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**Luc Racaut**, *Hatred in Print: Catholic Propaganda and Protestant Identity during the French Wars of Religion*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002. xiv + 161 pp., \$74.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-7546-0284-2.

Review by Ronald S. Love, The State University of West Georgia.

Ever since the publication of Lucien Febvre's pioneering work, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais* (1947), the significance of religion in early modern European politics and culture has enjoyed a steady rehabilitation in historical research. Until then, the prevailing view held that political factors were primary in the development of religious controversy in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, following the initial Lutheran revolt. In consequence, fundamental issues of confessional difference, sectarian strife, and both popular and official manifestations of faith in daily life were effectively relegated to an incidental, or even irrelevant, place in the discussion.

During the last five decades, however, and over the past twenty years in particular, a rich and varied historical literature has emerged to reveal the intricate interconnections of religious life with social, political, and (one should add) literary life as, perhaps, the essential defining force behind corporate or community identities and the violence of confessional conflict, whether through words or force of arms. Scholars of French history, and specifically the period of the Wars of Religion, have been especially active in exploring this theme, starting with Febvre's effort to probe the issue of belief versus atheism in the life and work of François Rabelais and moving forward with a host of studies devoted to such matters as the religious antecedents of the civil wars, the role of women in confessional change, and the cultural impact of religion on the structures of early modern French society as manifested by specific constituencies, social groups, or political factions that adhered to particular sectarian positions.

Most recently, the nature of religious violence in late-sixteenth-century France has taken the focus of attention. In the process, patterns of crowd behavior in such events as the terrible Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre have been identified as being more evocative of limited, ritual violence than of random, unlimited killing. Thus, religiously motivated urban bloodshed was not rooted simply in a seething, mob-like irrationality, as portrayed by more conventional accounts. Rather, an increasing number of historians have come to view it as a "culturally coded" group disturbance that grew out of a collective consciousness, the origins of which are debated hotly.

Luc Racaut's new book, *Hatred in Print*, contributes to that ongoing discussion by addressing specifically the overlooked, though nonetheless vital, role of catholic polemical writers who, between 1562 and 1572, defended the catholic cause aggressively by demonizing the Huguenot minority as enemies of the common weal deserving of extirpation. Part of Racaut's purpose is to explain why the Wars of Religion were so violent and why they engaged such a large portion of the French population. His ultimate goal, however, is to account for why France remained a catholic country on the proposition that this question "has not been properly addressed..." (p. 2). Yet that premise is faulty at best, for innumerable works have offered interpretations that, in the aggregate, have provided a convincing

response to the question. Still, there is great merit in Racaut's contention that the large body of French catholic polemical literature--for the most part ignored by historians hitherto--"contributed strong and persuasive arguments to the Reformation debate," and therefore "warrant[s] further exploration" (p. 2). He argues convincingly that from the mid-1550s and throughout the civil wars "a rhetoric of exclusion was spun by catholic authors who concentrated on portraying the protestants in the worst possible light" (p. 5). The ability of these versatile writers, who borrowed widely from medieval precedents to produce anti-Calvinist material in vast quantities during the post-1562 period "unfettered by censorship," should be taken into account not just in assessing the failure of the French Reformation, but also in addressing the phenomenon of religious violence as a product of printed perceptions of the Huguenot minority. For in contrast to the interpretations presented by such historians as Natalie Davis, Janine Garrisson-Estèbe and Denis Crouzet, Racaut contends that French Calvinists were killed not for what they believed, or from a collective sense of catholic apocalyptic anguish, but for what they were perceived to be--inhuman monsters guilty of moral crimes ranging from sexual impropriety to child-killing. This cause and effect relationship between the printed word and mob action, he asserts, "is crucial to our understanding the violence of the...Wars of Religion" (p. 35). Moreover, the persistence of these polemical themes in the collective catholic consciousness long after the conclusion of the civil conflict helps to explain why France remained within the bosom of the Roman Church.

Racaut develops his thesis in eight chapters of roughly equal length. The first chapter carefully delineates the chief differences between the French and German Reformations, with respect to the role of vernacular writing and censorship in each as background to the remainder of his study. Stressing the unsuitability of the German model applied commonly by historians to French conditions, Racaut contends that while German evangelical authors out-published their catholic adversaries many times over, catholic French polemicists (writing in the vernacular, instead of Latin like their German counterparts) "matched and often bested their protestant opponents in terms of output throughout the religious wars," with "whole-hearted support" from the printing industry, the University of Paris and the royal parlement (p. 21).

Racaut turns next to the problem of violence within the French religious context, and the impact of catholic polemic on the formation of public opinion. In the process he provides a judicious analysis of the relevant historiography over the last thirty years, with particular focus on interpretations by key historians. Unlike others in the field, however, Racaut argues that the bloodshed perpetrated against French Calvinists in the opening stages of the religious wars was a direct result of catholic perceptions of the Huguenot minority (explored in detail in chapters four, five, and six), which included "the blood libel" of infanticide, along with accusations of blasphemy, promiscuity, sexual deviance (e.g., "women on top"), sedition, and generally monstrous behavior. Consequently if, asserts the author, catholic polemical writings give important insight into contemporary popular beliefs about the Huguenots, it is largely because such works helped to fashion those beliefs in the first place. Thus the deliberate, even methodical demonization of the Calvinists in print becomes central to understanding the origin, nature, and extent of violence during the civil conflicts. Yet this literature cannot be construed as mere propaganda intended to manipulate viewpoints by telling lies for, as Racaut notes, in many cases "the authors were sincere, however misguided, and were convinced that what they were putting forward was true" (p. 44). Furthermore, though catholic writers drew heavily upon "the register of stereotypes" used against heretical groups during the Middle Ages, which they often quoted out of context when applying these conventions to French Calvinism, what this usage really reveals is "an evolution between the literature of persuasion at the beginning of the Reformation and the emergence of modern 'propaganda' towards the end of the sixteenth century" (p. 45).

