

H-France Review Vol. 11 (February 2011), No. 58

Bruno Hübsch, *Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs: Histoire d'une controverse entre catholiques et réformés français au début du XVIIe siècle*. Lyon: Laboratoire de Recherche Historique Rhône-Alpes, 2010. Collection Chrétiens et Sociétés, Documents et Mémoires No. 10. 251pp. Foreword, appendix, bibliography, and index. 22.00€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-85317-122-9.

Review by Diane C. Margolf, Colorado State University.

In their introduction to *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (2003), C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schütte declare that the Reformation in France “was negotiated by the clergy themselves, by way of the structures of church rule, the common stock of religious ideas and the shared training, and the same sense of mission and purpose which inspired them to take the faith to the parishes.”[1] Bruno Hübsch’s study of the debates between French Roman Catholic and Reformed clerics about the meaning of ministry in the early seventeenth century supports this recent claim, despite the fact that Hübsch’s work was written more than forty years ago.

Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs focuses on printed works concerning Roman Catholic and Reformed views of priests and pastors from the 1590s to the 1620s. In particular, the author offers a close reading of three treatises written by some of the most accomplished and active controversialists of both confessions. Jacques Davy du Perron’s *Réplique à la Response de quelques ministres sur un certain escript touchant leur vocation*, published in 1597, represents an important starting point for Hübsch’s analysis. Du Perron was already embroiled in arguments with Reformed theologians about a variety of issues, including different interpretations of clerical functions and authority. A document entitled *Response de quelques ministres sur un certain escript touchant leur vocation*, which summarized Reformed views in sixty-three articles, was forwarded to du Perron; it is reproduced in an appendix of Hübsch’s book. Du Perron’s *Réplique* was a reply to this document, in which he attempted to refute the *Response*’s arguments. Hübsch notes that du Perron’s work proved useful to other Roman Catholic controversialists in France such as Pierre de Bérulle, whose *Discours . . . de la mission des pasteurs en l’Eglise* (1609) is also analyzed extensively. The third text at the center of Hübsch’s study is Pierre du Moulin’s *Traité de la vocation des pasteurs*, published in 1618 and intended to assert the validity of the Reformed view of the pastorate against the Roman Catholics’ critiques.

According to Hübsch, the debate between Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians about the ministry ultimately led each group to emphasize certain elements of its interpretation, in order to distinguish its views from those of its opponents. Du Perron, for example, viewed the priest’s vocation as one that had been transmitted from the Apostles to his own day. The legitimacy of clerical authority was thus based on the notion of succession across time. Moreover, such authority could only be legitimately transmitted through the Roman Catholic Church as a divinely ordained institution—“le lieu de l’action divine,” in Hübsch’s words (p. 212). On the other hand, the priest’s vocation and authority set him apart from the Christian laity whom he served. Inspired by du Perron’s arguments, Bérulle developed his interpretation of the Roman Catholic priests’ vocation in another direction: by emphasizing the Church’s mission as derived from the life and work of Christ, a mission which involved and depended on the efforts of every priest.

Reformed authors such as Michel Bérauld, Daniel Chamier, and Philippe Duplessis Mornay drew upon the same scriptural and patristic sources as their Roman Catholic counterparts—as well as the writings of John Calvin and Theodore Beza—to offer a competing definition of ministry. In their view, the Reformed pastor was directly dependent on Christ for the exercise of his authority, rather than receiving that authority through apostolic succession. The pastor's main responsibility was to maintain the Church through preaching, sacraments, and discipline, but the Church he helped to govern was defined primarily as an assembly of believers who responded to the Word and who might not always constitute a visible community. As summarized in Pierre du Moulin's treatise, the Reformed explanation and justification of the pastor's authority rested on a different conception of both the office and its history. Hübsch's analysis of these texts is one of the strengths of his study, along with the connections he draws between the authors' debates about ministry and other related issues, including ecclesiology and the sacraments.

Another significant feature of *Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs* is Hübsch's argument that, despite the passionate nature of this debate, both Roman Catholic and Reformed controversialists envisioned a common goal for priests and ministers: the conversion of people to Christian belief and practice. Similarly, both groups ultimately emphasized the clergy's service to the Christian laity, despite the differences in their conceptions of pastoral office and its basis. The book thus concludes on a note of ecumenism, in which the religious controversies of seventeenth-century France are not only relevant for the present, but point toward a possible reconciliation of Roman Catholics and Protestants as fellow Christians. This is not surprising, given that *Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs* is based on the author's doctoral thesis in theology defended in 1965, the era of Vatican II. According to the foreword by Yves Krumenacker, an interest in interfaith dialogue characterized Bruno Hübsch's scholarship until his death in 2003, and this book's publication is thus a fitting tribute to his work and career.

Scholars will find much of value in the textual analysis and argument of *Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs*. Perhaps one of the most valuable features of this study, however, is what it does not contain. For example, there is no substantive discussion of how the controversialists' publications were received by a public readership. Instead, their debate is depicted as taking place within the confines of a learned and committed clerical elite whose members wrote only for and about each other. There is little detailed exploration of the local contexts and political culture in which these works were produced, nor much consideration of the clergy as a social and professional group. The book contains a *Bibliographie complémentaire* comprising many useful references to works published since 1960s on the French Reformation and the seventeenth-century controversial literature between Roman Catholic and Reformed authors, but Hübsch's study itself did not engage directly with this literature for obvious reasons. For readers familiar with recent studies of the print culture, religious polemics, the French episcopate, and co-existence between Roman Catholics and the Reformed, these lacunae may seem to limit the scope and significance of Hübsch's study. Alternatively, one could argue that *Le Ministère des prêtres et des pasteurs* instead highlights the ways in which the historiography of religion in early modern France has expanded and changed during the past fifty years.

NOTES

[1] C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schütte, eds., *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 38.

Diane C. Margolf
Colorado State University
Diane.Margolf@colostate.edu

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172