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Karen E. Spierling, Erik A. de Boer and R. Ward Holder, eds., *Emancipating Calvin. Culture and Confessional Identity in Francophone Reformed Communities*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. xx + 306 pp. €99.00/\$119.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-90-04-36051-8.

Review by Silke Muylaert, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

This edited volume forms a fitting tribute to the legacy and career of Raymond Mentzer, since it brings together eleven essays on the topic of early modern Francophone Reformed communities. These eleven contributions from the most prominent scholars in the field emphasize the impact of the local context on the reception of Reformed practices. The book consists of three parts or themes: *Consistories*, *Huguenot Culture and History*, and *Ritual and Worship*. As Bernard Roussel's foreward notes, the academic world to this day still profits from the fruits of Mentzer's hard labor, especially that of tracing consistory records, even in times before digitization in which small archives were often less accessible. The book contains a map depicting the places of origin of consistory records that Mentzer identified, thus illustrating the debt we owe him. [1] Above all, the map provides a handy overview of places in France for which consistory records exist. The volume ends with the addendum of an equally useful bibliography listing Raymond Mentzer's publications to date.

In the introduction, Karen Spierling explains the title 'Emancipating Calvin' in the context of Mentzer's work, and shows how it features in the rest of the book. Among many of Mentzer's contributions, Spierling identifies two main questions that have pervaded his work and helped change the way scholars examine Francophone Reformed communities. Both questions concern the ways in which French Reformed churches related to the Genevan church model and to the local contexts in which the churches operated. Spierling explains that posing these questions has enabled scholarship to surpass centuries of zealous projections of Calvinist notions on the Reformed churches and in so doing has emancipated the Reformed churches as institutions that need to be studied in their local context. Consequently, over the past few decades, scholars have started seeing the churches as independent institutions connected through transcending networks and theological notions and have started to recognize the diversity in unity and the adaptability of Reformed practices.

Mentzer thus stood at the crossroads of a large historiographical change that impacted Reformation studies and subsequently the study of Reformed communities in many ways. As Spierling mentions, Calvin and Calvinism are now more detached notions than before. Calvin has effectively been liberated from Calvinism. These changes also impacted research on communities and their confessional boundaries more profoundly. Scholars now describe how

blurred or negotiated confessional boundaries often were, also in the context of toleration and religious pluralism. [2] The exploration of confessional boundaries is a first major theme that emerges from the book, with the first four essays concentrating on consistories.

In the first chapter, Jeffrey Watt shows how the Genevan consistory dealt with misbehavior. Watt tackles the notion that the Reformed, even those in prominent social positions, behaved impeccably by putting forward three cases of bad behavior of refugees connected to Geneva. At first sight, these three cases do not offer any surprises to the Reformation scholar. Yet, in putting forward the three case studies, Watt shows that Reformers such as Calvin accepted that sinning was an inevitable part of life which they could not, and did not try to, erase. Sinning was problematic, yet as long as sinners were repentant, they could still be paragons of faith. Watt uses one example of a Protestant who had misbehaved in Geneva but later still ended up being hailed for his martyrdom by Crespin. This first chapter thus delves deeper into the way we understand church discipline as well as reconceptualizing the connection between faith and sin. [3]

Chapters two and three carefully thread the path of confessional boundaries as they explore the tensions between Protestant and Catholic believers, demonstrating the complexity and adaptability of inter-confessional contacts. The second chapter, by Christian Grosse, recounts the story of an inter-confessional cooperation over a common interest in the regulation of matrimonial life and matters of adultery in Echallens in Switzerland. Cooperation came in the form of a shared consistory that contained both Catholic and Reformed representatives, and its eighteenth-century records attracted Grosse. At first sight, religious cooperation does not seem odd. The author, however, refers to the simultaneous relationship between cooperation and the guarding of confessional boundaries. This chapter demonstrates how local exceptional circumstances could shape and reinvent Reformed rituals. In chapter three, Graeme Murdock describes the range and boundaries of contacts between Catholics and Protestants in the town of Montauban in the second half of the sixteenth century. He shows that despite violence towards one another during difficult times, and despite well-defined confessional identities and boundaries, Catholics and Protestants did interact freely as is evidenced in the frequent presence of Protestants at Catholic festivals. This presence was also a burden on the consistories, as the festivals often involved dancing. Murdock identifies dancing as a distinguishing factor for both religions, since Reformed consistories did not allow the dancing so often practiced by Catholics. Yet, members of the Reformed church in Montauban did not always agree with the ban on dancing and attended festivals in which they mixed with Catholics and in which they were known to have danced.