The last two chapters of Racaut's study explore the polemical application of one such analogy to the thirteenth-century Albigensian Crusade. Because its political dimension "made it immediately relevant" to catholic authors and their view of contemporary events, the "comparison between the emerging Calvinist Church and the Albigensian heresy," writes Racaut, "became commonplace...and changed over

time to fit new political circumstances" (p. 99). Seeking precedents in the history of the Roman Church where orthodoxy had been challenged, catholic theologians and polemicists were drawn to the late medieval crusade as a prime example "of how heretics could be defeated in battle by a decisive monarch" (p. 100). Nor did the parallels stop there. Catholic histories of the crusade published during the second half of the sixteenth century portrayed Calvinists as offspring of the earlier sect, merging their tenets of faith with those of the medieval heresy. The Albigensians thus provided a usable precedent for writers who "wanted the [Valois] Crown to declare an all-out war on Protestantism" (p. 101). And the analogy offers in the broader sense "extraordinary insight into the ingenuity of catholic authors and their ability to rewrite history to fit their needs" (p. 99). The volume then concludes with a lengthy chapter on Calvinist use of the same event in their own literature of martyrdom. Though related to the previous discussion and interesting because of its subject matter, this section of the book seems out of place in a study of catholic polemical writing during the French Wars of Religion, nor does the author provide any real justification for including it.

The most distinctive feature of *Hatred in Print* is its historiographical character on three levels. First is Racaut's clear mastery of, and frequent references to, the wide body of literature by secondary historians on the print culture of the Reformation both in France and Germany that pervades the volume, particularly in the initial chapters. Various schools of thought, and their representative historians, are introduced to the reader with clarity and relevance to the text. Racaut's discussion of such matters as the problem of religious violence, the emergence of print culture during the Reformation, and the formation of public opinion (to name just three) are balanced, informative, and up to date, while laying a solid foundation upon which to build his own argument. The second level is Racaut's detailed analysis of polemical works (books, as opposed to pamphlets) by leading catholic authors in France between c.1560 and 1572, in which he identifies the major themes, issues, and accusations leveled against the Calvinist minority. The third and perhaps most intriguing level, depending upon the taste of the individual reader, is Racaut's exploration of the medieval sources--if not by title, then by content--consulted by sixteenth-century catholic writers for inspiration, argument, and precedent, as well as the way in which the ideas contained in these early sources were adapted to new conditions and employed against the Huguenot minority. This is the most distinctive feature of Racaut's book and its major contribution to the field.

By contrast, the chief flaw of *Hatred in Print* is its highly speculative nature when attempting to determine the impact of catholic polemical writing on contemporary mentality. That the Huguenots were demonized in these printed works, as Racaut observes, is indisputable. But to argue that the perceptions they promoted constituted the prime ingredient in the origins of religious violence during the period demands a far more definitive answer than he offers to two fundamental questions. First, to what extent were catholic polemicists successful in influencing the viewpoints of their intended audience through their published works, and second, how can this be measured? Racaut cannot simply echo Mark Greengrass in dismissing the tendency of historians of sixteenth-century print culture to focus on the work of protestant authors as a preference for writing the history of the French Reformation "through the eyes of the protagonists of change" (p. 2). Calvinist publications responded frequently to specific events, were plentiful, and intended for a minority readership to be sure, but one far more literate (proportionately speaking) than the catholic majority. Moreover, the effect of Calvinist works can be measured with greater certainty through the prevalence of certain ideas in various printed forms--political treatises, sermons, pamphlets, etc.--that reached, were read by, and circulated within a well-defined audience.

The catholic situation was markedly different, forcing Racaut to write in the conditional tense whenever attempting to assess the issue of impact. Acknowledging that early modern information networks were predominantly oral and, as a result, surviving printed sources can provide only a fraction of what was commonly overheard, the author observes, not unreasonably, that the extent to which their ideas spread by word of mouth through the illiterate population would determine "the relative success of certain

books as opposed to others" (p. 48), let alone their general influence on public mentality. If, however, J.K. Sawyer's estimate—quoted by the author in presenting his argument—that the most popular, catholic, political pamphlets of the early seventeenth century got into the hands of only one percent of France's urban population is correct,<sup>[1]</sup> then just how much influence could such polemical works have exerted? Certainly Racaut is unable to provide concrete evidence in this regard, apart from an allusion or two to changes in royal policy that might have been prompted by catholic publications. The period of his study is also much earlier than Sawyer's, when the crisis facing France was far deeper than the largely political conflicts of the 1620s and 1630s. The point is that there were ways in which the treatises under examination could have reached and molded public opinion, but Racaut has failed to pursue the points of transmission. Instead, he falls back in the last chapter on the more secure foundation of Calvinist writings when discussing contemporary use of the Albigensian Crusade as a model for Huguenot identity.

This flaw does not destroy the book's integrity, however. With that single exception, and perhaps Racaut's additional failure to identify the catholic authors he refers to more consistently, what *Hatred in Print* does, it does well. Clearly written, carefully researched, and judiciously argued, the book achieves its goal of helping to redress the balance of play in the current historiography on the French Wars of Religion "by explaining the production and impact of catholic propaganda," which is Racaut's stated purpose. He succeeds at the same time in opening a new and important avenue of research in the field, while providing a promising foundation upon which subsequent scholars can build.

#### NOTES

[1] J.K. Sawyer, *Printed Poison: Pamphlet Propaganda, Faction Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 48.

Ronald S. Love  
The State University of West Georgia  
rlove@westga.edu

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