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Yves Krumenacker, ed., *Le calvinisme et les arts du XVIe siècle à nos jours*. Special issue no. 1 of *Chrétiens et sociétés--XVIe-XXIe siècles*. Lyon: Université Jean Moulin-Lyon 3, 2011. 227 pp. Illustrations. 12 €. (pb). ISBN 978-2-9537928-5-0.

Review by Raymond A. Mentzer, University of Iowa.

John Calvin and the Reformed tradition with which he was closely associated have, as Yves Krumenacker aptly notes in the introduction to this anthology, long been regarded unsympathetic, if not hostile to the arts. An early and persistent iconoclasm along with the rejection of images, the austerity of the temples in which Reformed Protestants worshipped and the absence of a tradition of grand liturgical music are often cited as evidence. Yet these perceptions mask the profound appreciation that Calvin and his followers shared for the arts. To be sure, they counseled restraint or, in more positive language, advanced a simple but elegant aesthetic, particularly in those aspects of artistic culture that bore upon religious devotion. Nonetheless, they unquestionably valued and encouraged endeavors in nearly all aspects of art and culture. Reformed artists and architects, poets and musicians were numerous, prolific and celebrated throughout the early modern age and beyond. The nine essays gathered in this anthology have their origins in a conference held at Lyons in October 2009 to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth. As such, some of the contributions can be overly approving even as they extend our understanding of Calvin and the arts. The volume nonetheless effectively suggests the breadth and depth of artistic creativity and originality within French Reformed circles from the mid-sixteenth century to the present.

While arranged more or less in chronological order, the essays also divide into thematic groupings. They begin with discussion of theoretical and ideological questions and move from there to issues of practice and influence. Thus, Jérôme Cottin opens the collection with an illuminating and thoughtful exploration of aesthetics--metaphors of the beautiful and visual signs--in the thought of John Calvin. The Genevan reformer was clearly troubled by the employ of artistic representations in the devotional realm. They risked misleading the believer into idolatry and superstition, for no image could properly represent the mysteries of God. Yet Calvin and other Protestant leaders did not completely reject images and metaphors. After all, the arts were a gift from God and they could even be signs of the divine. God's creation and the natural world possessed a powerful, fundamental beauty. In Cottin's view, nature was for Calvin an ensemble of divine signs which were best understood with the aid of Holy Writ. In a sense, Calvin offered a parallelism between the language of nature and the language of Scripture. With the benefit of the Bible, Calvin was able to liberate images--better understood as visual signs--from their idolatrous confinement. Indeed, images could allow Christians to praise and glorify their Creator.

Following these helpful general reflections on the place and meaning of art in Calvin's theology, a series of essays provides insight into specific artists, art experts, Calvinist poetry and music, and Reformed architecture. Thus, Vanessa Selbach shifts attention from the universal to the particular in her treatment of Pierre Eskrich, a central if modest figure in woodblock engraving within the late-sixteenth century humanist communities of Lyons and Geneva. Among other projects, he contributed to Gabriel Chappuys, *Figures de la Bible*, published in 1582. He also produced a number of cartographic woodcuts

centered on the ancient biblical world. Selbach draws particular attention to his *Marché des Hébreux dans le désert*. In the end, the answer to the question posed in her title—was Eskrich an artisan or an artist—seems obvious. He was a talented artist, at least in light of the evidence that Selbach presents. Unfortunately, the broader issues concerning the relationship between his artistry and his Reformed religious position remain largely unexplored and unresolved. Greater elucidation and further precision on this latter matter would have been welcome.

The time frame and context shift dramatically forward to the 1670s and 1680s in Yves Moreau's consideration of Jacob Spon, whom he characterizes as a Protestant antiquarian and erudite in the Republic of Letters. It was also a time in which the French Protestant universe was crashing down under relentless oppression from the Sun King and his agents. Spon encountered enormous obstacles to the study and practice of medicine because of his Reformed faith, and with the Revocation he fled Lyons for Geneva, where he died in late 1685. He had earlier travelled extensively throughout France as well as to Italy, Greece and the Near East. Eventually recognized as one of the more renowned French specialists of antiquity, Spon viewed art as commemorative, informative and instructive. As a firm Calvinist, however, he rejected the sacred function that Catholics attached to images.

Hélène Guicharnaud considers a different, but no less critical issue in her chapter on Raphael's *Transfiguration* and the nineteenth-century Protestant pastor Athanase Coquerel. French art critics and artists had since the seventeenth century regarded Raphael as the "prince of artists." Among the most admired of Raphael's paintings and tableaux was his *Transfiguration*. It became in the 1850s a focal point for the liberal Coquerel's two great passions: art and Protestantism. In his *Beaux Arts en Italie* (1857), Coquerel devoted an entire chapter to the *Transfiguration*. He located within the painting representations of human anxiety and moral purity, terrestrial misery and heavenly glory. Coquerel dismissed Catholic elements as minimal and suggested that Raphael, rechristened the fifth evangelist, affirmed the autonomy of the Protestant artist over and against Catholic rigidity. As Guicharnaud rightly points out, Coquerel saw in the *Transfiguration* confirmation of his own liberal Protestantism. Calvin, however, is unlikely to have found Coquerel's interpretation appealing or constructive.