A second large theme in the book is consistorial diversity. The fourth chapter, by Philippe Chareyre, demonstrates this diversity by comparing seventeenth-century records for three Reformed communities: the city of Nîmes and the nearby villages of Gallargues and Aimargues. He compares both the appearance of the consistorial books and their contents and concludes that consistorial institutions were adaptable and depended on a few key variables, notably on the number of members in a church, the location of the church, and the majority or minority status of the Protestant population. The next chapter investigates a different sort of consistorial diversity. Despite being the first chapter of the second part of the volume, themed *Huguenot Culture and History*, it continues to demonstrate consistorial diversity. Karin Maag's investigation into the changing coverage and status of the office of deacon in the French Reformed Church between 1560 and 1660 reveals the extent of the diverging interpretations of

the office, from Calvin to French and Swiss Reformed churches and the potential Catholic influence on these interpretations. During the sixteenth century, deacons held a wide range of assignments, sometimes broader than those of the elders, which included reading the Scripture to the community and regularly or occasionally replacing pastors. She shows the wide range of assignments that deacons enjoyed over the next few centuries, despite the increased prominence of elders in Reformed communities between 1560 and 1660.

These essays and those that follow illustrate, as Karen Spierling points out in the introduction, the lived experience of setting or breaking confessional boundaries as a “negotiated process,” answering to particular local contexts. This negotiating process could be shaped by the needs of the nobility, as both Jonathan Reid and Andrew Spicer argue. In chapter six, Reid builds on the idea that nobles played a major role in the promotion of the Reformed faith in France. He analyzes this thesis for the particular period 1559-1563, examining how lay leadership coincided with a strong growth of the churches during this period, and the role nobles played in combination with the impact of the large number of adherents. In the final chapter (eleven), Andrew Spicer demonstrates the Catholic exploitation of the social needs of the Reformed nobility and churches in order to discredit Protestants a century later. He analyzes the use of marks of honor and distinction in Reformed temples, noting that Huguenots held on to marks of honor such as the right to burial within the parish church, the presence of their insignia, or their own seating spaces, and attempted to gain similar marks of honor in Reformed temples. In some places they succeeded, yet such honors did not go uncontested among the Huguenot assemblies, again displaying diversity in practices. The greatest criticism of such practices, however, came from secular authorities, perhaps on the instigation of the Catholic Church, who wanted to curtail the privileges of Calvinists, and often succeeded in suppressing them by the end of the seventeenth century.

The confessional negotiation process also showed in communities at large. In chapter seven, Françoise Moreil describes the confessional networks of the Orangeois notary Jean Dubois and his clientele. She claims that as a notary, Dubois attracted a large Reformed clientele because of his attachment to the Reformed church and that in this case, confessional bias probably affected people’s choice of notary, despite Dubois also having some Catholic clients. Moreil’s main goal is to point out the existence of detailed notarial sources that describe confessional boundaries in society in many ways. In chapter eight, Edwin Bezzina recounts the history of the Walloon or Huguenot Refugee church of Amsterdam between 1650 and 1700, with an emphasis on how the church’s refugee position in its local political and religious context affected it. He analyzes the consistory records and notes, showing that the number of recorded cases decreased by the last quarter of the century, just as it did in the Dutch Reformed churches.

