3]

Following an emerging historiographical consensus, de Waele sees a major break between about 1574 and 1584, when the multifarious revolts were largely, if tentatively settled.^[4] When the Bourbon succession led to a new outbreak of hostilities, it was in the form of a full-scale civil war as the Romans, and the Renaissance French following them, defined it.^[5] The country was thoroughly polarized, neutrality was difficult at best, and ultimate authority was disputed. Up to this point, there is little in de Waele’s study that will be new to specialists, though he does present a very confusing set of events in an unusually clear lucid manner. Parts I and II of this book would make an unusually good introduction to the Wars of Religion for non-specialists.

De Waele’s analysis of the process(es) of reconciliation comes in three parts. First, he covers the maneuvers leading up to the conversion, and its aftermath as far as the outbreak of war with Spain in 1594. His view is that the king’s margin of maneuver was very much limited, both militarily and politically: the war with the League became almost a pure stalemate, while (even more than in, say, Michael Wolfe’s account) the conversion to Catholicism was not something in which Henri had much choice at all—and it failed to break the stalemate in any decisive way.^[6] What did the job in the end was reconciliation with the papacy (which fulfilled one of the League’s major demands), the appearance of a foreign enemy (a remedy already suggested in Roman theories of civil war), and of course the process of reconciliation with towns and magnates that forms the subject of Part III.

The core of this part is a detailed analysis of these individual settlements, mostly still unedited, as well as deliberations about them found mainly in municipal archives. He finds that these focused largely on politico-judicial and financial issues, a testament to the imperative of knitting back together the administrative state, and to the financial exhaustion that (as always) laid some of the groundwork for reconciliation.^[7] He also argues quite convincingly that Henri’s strategy of retail agreements with individual towns and magnates was modeled on the Duke of Alba’s successful pacification of the Southern Netherlands—though given that the French king was even then involved in a complex but important alliance with the very much unsubdued United Provinces, he must have been uncomfortably aware of the limitations of that model. Religious questions, on the other hand, were much less prominent. As de Waele notes, the final religious settlement was essentially that of the late 1570s, modified slightly to acknowledge Catholic supremacy more clearly. And in de Waele’s view, that was indeed the ultimate basis of reconciliation: a clear and convincing victory for the Catholicity of France in exchange for a renewed acceptance of (what the Leaguers, at least, thought would be) the traditional forms of royal authority.

Though he invokes them in his introduction, de Waele does not make extensive use of political-science models of civil conflict, preferring to emphasize endogenous models largely based on Roman prototypes, along with the archival details of negotiated settlements. Tulchin’s parallel investigation takes rather the opposite tack, suggesting for example that a game-theoretical model of learning the costs and benefits of violence, rather than a theory of revolt, can explain the gradual diminution of warfare up to

the Peace of Bergerac. He also sees Henri IV more as “a victor with a peculiar conciliatory style” that gained him acceptance as a broker of peace than as a stalemated combatant engaging in negotiations of equals.[8] This perspective has the advantage of putting violence and brutality at the center of the Wars of Religion, something that can be somewhat occluded by de Waele’s more purely political approach.

Tulchin’s model also engages, if perhaps unsatisfactorily, with a problem that de Waele sidesteps. One insight common to ancient and recent theorists of civil war is that they hardly ever end without either the decisive military victory of one party or the passage of so much time that they lose their relevance. Long as they were, the Wars of Religion did not meet the second criterion, and if de Waele is at all correct in seeing the War of the League as basically stalemated, they do not meet the first either. Thus, if Henri IV did in fact reconcile the French, he achieved something very rare in the annals of politics. But what if his accomplishments were, to some extent, a mirage? War with the Protestants, after all, continued as a low-intensity conflict into the next reign, ended only by Louis XIII’s crushing victory at La Rochelle—and even then, the Camisards would show that the embers of civil war were not entirely extinguished. And contemporaries certainly saw continuities between the Wars of Religion and the constantly incipient or active revolts that stretched up to the Fronde. It would be interesting to contrast Henri IV’s policies of reconciliation systematically with Louis XIV’s ways of controlling the nobility.[9]

Perhaps, at least in this case, “the end of the civil war” is not really the right framework. Although he does not make this explicit, de Waele’s use of the term “reconciliation” suggests a dynamic process in an ongoing relationship. The intractability of civil conflict has a lot to do with the fact that the parties generally continue to coexist within the same polity, where “the past is never dead; it’s not even past.” The strength of this study is that it shows in detail how one group of French leaders understood and lived with that basic truth.

NOTES.

[1] “Roundtable: Ending Civil Wars,” *The American Historical Review* 120 (2015): 1682-1837.

[2] Arlette Jouanna, *Le devoir de révolte: la noblesse française et la gestation de l’Etat moderne, 1559-1661* (Paris: Fayard, 1989). Jouanna (pp. 180-211) extends this analysis to the final stages of the Wars of Religion in a way de Waele does not really accept.

[3] See Janine Garrisson, *Protestants du Midi, 1559-1598*, 2 ed. (Toulouse: Privat, 1991).

[4] The major account of this process is Mark Greengrass, *Governing Passions: Peace and Reform in the French Kingdom, 1576-1585* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[5] In the *AHR* roundtable, Josiah Osgood, “Ending Civil War at Rome: Rhetoric and Reality, 88 B.C.E.-197 C.E.,” *American Historical Review* 120 (1995): 1683-95, provides an excellent review of how the Romans thought and wrote about their civil wars.

[6] See Michael Wolfe, *The Conversion of Henri IV: Power, Politics and Religious Belief in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[7] For what it is worth, this analysis fits well with my own findings on the reconstruction of the monetary system in the wake of the War of the League: see Jotham Parsons, *Making Money in Sixteenth-Century France: Currency, Culture, and the State* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014), 155-73.

[8] Allen Tulchin, "Ending the French Wars of Religion," *American Historical Review* 120 (2015): 1696-1708, p. 1698.

[9] For example, with the contrasting viewpoints exemplified by William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and John Hurt, *Louis XIV and the Parlements: The Assertion of Royal Authority* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). It seems not entirely fanciful to parallel these authors' respective emphases on reward and coercion with Tulchin and de Waele's views of Henri IV's negotiating position.

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