
H-France Review Vol. 18 (February 2018), No. 31

Julien Léonard, *Le pasteur David Ancillon (1617-1692). De Metz à Berlin, de la France au Refuge*. Metz: Éditions des Paraiges, 2017. 363 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. 20 € (pb). ISBN 978-2-37535-039-3.

Review by Raymond Mentzer, University of Iowa.

While scholars have long studied the ministers of the French Reformed Churches during the early modern period, attention has tended to focus on their theological treatises and published sermons. Organizational endeavors, pastoral care, and the relationship between ministers and their congregations have drawn less interest. Only in the past several decades have historians begun to redress the imbalance. Various projects seek to identify the members of the Reformed pastorate, most of whose names appear but fleetingly in the scattered manuscript documents. Constructing brief biographies of the myriad of individuals has proven even more challenging. Albert Sarraière, who has taken the first tentative steps, offers one of few examples.^[1] Accordingly, Julien Léonard's research and publication program is especially welcome. He has rapidly established himself among the leading scholars of the Reformed Church of Metz and its pastorate during the seventeenth century.

Léonard's doctoral dissertation, subsequently published as *Être pasteur au XVIIe siècle. Le ministère de Paul Ferry à Metz (1612-1669)*, is a comprehensive and illuminating study of the Protestant ministry under the provisions of the Edict of Nantes (1598-1685).^[2] Paul Ferry, Reformed pastor at Metz from 1612 until his death in 1669, was, in Léonard's view, the very model of the pastoral ministry. These were troubled times and Ferry labored tirelessly to reassure the Protestant faithful of their salvation through faith. His regular preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments gave voice to the marks of a true church. Not surprisingly, Ferry's promotion of a strict moral code and robust discipline reinforced a powerful sense of Reformed religious and cultural identity. Even the private life of a minister in advancing an example of the proper Christian comportment became a means for the edification of the community of belief. Finally, amid the confessional tensions of the seventeenth century, the pastor inevitably acted as the defender of the members of the congregation. Ferry shrewdly navigated the treacherous political landscape, confronted Catholic polemicists, and affirmed his commitment to Protestantism through his work as an historian, writer, and director of the local *collège*. In short, Ferry was, in Léonard's view, the prototypical exemplar of the Reformed pastor under the regime of the Edict of Nantes.

In the volume at hand, Léonard turns his attention to the sequel to Ferry's career at Metz and the emerging new challenges to the Reformed ministry in the years leading up to and following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). David Ancillon, the celebrated successor to Ferry, becomes the central figure of the inquiry. He was the dominant personality within the Reformed community of Metz after Ferry's death in 1669. Following the Revocation and the dissolution of the Metz Church, Ancillon's influence continued into the Refuge, initially at Frankfurt-am-Main and later in the Electorate of Brandenburg. An accurate portrait of Ancillon's life is not easily constructed. The careful, deliberate, and highly effective destruction of Protestant church archives by royal officers after 1685 makes close inquiry into the careers of most all Reformed pastors extremely difficult. Here, Léonard has

lit upon an exceptional source, a three-volume collection of Ancillon's papers along with a detailed biography. Charles Ancillon, the pastor's son, published the materials at Basle in 1698, six years after his father's death. The third volume, in particular, is a meticulous chronology of the pastor's life and proved especially helpful as Léonard pieced together Ferry's career and sought to distill its broader significance.

David Ancillon was born in 1617 at Metz where his family figured prominently among the city's Reformed community. The situation for Protestants at Metz had become ever more precarious by the 1620s as the Catholic hierarchy and religious orders such as the Jesuits sought to assert a coercive dominance. Thus, while Ancillon's earliest instruction appears to have been at the hands of Protestant schoolmasters, he later spent several years at the local *collège* whose administration the Jesuits usurped. Despite Jesuit pressure to convert to Catholicism and his father's reservations regarding a ministerial career, Ancillon resolved to pursue studies in theology with the goal of becoming a pastor. He departed Metz in 1633 and journeyed to Geneva where he enrolled in the city's Academy. This was the renowned theology faculty established by Theodore Beza in 1559 and the training ground for hundreds of future ministers. Young men arrived annually from throughout Europe and, above all, from France. The Academy was also, in Léonard's words, a bastion of Reformed orthodoxy. Upon completion of his formal studies in 1641, Ancillon returned to France where the pastors of the provincial synod meeting at Charenton (the church for Paris) examined his knowledge of Reformed theology and had him preach a model sermon. They subsequently appointed him pastor at the celebrated Church of Meaux to the immediate northeast of Paris. His tenure there was, in effect, an apprenticeship. He honed his preaching talents, administered the sacraments, and for the first time became involved in polemical debate with confessional adversaries. Additionally, in keeping with Reformed notions regarding the ideal pastor, he married. The marriage to Marie Macaire, who was fourteen years old at the time (Ancillon was thirty-two) allowed him to realize another pastoral role—that of the model husband and father. In all of this, Ancillon kept in touch with the Church of Metz and finally in March 1653, after a dozen years at Meaux, he returned to his native city.

