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Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod, eds., *L'organisation et l'action des Eglises réformées de France (1557-1563): synodes provinciaux et autres documents*. Archives des Églises réformées de France 3. Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 504. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2012. cxxviii + 362 pp. \$132.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-2-600-01603-2.

Review by Raymond A. Mentzer, University of Iowa.

In 2007, a group of French, British and American scholars specializing in the French Reformation launched a book series whose express purpose is the publication of the sources for the history of the Reformed Churches of France. Despite the destructive efforts of royal officials in conjunction with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the materials are far more abundant than scholars have sometimes supposed. Still, many exist only in manuscript form and even those that have been published are found largely in nineteenth-century journals and monographs that are frequently difficult to access. The project participants mean to overcome these obstacles and make the sources readily available. The edited and annotated texts which have and will result from their efforts include the acts of the national and provincial synods, various consistory registers and the proceedings of the Huguenot political assemblies. The volumes form their own series entitled the Archives des Églises réformées de France within the collection Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance published by Librairie Droz in Geneva. To date, three volumes have been appeared. The first two were the *Actes des synodes nationaux. Charenton (1644) – Loudon (1659)*, edited by Françoise Chevalier and the *Actes des synodes provinciaux. Anjou-Touraine-Maine (1594-1683)*, edited by Didier Boisson. Both were published in 2012. Other projects are currently underway. Philippe Chareyre, for instance, is preparing an edition of the first register of the deliberations of consistory of Nîmes; Hugues Daussy and Mark Greengrass are assembling the acts of the Huguenot political assemblies.

The work at hand, concentrating on documents from the formative years of the French Reformed Churches, is the third in the series to see publication. Accordingly, critical assessment of Benedict and Fornerod's efforts ought not only to provide insight into the value of the present volume, but also offer a better sense of the overall endeavor, its goals and achievements. The editors have divided the book into two obvious parts. The first is a substantial introduction of well over one hundred pages. More than three hundred pages of original texts along with a precise critical apparatus follow. The documents are mostly from the Reformed provincial synods, but also include consistory records and early disciplinary texts. The editors have focused on the late 1550s and early 1560s, above all the three years between the gathering of the first Reformed national synod at Paris in May 1559 and the eruption of the Wars of Religion in the spring of 1562. This period was critical in laying the foundations for ecclesiastical institutions, church discipline, and liturgical practices. At the same time, the French Protestant community was growing dramatically in numerical size and political stature. By 1562, some two million Reformed Protestants had established 816 churches. The rapid expansion of an initially clandestine and fundamentally illegal religious minority posed enormous organizational problems. How

did this federation of individual congregations stretching across Western Europe's largest kingdom coordinate ecclesiastical discipline, manage financial affairs, regularize their relationship with the state, and eventually arrange for their own military protection?

The earliest document in this collection is dated 1557, the latest 1 May 1563. The material falls into three principal categories. The bulk of the documentation—twenty-eight items in all—consists of the acts of the provincial synods of the Reformed Churches of France that have survived for the period up to and including 1562. Also included are various petitions (*requêtes*), memoranda, and letters composed by the deputies – pastors and elders – who attended the synods. The first of these synodal acts are the *Articles polytiques pour l'Église réformée selon le Saint-Évangile* formulated in 1557 by a small group of French pastors gathered at Poitiers to resolve certain matters relating to belief and governance. The last are the *Actes du synode du Dauphiné et du Lyonnais* meeting at Montélimar in March 1563. The geographic range of these assemblies runs from Normandy to Berry and Guyenne, from Languedoc to Dauphiné.

The second sort of documentation is the register of the consistory of the Church of Le Mans. This record of consistorial activities begins in January 1561 and continues through February 1562. As such, it is one of the two oldest extant consistory registers. The other is the first volume from the Nîmes consistory, which covers the period from March 1561 to January 1562. As previously noted, Philippe Chareyre is preparing a critical edition of the Nîmes register. Finally, Benedict and Fornerod have included several local church orders. When read alongside the consistory records and the national *Discipline des Églises réformées de France*, they serve to illuminate developments from the level of the local community of faith to the concerns of the kingdom-wide leadership. The three church orders published here are a 1562 *Réglement général* from the Protestant Estates of Dauphiné and two disciplines drawn up in 1563 by individual churches in Normandy. One is from the Church of Bayeux, the other from that of Saint-Lô.

