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Marie Huber, *Un Purgatoire protestant? Essai sur l'état des âmes séparées des corps*. Introduction and notes by Yves Krumenacker. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2016. 317 pp. Bibliography and index. 26€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-8309-1591-4

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This new publication from Labor et Fides Press is a modern edition of a theological treatise by Marie Huber (1695–1753) entitled *Le Systeme des anciens et des modernes, consilié par l'exposition des sentimens différens de quelques théologiens sur l'état des âmes séparées des corps. En quatorze lettres. Nouvelle édition, augmentée par des notes & quelques pièces nouvelles*. Originally published in 1731, this transcription comes from the second 1733 edition that included additional materials. Huber is relatively unknown today, although she was very influential in the early Enlightenment. Her works went through multiple editions and were translated into German and English. Theologians of all confessional stripes debated her ideas, and her radical Protestantism was instrumental in the formulation of Rousseau's natural religion. She is considered a forerunner of nineteenth-century Universalism and modern Unitarianism.

Huber's text is preceded by a detailed introduction to her background and theology by Yves Krumenacker of the University of Lyon (Jean-Moulin). Marie Huber was born into a wealthy Lyonnais family that had originated in Geneva and had vast international connections in the academic worlds of theology and the sciences. Her maternal grandfather, Bénédict Calandrini, was a professor of theology at the Academy of Geneva, and several uncles were influential Calvinist pastors. Her nephew Jean Huber and grand-nephew François Huber were both distinguished naturalists (and Jean was also a painter). But it was perhaps Nicolas du Duillier, the son of Huber's godfather, who had the most profound influence on her. A member of the Royal Society of London and close friend of Newton, Cassini, and Huygens, he was also connected with the French Prophets of London, a group of Protestants who took refuge in England after the Camisard War. Their correspondence was crucial in the development of Huber's own theology.

Huber's *Systeme des Theologiens Anciens et Moderns* is a systematic refutation of the doctrine of Hell and eternal damnation. Like her Calvinist predecessors, Huber based her eschatology on the immutable nature of God, but substituted the emphasis on the divine nature from that of an omniscient judge who presides over a depraved humanity to a source of absolute goodness ("Bonté") that is incapable of being anything other than benevolent towards creation. "Il résulte de là que la Souveraine Bonté ne suspend jamais ses effets, ou ne cesse jamais de faire du bien aux hommes, lors même qu'ils éprouvent ce qu'on appelle des punitions ou des châtimens" (p. 66). The human world is merely a passing phase of God's infinite goodness, after which everything will revert to the condition that existed before creation. Therefore, a realm of eternal punishment that is separate from God is impossible. "Son infinite ne consista pas à punir à l'infini" (p. 89). Evil is "un incident arrivé contre le dessein que Dieu avait que tous ses ouvrages fussent bons" (p. 10; emphasis in the original). While God's gift of free will can lead humanity astray, it cannot lead to eternal damnation because an infinitely good creator would not give something that could lead to harm. "Il est certain que la Bonté infinite ne peut avoir fait aucun don à

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l'homme qui ne lui soit avantageux; si elle l'a doué de *liberté* et que ce *don* ait pu accidentellement lui devenir funeste, il faut que ce don soit, par lui-même, si essentiel à sa nature que la Sagesse divine n'ait pu l'en dépouiller sans le degrader de la qualité d'homme" (p. 71; emphases in the original).

While Huber's conclusions may seem to have contradicted Protestant doctrine, particularly the Calvinist emphases on human depravity and predestination, there are many ways that they followed the Protestant tradition. Like her predecessors, her approach was based in a sophisticated biblical exegesis and the writings of the early Church Fathers in the effort to restore the original purity of the first centuries of the church. Although she rejected the notion of being eternally punished for one's sins, she retained the belief that all forms of recreation were contrary to the spirit of Christianity and that all aspects of life should be oriented towards God.

Her readings of the Church Fathers brought her into contact with Origen, a Neoplatonic theologian and ascetic from Alexandria who was active in the early third century, Huber's writings owed the most to his philosophy. Origen's cosmology included the doctrine *apocatastasis*, or the restoration of all things to their original condition. This theory was anathematized during the reign of Justinian, and Origen's writings never took hold in the Western Church. They did, however, experience a revival in Europe in the late seventeenth century. These Neoplatonic views conceived of God as an unchanging Ultimate Reality rather than a personal deity who responds emotionally to human actions.

Labor and Fides Press specializes in Protestant history and theology, but this text is of broader interest for anyone working on the Enlightenment or modern religious culture. Huber's theology pointed in the direction of Deism and the Cult of the Supreme Being, and presents interesting questions on the origins of the Enlightenment and the role of religion in it. Was the "watchmaker God" of eighteenth-century Deism strictly an outcome of Newtonian physics and its separation of the divine from the natural world, or were other influences also at work? Does the Enlightenment represent a liberation from religious influence over Western society, or a reformulation of its role within it? While this text does not directly address these questions, it has much to offer to the literature on the broader academic discussion.[1]

Marie Huber's career also contributes to the scholarship on the participation of women in the early Enlightenment. By publishing works on theology, she was treading on what had long been exclusively male territory.[2] She published anonymously, but it did not take long for her identity to be revealed, and even then there were lingering doubts that a woman could be capable of developing such an intellectually sophisticated work (p. 9). While it is possible to see Huber as blazing new trails for women in the Republic of Letters, she also fits into the older model of the female mystic whose special communion with God is achieved by transcending traditional gender roles. Huber kept an ascetic and celibate lifestyle as well as a low public profile. Admirers referred to her as "la belle sibylle des Alpes" in reference to the virgin shamans of the classical world. This contained her religious authority within gender norms while placing it outside the reach of ordinary women. Taken together, these questions of gender and religious culture add nuance to our understanding of modernity, and how sharp a break from the past it really represents.

Yves Krumenacker's introduction to the text is meticulously researched, especially considering that his subject left scant evidence in the archives. We know very little of Marie Huber as an individual, but her influence is very evident in the wider theological literature of her time. Krumenacker provides an overview of the evidence of Huber's influence in other theological texts, and traces it to the later movements of Universalism and Unitarianism. While the introduction could benefit from more historical context of Lyon in Huber's time, Camisard Pietism, and early eighteenth-century Calvinism, this is hardly a fault considering the focus of this book. Overall, this text leaves much for scholars of the long eighteenth century to consider.

## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); William J. Bulman and Robert G. Ingram, eds., *God in the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Nigel Aston, *Christianity and Revolutionary Europe, c. 1750-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[2] Ulrike Gleixner, "Gendering Tradition and Rewriting Church History," in *Gendering Historiography: Beyond National Canons*, ed. Angelika Epple and Angelika Schaser (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2009), 105-116.

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