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Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith: Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva*. Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State University Press, 2010. viii + 269 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$48.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-935503-11-8.

Review by Karen E. Spierling, Denison University.

In 1962, Ruth Kleinman published a book entitled *François de Sales and the Protestants*, an examination of de Sales' re-conversion efforts in and around the Reformed city of Geneva.<sup>[1]</sup> The core body of sources for her work was de Sales' own correspondence. In a review, an emerging expert on Geneva at the time, the now late Robert M. Kingdon, concluded that Kleinman had provided "convincing evidence that religion and politics were inextricably mixed throughout [de Sales'] career."<sup>[2]</sup> In the four decades since, little has been published in either English or French on the efforts of de Sales or his Catholic colleagues to reform and reconvert the Diocese of Geneva. Jill Fehleison's new book, *Boundaries of Faith*, addresses this lacuna in the scholarship on both the Catholic and Protestant Reformations.

Fehleison presents a new approach to the history of the Genevan diocese during the Reformation era, employing a variety of the developments in social and cultural history that have evolved since 1962. Fehleison moves beyond Kleinman's focus on de Sales to look at the local contexts of reform and the interplay among religious, political, and economic concerns. Specifically, she seeks to shed "light on how the multiconfessional nature of the region impacted and even modified the implementation of Tridentine Reform on the Catholic side of the religious divide" (p. 22). Drawing especially on visitation records from the Diocese of Geneva, François de Sales' letters, and the records of the Genevan Company of Pastors, Fehleison produces a vivid and intriguing picture of the process of Catholic reform and reconversion at the local level. Her book is exciting both for the information it presents and for the possibilities it suggests for future research on Catholics and Protestants in the region around Geneva.

The book explores official efforts to reform and reconvert the Diocese of Geneva from 1579 to 1635, during the bishoprics of Claude de Granier, François de Sales, and Jean-François de Sales. Fehleison's interest lies, however, in uncovering the ways that those official efforts were shaped and modified by local concerns and interests. Her findings make an important contribution to scholarship both on the Protestant Reformation in Geneva and on the Catholic/Counter-Reformation. Work on Reformation-era Geneva, in both English and French, has tended to focus on the city itself, its international connections, and its dealing with local Reformed churches rather than examining Genevan interactions with local Catholic reform efforts. At the same time, in recent years, scholars such as Keith Luria have produced important studies of interactions between Catholic and Protestant laity in other areas of France, but the overall view of official Catholic reforming efforts has continued to emphasize increased orthodoxy and the enforcement of correct doctrine, rather than exploring instances of clerical accommodation of local circumstances.<sup>[3]</sup> The exceptions to this tend to be found in work on Spain and Italy, areas where there was little or no Protestant presence and the focus remained on reform alone, rather than reconversion.<sup>[4]</sup> Fehleison, in contrast, is looking at a religiously mixed area where reconversion was a key goal. As she makes clear, it was shifting political boundaries, as

well as multiconfessionalism, that presented obstacles to Catholic reform around Geneva. After 1601, the Diocese of Geneva lay partly in France and remained partly under the control of Savoy, as well as having lost territory to the Republic of Geneva. Fehleison's goal is to delineate the ways that these changing political boundaries, layered upon religious divisions and economic concerns, shaped the process of Catholic reform in this particular region of Europe.

In her introductory chapter, the author outlines a number of scholarly discussions to which her work contributes, including questions of terminology (is it the Catholic or Counter Reformation?), the usefulness of dichotomies such as popular/elite and central/local, and the applicability of the concept of confessionalization. The overarching argument of the book is that Catholic reform and reconversion in the Diocese of Geneva was a process of negotiation among diocesan officials, local clergy, laity, and political rulers. This negotiation revolved around the key issues of defining sacred space, shifting confessional boundaries between Catholicism and Protestantism, changing political borders, and economic constraints. In the succeeding chapters, she presents a wealth of information to demonstrate this dynamic, emphasizing throughout the complexity of the reformation and reconversion processes.

After laying out the key factors and participants in her second chapter, Fehleison devotes the third and fourth chapters to a comparison between the success of Catholic reconversion and reform in the Duchy of Chablais (northeast of Geneva along Lake Geneva) and the resistance to Catholic efforts in the Pays de Gex (northwest of Geneva on the opposite side of the lake). Protestant reformers from Geneva and Berne had made significant inroads into both of these areas prior to the 1590s, but by 1635 Chablais was recatholicized almost entirely, while Gex remained closely tied to the Reformed Church of Geneva. In the case of Chablais, the Catholic mission succeeded based largely on its "advocacy of oral debates and public spectacles, not to mention their skillful manipulation of local opinion after the events" (p. 89). Residents of the Pays de Gex, in contrast, "may have been nominally and publicly members of the Catholic Church after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, but they never embraced its institutions, rituals, or its confessional identity" (p. 136).