Chapters nine and ten offer two further cases of negotiation between laity and clergy. Mack Holt’s well-structured article analyzes reading habits through annotation in sixteenth-century French vernacular Bibles. He reveals that four out of five Bibles did not include annotations, concluding that most Bible readers held a “passive” reading attitude. Whether or not the link between making annotations and actively engaging with a book is as straightforward as the author assumes, his conclusions about the subjects on which readers made annotations are fascinating. In chapter ten, Ezra Plank comments on the sacralization of the Reformed home, arguing that, contrary to Weber’s ideas on the disenchantment of the world, Calvin and Calvinism attempted to sacralize domestic spaces. Reformed churches did not always succeed in a sacralization of the domestic sphere, as consistory records testify. This sacralization of the

home depended on negotiation between the consistories and the Reformed population, and believers remained ambiguous concerning the boundaries between the profane and the sacred. This is a very dense, yet thought-provoking, chapter.

In respect to historiographical developments, this edited volume does not always bring surprising conclusions or methodology forward. Rather, the articles demonstrate the various directions of research that scholars have taken over the past decade and brings them together in a useful volume supporting the argument in the introduction that the book represents “the most recent steps along this path toward understanding Francophone Reformed congregations—including Geneva—as autonomous communities grappling with particular circumstances” (p. 3). The book confirms the notion of diversity among Reformed populations and contributes to our understanding of church discipline. I would argue that its conclusions could be expanded beyond Francophone communities. While the choice to focus largely on French Reformed communities is logical, given that the book is a tribute the work of Raymond Mentzer, one should note that the study of Dutch-speaking Reformed churches shows parallel historiographical trends and would provide interesting comparisons. Scholars of Dutch Reformed churches can learn much from the research paradigms in this volume and vice versa. Connecting this research with similar historiographical developments in scholarship on Dutch and Walloon Reformed churches would provide an interesting contextualization and put these developments in perspective. In any case, all scholars with an interest in religion during the Reformation will find inspiration in this volume.

## LIST OF ESSAYS

Karen E. Spierling, “Introduction: Emancipating Calvin

### Part 1 *Consistories*

1. Jeffrey R. Watt, “Rowdy Refugees and Mischievous Martyrs in Calvin’s Geneva”
2. Christian Grosse, Translated by Christine Rhone, “A ‘Catholic’ Consistory?: The Bipartisan Consistorial Court of Echallens in the Vaud (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)”
3. Graeme Murdock, “The Dancing Calvinists of Montauban: Testing the Boundaries of a Reformed Community in the 1590s in France”
4. Philippe Chareyre, Translated by Karin Maag, “On Consistorial Diversity”

### Part 2 *Huguenot Culture and History*

5. Karin Maag, “A Debated Office: Deacons in the Huguenot Church, 1560-1660”
6. Jonathan A. Reid, “Lay Leadership in the Reformed Communities during the Huguenot Revolution, 1559-1563”
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9. Mack P. Holt, “Reading the Bible in Sixteenth-Century France”
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11. Andrew Spicer, “The Huguenots and Marks of Honor and Distinction in the Parish Church and Reformed Temple”

## NOTES

[1] For more information on French consistory records, see Raymond Mentzer’s *Les registres des consistoires des Églises réformées de France, XVIe-XVIIe siècles. Un inventaire*. Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance 526. Archives des Églises réformées de France 4. (Geneva: Droz, 2014).

[2] Such conclusions are not limited to interactions between confessions in France but also feature in studies on toleration in England or the Holy Roman Empire. See for instance Jesse Spohnholz, *The Tactics of Toleration: A Refugee Community in the Age of Religious Wars* (Newark/Plymouth: University of Delaware Press, 2011).

[3] This is a topic also closely connected to Mentzer’s own research interests, of course. See, among others, Raymond A. Mentzer, ed., *Sin and the Calvinists: Morals, Control and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1994); Raymond A. Mentzer, “Notions of Sin and Penitence within the French Reformed Community” in K. J. Lualdi and A. T. Thayer, eds., *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 84-100; or his work in Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moreil & Philippe Chareyre, eds., *Dire l’interdit. The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010).

Silke Muylaert  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam  
[s.muylaert@vu.nl](mailto:s.muylaert@vu.nl)

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