The documentary ensemble contained in this volume represents an extraordinary accomplishment on several counts. Not only are the materials for the first time made readily available in a single, concise and well-edited compilation, but their consolidation prompts a number of important investigatory queries. Even a cursory reading of the church disciplinary orders from Bayeux and Saint-Lô suggests that these local arrangements differed in curious ways from the national *Discipline*. To what extent then did individual communities in these early years adapt and mold structures and practices to meet their own particular tastes and requirements? What furthermore might these and other developments tell us about the nature of the consistorial-synodal system inaugurated by the Reformed Churches of France? Other records, particularly the correspondence and decisions associated with the provincial synods, illuminate the role of Geneva and its pastors in the construction of the French churches.

The relative richness of surviving provincial synodal acts from this formative period is impressive. Perhaps the only records from this timespan that would prove more abundant are the baptismal registers that Reformed churches maintained from the beginning of their existence. Because they served a “public interest,” Louis XIV’s agents spared the registers of the Protestant *état-civil* from the bonfires following the Revocation. Excepting the 1557 Poitiers articles, the provincial acts appearing here begin after the first national synod that met secretly at Paris in May 1559 and carry through to the end of 1562. The editors have identified materials from at least thirty-eight gatherings that can be classified as provincial synods. Together with the Le Mans consistory register, which runs to seventy-six printed pages in the current collection, as well as the several local disciplinary texts, they offer exceptional insight into the shaping of the distinctive institutional character of French Protestantism.

The emerging pattern of development clearly points toward the later mature structure with which scholars are mostly familiar. At the same time, some interesting experiments occurred. Though not quite trial and error, consideration of various possibilities and alternatives was not unknown.

Nomenclature, for example, took time before settling upon what would become established language. Terms such as *colloque*, *synode* and *concile* appear to have been used interchangeably. To take another example, church authorities had to decide upon the number of ecclesiastical provinces that ought to be established and, in addition, to create suitable geographic boundaries for them. What, moreover, were the appropriate procedural rules for the conduct of the synod? How many deputies attended these early provincial assemblies? And in what capacity? How often did they hope to gather? What was the nature of their agenda? And the reach of their decisions?

The disciplines from Bayeux and Saint-Lô offer a wonderful portrait of the emerging church ministries: pastor, elder and deacon. Here too there are some unexpected developments. Although the office of doctor (or teacher) never developed in France as in Calvin's Geneva, the *Discipline* of Bayeux carefully outlines the responsibilities of the *précepteur* or school teacher. More surprising yet is the failure of the Saint-Lô discipline to mention deacons, all the while naming the magistrate—the “*protecteur de la paix et tranquillité publique*”—as one of the ecclesiastical ministries. For their part, the minutes of the consistory of Le Mans for 1561-62 amply portray the exploratory steps in instituting morals control and related measures. Among the greatest challenges for pastors and elders seated in the consistory was coordinating their activities with those of the magistrates who exercised civil justice. None of this necessarily surprises us, but it is extremely valuable to be able to trace the church's institutional evolution and observe the ways in which acceptable, ultimately standardized forms emerged.

The consistory deliberations and other documents also detail the essential elements of Reformed worship and its emergence from clandestine preaching and celebration of the Lord's Supper to full public expression. Where would the faithful gather? How often? Who would participate? What were the requirements for admission to the Supper? The resolution of these issues had particular urgency given that the churches were proscribed and, accordingly, under considerable threat from the Catholic Church and monarchical state. Historians have, of course, long appreciated consistorial efforts to regulate behavior and to exercise tight control over marriage and family life. Here we can discover the details and assess the impact through a close reading of the Le Mans consistory register. The political activities of the provincial synods have perhaps received less scholarly attention. Benedict and Fornerod, however, provide a superb introduction to this aspect of the material. The spiritual and political leadership exercised by the deputies—remember they were both ordained pastors and lay elders mostly from the middling bourgeoisie—was critical during this period of intense persecution and uncertainty at the highest level of French monarchical governance.

Altogether, this collection of original sources, conveniently assembled in a single volume along with helpful guidance from the editors represents a significant accomplishment. It will substantially assist scholarly attempts at understanding the meaning of the religious transformations that gripped early modern France. Both the first-year graduate student and the seasoned historian will find the texts revealing and useful. While the present remarks cannot possibly do full justice to the materials, they ought, nevertheless, to suggest the rich possibilities for their utilization in future research projects. For this, we are grateful to the editors, and look forward to the other volumes forthcoming in the Archives des Églises réformées de France series.

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