Using synodal records, de Sales' correspondence, and the records of the Genevan Company of Pastors, Fehleison determines that Catholic reformers faced greater Protestant opposition and greater financial problems in Gex than in the Duchy of Chablais. Most importantly, she argues that the critical difference between the two situations was the 1601 Treaty of Lyon, an agreement between Henri IV of France and Charles-Emmanuel I of Savoy that made Gex officially part of France. While Fehleison asserts that "the redrawn national boundary did not make the Protestants of Gex feel that they were part of France" (especially in relation to the French Reformed Church) (p. 113), she concludes that Protestants in Gex successfully resisted Catholic reconversion efforts due to "the toleration outlined in the Edict of Nantes, the continued support of Geneva, and the recognition by the French crown and *parlement*" (p. 137). In other words, changing political circumstances helped to create an entirely different religious outcome in the Pays de Gex, where Catholic efforts at reconversion did not begin in earnest until after the Treaty of Lyon had been concluded, than in Chablais, where reconversion efforts were well underway before the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598.

In chapters five and six, Fehleison focuses on the reforming (as opposed to reconverting) aspects of the bishops' efforts. In these chapters she makes effective use of visitation records to examine the challenges reformers encountered in dealing first with local Catholic clergy and then with the laity. In chapter five, she reveals the variety of ways in which local clergy resisted the diocesan visitors' efforts to bring local practices into conformity with Tridentine decrees. In this discussion, money comes to the fore as a key factor in reform. For example, the visitation records reveal that it was not uncommon for the laity of a parish to resist providing the local

priest with the money needed to tend to a visitor's requirements, such as repairing a priest's house. While situations like this suggest tensions between local clergy and their parishioners, other cases demonstrate the ways in which local priests sided with the laity and defended local interests in the face of reform. Most interestingly, Fehleison shows that the diocese sometimes chose to accommodate these local concerns, as in the case of the curé of Vacheresse, who established a shrine to a local saint "in an attempt to heal the sick cows of the area" (p. 158). Despite Tridentine directives, "Francois de Sales did not forbid this shrine or deem it superstitious, even though its purpose surely bordered on the limits of orthodoxy" (p. 158). Ultimately, Fehleison finds that the bishops had significant success with the secular clergy, in contrast to the intransigence of the regular clergy. The monasteries in the Diocese of Geneva remained nearly impervious to reform. As Fehleison remarks, "it was extremely difficult to make monks who were unwilling to change their ways do much of anything" (p. 169).

Regarding the laity, Fehleison's examination of the visitation records reveals a constant process of negotiation between diocesan officials and local church members. Here Fehleison makes an especially significant contribution in her close examination of the types of issues most likely to provoke controversy or resistance to reforming efforts. Here, too, one is struck by the extent to which money was a factor in the success or failure of reformation efforts. Simply put, "parishioners preferred to ignore injunctions that came with financial obligations" (p. 194). As Fehleison explains, such conflicts over money were often intertwined with debates regarding the use of sacred space and, in particular, the adornment of sanctuaries and upkeep of buildings.

Perhaps the most important revelation of this book is Fehleison's finding that the bishops' insistence on orthodoxy within their Catholic parishes depended upon a given parish's proximity to Protestants. As she says, "In a biconfessional area, there was not a more sacred activity than to defy the rival faith. The visitor rewarded the confreres for reinforcing confessional boundaries. The bishops appear to have possessed greater toleration for popular 'unreformed' devotional practices when Protestants lived nearby" (p. 216).

This discussion of negotiation among diocesan officials, local priests, and laity is resonant of a number of recent studies that explore this process of negotiation in the Reformation. Fehleison's evidence for the Diocese of Geneva provides fertile material for comparison of Protestant and Catholic efforts and obstacles in same region. While Fehleison herself is wary of John Bossy's emphasis on the shared culture confronted by both Protestant and Catholic reformers (p. 5), chapters five and six are very suggestive in that way. Some of the similarities in both the concerns and the experiences of Protestant and Catholic reformers in the Genevan region are striking. Fehleison's accounts of the diocesan struggles to implement a catechism, enforce regular attendance at mass, and alter local customs will all strike a chord of familiarity with scholars of Protestant reform. As Fehleison describes in her introduction, the histories of the Protestant and Catholic sides of the Reformation have developed largely independently for far too long. This study of the Catholic reform and reconversion efforts in the Diocese of Geneva makes a compelling case for the need for scholars of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations to find a way to communicate, collaborate, and share our findings more effectively across our historical religious divide.

## NOTES

[1] Ruth Kleinman, *François de Sales and the Protestants* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962).

[2] Robert M. Kingdon, review of Ruth Kleinman, *Saint François de Sales and the Protestants* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1962) in *Church History* 32/3(1963): 368.

[3] Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

[4] For example: Silvia Evangelisti, “We Do Not Have It, and We Do Not Want It’: Women, Power, and Convent Reform in Florence,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34/3(2003): 677–700 and Kathleen M. Comerford, “I can’t imagine it won’t bear fruit’: Jesuits, Politics, and Heretics in Siena, Montepulciano, and Lucca,” in Michael J. Halvorson and Karen E. Spierling (eds.), *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 289-305.

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