If the visual and plastic arts were the objects of tension with the Reformed orbit, poetry and music, embodied above all in the Psalter, were decidedly not. The singing of Clément Marot's metric French version of Psalms would eventually come to define the very essence of being Protestant in the francophone world. Jean-Michel Noailly's essay on the Reformed Psalter provides a precise summary of its origins and development. He begins with an overview of the Genevan Psalter, beginning in the late 1530s, and the formative role of the two poets Clément Marot and Theodore Beza as well as the three musicians Guillaume Franc, Loys Bourgeois and Pierre Davantès. Noailly then takes up the long and rich history of the Psalter during the centuries that followed. The concluding remarks, unfortunately, do not match the grandeur of the subject. Clearly the melodies have a timeless quality and the poetic structure imparted by Marot and Beza is equally enduring. But these views do not appear particularly fresh, nor is Noailly's observation that it is to Calvin's great merit that he encouraged the project. Again, the author might have pushed the analysis a bit further.

Turning to the broader sphere of *belles-lettres*, Julien Gœury advances the notion that between the Peace of Alès and the Revocation, roughly from 1630 to 1685, French Reformed poets, while numerous, demurred from writing an explicitly Protestant religious poetry. According to Gœury, the evidence of poetic creativity is abundant, as is the poets' increasing dissimulation. Poetic demonstration of confessional position became rare over the course of the seventeenth century. The pastor Laurent Drelincourt, for example, showed little interest in dwelling upon or promoting confessional differences. He never meant his *Sonnets chrétiens* (1677) to be construed as *sonnets protestants*. Moreover, in Gœury's interpretative perspective, a parallel development was unfolding. As Protestant poets became more

guarded in their expression of confessional position, the level of their integration into the general literary milieu of the kingdom increased proportionally. At the very least, the analysis affords further evidence of the variety of reactions among the Huguenots to royal pressure. To be sure, some resisted and some capitulated; others fled and many, poets included, seem to have simply kept their views to themselves.

Three substantial essays in this collection study Reformed temples in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (the crown insured that there were no temples in the eighteenth century). Yves Krumenacker, the volume's editor, presents a detailed and encompassing portrait of the French temples from the beginnings of the Reformation in the early 1560s to the Revocation of 1685. He has mined the meager but informative original sources to good advantage, all the while synthesizing in very helpful ways much of the research on Reformed temples that has appeared over the past several decades. The accent is upon the originality of key architectural features of the temples (the church was the body of the faithful; the temple was the space for worship). Thus, the Huguenots built edifices with centralized (polygonal) as well as the more traditional basilica (rectangular) plans. They eliminated what they regarded as the idolatrous excesses of gothic style. The pulpit became the dominant interior feature. In addition, French Reformed Protestants introduced benches, added galleries and insisted upon natural light. These new features, which responded to liturgical innovations, became the essential characteristics of French temples and, even after Louis XIV razed those in the kingdom, the design survived within the Huguenot exile communities of the Refuge, especially in the German Empire. Krumenacker underscored the notion that it is all too facile to propose, as many have, a simple contrast between the austerity of the Reformed temples and the exuberance of Catholic baroque churches. The reality is far more subtle. Protestants were willing to deploy decorative elements, though always within the framework of Scriptural direction and standards.

When, following the Revolution, Protestants were once again permitted to construct temples, they did so in cooperation with the *Conseil des Bâtiments civils*, created in 1795. Drawing on the rich archival records of the Conseil's deliberations, Cécile Souchon is able to document with precision and clarity the breadth and vitality of the nineteenth-century Protestant religious Renaissance in France. Her essay is ample demonstration of the wealth of material—proceedings, reports, and architectural plans and elevations—available in the Conseil's archives, now housed in the Archives Nationales. She also makes clear the interplay between petitioners, designers, and authorities in the building projects at Anduze, Bordeaux, St-Hippolyte, Vallerauges and a host of other Protestant communities. The exact nature of the Reformed aesthetic that emerges from this mass of documentation is, however, a question that is yet to be addressed.

The volume concludes with a thoughtful, synthetic essay by Bernard Réymond, an acknowledged expert on the history of Reformed religious architecture. Here, he takes up an issue that is in some ways ancillary to Souchon's chapter. As Protestant congregations undertook to build anew after the Revolution of 1789, from where did they draw inspiration? After all, the physical evidence of earlier temples had been obliterated by the end of the seventeenth century. Iconographic evidence—images of the temple at Charenton, for example—was sparse and often imprecise. Closely guarded family memories were equally useful, but they too could be vague and inaccurate. Other, sometimes overlooked models were the structures that Huguenot refugees built in Germany, the Netherlands and the Swiss cantons. And while the earlier models were useful, tastes also changed and evolved over the course of the nineteenth century. Imposing neoclassical, neo-Gothic and even neo-Romanesque temples began to appear throughout the French Reformed world. The details are captivating and Reymond is adept at explaining them. He concludes that despite the variety of architectural forms and the many transformations over the past two centuries, the edifices speak eloquently to a Reformed aesthetic by virtue of their "sobriety" and the "economy of means" employed by the builders (p. 221).

The contributions to this collection are far from the definitive explanation of the relationship between Calvinism and the arts. In all fairness, neither the editor nor the authors make such a claim. On the other hand, they do suggest a number of areas for fruitful investigation. How ought we to understand Calvin's aesthetics? What was its meaning for adherents to Reformed Christianity in the early modern period and beyond? How did views change over time? What were the consequences of Calvin's views for architecture and the visual arts, literature and music? Where do we turn for the sources that will allow us to probe these matters? What are the latest interpretative perspectives? Where are matters likely to proceed from here? Altogether, Yves Krumenacker has gathered an absorbing set of essays that serves to pose a series of useful questions and, hopefully, provokes an equally useful array of responses.

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