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Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moreil and Philippe Chareyre, eds., *Dire l'interdit. The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010. vii + 359 pp. \$147.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-9004-17922-6.

Review by Mark Greengrass, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

In 1976, Jeannine Estèbe and Bernard Vogler published the results of their first pioneering attempt to compare Protestant consistorial registers from different locations and in different political and cultural contexts.[1] A quarter of a century later, a growing body of similar studies, conducted by both individuals and informal research groups has confirmed the fruitfulness of such comparisons. They include Raymond Mentzer's edited series of studies comparing French consistorial objectives and success, published in 1994 and a further collective volume, devoted to their methods, published in 2007.[2] The collection under review results from a conference held in Avignon in June 2007. It brings together fifteen specialists on consistorial evidence from Geneva and the Swiss protestant cantons, Hungary, Scotland, the Dutch Republic, and francophone Alsace and the discussion ranges widely from the 1540s through to the end of the eighteenth century. Its focus is on consistorial authority, as expressed especially in the powers to admonish, to exclude temporarily from the communion, and to excommunicate.

The volume is, firstly, a measure of how far our understanding of these institutions has come. That is demonstrated in the conceptual framework and the methodological approaches that predominate in it. It is no longer a matter of using consistorial registers to measure the impact of the religious and social control that they were able to exercise, treating them as quasi-judicial institutions for the top-down supervision of moral reform and the inculcation of confessional uniformity. It is not that the enumeration of the kinds of cases that the consistory took seriously does not still have its place. The fine-grained analysis by Edwin Bezzina of the register for the church at Loudun for 1589-1602 (p.254) and the revealing evolution of the cases that came before the elders of the church at Sainte-Marie des Mines from 1635 to 1685 by Michelle Magdelaine (pp. 324; 327) demonstrate that they do. But they are placed in a different context and discussed with a different vocabulary. They were part of a 'negotiation' in which the 'vocabulary' of 'censure' and 'exclusion' is placed within the 'limits' to the moral and community pressure that it could exercise, the main objective being, as Christian Grosse says in the conclusion, "la démonstration d'une obstination individuelle dans le péché," within an overall "« travail » [...] collectif de pénitence et de sanctification" (p. 337).

Those limits come through in different ways. Using the rich evidence from Genevan city and ecclesiastical sources in the sixteenth century, Karen Spierling unravels the intricate ways in which its citizens sought to cover up their sexual transgressions from the consistory and the magistrates. That throws into doubt the suspiciously low illegitimacy rates officially recorded there. Those Genevans who the late Robert Kingdon tells us (poignantly this must be one of that eminent historian of Geneva's final publications) were supporters of the founding of its consistory did so whilst, at the same time, expecting to be excused for their own failings. Particularly revealing are the first pair of essays on women confronting the naturally patriarchal consistory, which tended to assume their primary responsibility for sexual misconduct. Using a range of consistory evidence from the French lower Languedoc, Suzannah Lipscomb demonstrates that women were perfectly capable of using the consistory court as a weapon in defence of their own honour. Based on evidence from Utrecht, Judith Pollmann shows that unmarried women, whose opportunities to participate in corporate urban life were very limited, chose church membership as a form of sociability that conferred dignity and honour upon them. Philippe Chareyre investigates the particularly

problematic issue of the censorship of pastors, using evidence from Béarn and France. Indulgence was the order of the day here, since disciplining pastors was a delicate issue where there were overlapping responsibilities between consistories, colloquies, and synods. And there was every good reason to avoid the scandal of a pastor's excommunication. The excommunication of Jérémie Ferrier from the church at Nîmes on 14 July 1613 was, therefore, an exception and the formula that was used is a formidable anathema (p. 86). Serge Brunet's forensic examination of manuscript materials from the troubles immediately prior to the first French civil war uncovers evidence of how consistories were suspected of taking the law into their own hands and acting as *files conducteurs* for anti-seigneurial risings in the countryside.

The consistorial authorities were well aware of the limitations of their own authority. Andrew Spicer indicates that the Dutch and French exile churches in London were prepared to hand over the ultimate sanction of excommunication to the Bishop of London in order to maintain the sanctity of the Lord's Supper. Graeme Murdock uses evidence from Zemplén county (the extreme northeast of what is now Slovakia) to investigate how the powers to exclude recalcitrant or troublesome church members in Hungary were applied by local communities. It is tempting to conclude that it is the relative *weakness* of the consistory courts here explains the recourse to the most extreme form of social ostracism mentioned in this work, that of the "asses' funeral" (pp. 212-3; 215). Meanwhile, in Scotland, Margo Todd finds convincing reasons for why the presbyteries were so reluctant to excommunicate. In the French town of Loudun, too, the consistory, which seems to have had no compunction about investigating and recording transgressions of all sorts, was tepid when it came to disciplining those responsible for the transgressions. In a confessionally-mixed environment, and in the shadow of the civil wars, there was everything to be said for preventing anything that could be seized on as scandal. In and around Orange, later in the century, Françoise Moreil picks up a theme which is evident in several other essays too, that the consistories concentrated on certain issues (mixed marriages, quarrels, moral transgressions) but preferred to avoid excommunication, and to bring as much as possible within the orbit of private, fraternal correction.

The collection shows how the instruments of censorship varied little across Protestant Europe and that they continued into the eighteenth century. In the pays de Vaud, Nicole Staremberg Goy documents how moral regulation became an object of debate and reform in the early eighteenth century, thereby serving to prolong its effectiveness, albeit in the second half of the century, the voice of the laity had a much more prominent role in its application. Salomon Rizzio provides an overview of the Genevan consistory's increasing obsession with conjugal and matrimonial disputes in the eighteenth century, showing how those individuals investigated for serious extra-marital sex (the one issue on which the Genevan tribunal continued to excommunicate) increasingly relied on trained legal counsel for their defence. Didier Poton uses evidence from Saintonge and Poitou from the decade 1651-1661 to suggest, plausibly enough, that consistorial discipline was a way for French Protestants to maintain their identity and roots. In sum, this examination of the consistorial powers of correction, interdiction, and excommunication in various parts of the Europe shows how, as Michelle Magdelaine puts it, when concluding her sensitive examination of their application in the confessionally very mixed environment of the Alsatian community at Sainte-Marie-les-Mines, the consistories did not create "une nouvelle société plus chrétienne, plus policée" (p. 310). But they did play their part in social cohesion and that was more important than social control.

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Christian Grosse, “ Conclusion”

## NOTES

[1] Janine Estèbe and Bernard Vogler, “La genèse d’une société protestante. Etude comparée de quelques registres consistoriaux languedociens et palatins vers 1600,” *Annales: E.S.C.* 31(1976): 362-388.

[2] Raymond A. Mentzer (ed.), *Sin and the Calvinists. Morals Control and the Consistory in Reformed Tradition* (Kirskville: Truman State University Press, 1994); Philippe Chareyre and Raymond Mentzer (eds.), *La mesure du fait religieux. L’approche méthodologique des registres consistoriaux dans l’espace calvinien, XIVe-XVIIIe siècles*, in *Bulletin de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 153(2007): 457-711.

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