During his first fifteen years at Metz, Ancillon stood in the shadow of the highly esteemed pastor Paul Ferry. Metz was among the foremost Reformed communities of western Europe and, at the same time, the site of enormous contestation between Protestants and Catholics. Ancillon sparred, in particular, with Pierre Bédacier, a Benedictine theologian who was determined to assert Catholic supremacy. The polemical exchange confirmed Ancillon's credentials in theology, while he simultaneously established an outstanding reputation among the wider congregation with his forceful and eloquent sermons. Ancillon was well-prepared and well-positioned to succeed his charismatic mentor Paul Ferry as chief pastor at Metz upon the latter's death in 1669. The circumstances attending the Church of Metz at this point were extremely difficult. Indeed, this precise portrait of David Ancillon's early career is largely an extended prelude to Léonard's main purpose: examining the experience of the Reformed pastor in the decade and a half leading up to the Revocation, the painful flight of Ancillon and others from France, and his and other pastors' eventual ministry to refugee churches.

The classic pastor was a learned and pious individual who regularly explained God's Word from the pulpit, administered the sacraments, and maintained Christian discipline within the congregation. Beyond these obvious official expectations, reigning understandings of how a pastor, his wife, children, and siblings should conduct themselves profoundly shaped his private, family life. In addition, the increasingly coercive strictures that the monarchy imposed upon the Reformed churches and their followers progressively and relentlessly constrained Ancillon's capacity to conduct his vocation. By the early 1680s, the ministerial corps of Metz was painfully aware of the impending disaster. Indeed, Protestant families had already begun to make the agonizing decision to emigrate in hope of finding safety beyond France's borders. When the royal government finally revoked the Edict of Nantes in October 1685, all six Reformed ministers of Metz chose exile abroad. Perhaps the fact that Metz was close to the frontier facilitated their collective decision. Still, it could not have been an easy choice. Did

Ancillon regret abandoning the faithful at Metz? Surely. At the same time, a substantial number of individuals from the Metz congregation would ultimately join him in the Refuge.

David Ancillon along with several of his colleagues departed Metz at the end of October 1685 within weeks of the Revocation. For the next ten months, he travelled through the Empire, arriving first at Frankfurt-am-Main, the “crossroads of the Refuge” to borrow the language of Michelle Magdelaine.[3] An initial appointment as pastor in the Walloon Church of Hanau near Frankfurt proved difficult. The two ministers already serving the Hanau church resented his presence. Ancillon left Hanau within months, returned briefly to Frankfurt and then proceeded to Berlin. The Elector of Brandenburg warmly welcomed the Huguenot refugees and Ancillon soon found himself pastor of the Église française de Berlin whose membership included men and women from his former Church of Metz. For the final six years of his life, Ancillon dedicated himself to serving this religious community in exile.

Naturally, the conditions surrounding the refugee church deeply influenced Ancillon’s ministry. Some previous elements remained in place, while new aspects demanded close attention. He and others likely hoped that they might someday return to France. Yet Ancillon must have also realized that he was approaching the end of his life. For its part, the Berlin church flourished as more and more Huguenots, many of them from Metz, swelled its ranks. They struggled with timeless diasporic anxieties surrounding survival and assimilation. The challenge of maintaining their French cultural identity admitted no easy solution. Finally, as is often the case in exilic communities, they quarreled endlessly among themselves. The “Ancillon clan” as it came to be known—David, his wife, and their children—occupied a prominent position and, predictably, became a convenient target for expressions of discontent. Still, the community survived and, indeed, flourished.

This is, to be sure, a straightforward chronological account of Ancillon’s life and ministerial career. It draws heavily upon the highly romanticized biography, *Discours sur la vie de feu Monsieur Ancillon et ses dernières heures*, written by the pastor’s son.[4] While the reality of Ancillon’s life may not always have measured up to his son’s description, the reader discovers at the very least the ideal to which many aspired. Léonard ably sorts through the key events in Ancillon’s life and career, establishing at every juncture the broader context and its meaning. As such, the study rises well above a narrowly focused biography. It provides a meticulous history encapsulated in a single individual. It was, from this perspective, the shared experience of French Reformed pastors amid the rising confessional tensions. The apprehensions and growing difficulties began in 1661 with Louis XIV’s strict application of the Edict of Nantes and continued with developments that culminated in the Revocation in 1685 and the Refuge in the decades thereafter. Léonard’s investigation of the ways in which Ancillon served the faithful in these unsettled times is both captivating and enlightening.

NOTES

[1] Albert Sarrabère, *Dictionnaire des pasteurs Basques et Béarnais (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)* (Pau: Centre d’Étude du Protestantisme Béarnais, 2001) and *Dictionnaire des pasteurs d’Anjou, Main, Touraine, Loudunmois, Vendômois et de la province synodale de Bretagne. XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Pau: Centre d’Étude du Protestantisme Béarnais, 2006).

[2] Julien Léonard, *Être pasteur au XVIIe siècle. Le ministère de Paul Ferry à Metz (1612-1669)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015).

[3] Michelle Magdelaine, “Francfort-sur-le-Main et les réfugiées huguenots,” in Guido Braun and Susanne Lachenicht eds., *Les États allemands et les huguenots. Politique d’immigration et processus d’intégration* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), pp. 35-49.

[4] Charles Ancillon, *Discours sur la vie de feu Monsieur Ancillon et ses dernières heures*, vol. 3 of *Mélange critique de littérature recueilli des conversations de feu Monsieur Ancillon*, 3 vols. (Basel: Eman & König, 1698).

Raymond A. Mentzer
University of Iowa
raymond-mentzer@uiowa.edu

Copyright © 2018 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