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Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002. xxvi + 670 pp. Figures, maps, graphs, bibliographical notes, and index. \$40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-300-08812-4.

Review by Raymond A. Mentzer, University of Iowa.

The tumultuous history of the Huguenots in early modern France had an expansive European and Atlantic context. The members of the French Reformed churches were part of an international Calvinist movement whose dimensions were wide and deep. Inspired initially by Huldrych Zwingli's reform of Zurich and, more obviously, the Frenchman John Calvin's subsequent success at Geneva, the so-called Reformed tradition spread north and east to Germany, Poland, and Hungary, west to France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England, and ultimately across the Atlantic to New England. This religious dynamic with its empowering doctrine of predestination occupied a crucial role in the French, Dutch and English religious-civil wars. In New England, puritans exercised substantial influence in the formation of American culture.

Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber approvingly argued that Calvinism profoundly shaped modern western bourgeois society. While our understanding of the details of these developments and the appropriate interpretative models has changed a great deal since Weber's time, the fascination with Calvinism remains. Over the past several decades, scholarly scrutiny of the movement has tended to focus on the experience of particular kingdoms, regions, and cities.

As Philip Benedict aptly remarks in the opening pages of this study, the last major synthetic examination of the Reformed tradition, John T. McNeill's *History and Character of Calvinism*, appeared some fifty years ago. During the intervening half century, scholarly interests and inclinations have undergone a dramatic shift. To some extent, the transformation has been a move towards assessment of the religious beliefs and activities of ordinary men and women, and away from the concerns of political and social elites. At the same time, historians have become less invested in the particular confessional traditions associated with the Reformation; they are more ecumenical in their approach and often religiously detached from the subject. Both developments prompt Benedict's reconsideration of the nature and influence of Calvinism in early modern Europe.

The results are a significant book--some 550 pages of text and fifteen years in the making--whose value to scholars cannot be overemphasized. The present study assembles the best recent scholarship on Calvinism throughout Europe and integrates the findings into a coherent overarching account. While Benedict's survey embraces a Calvinist world that goes well beyond the kingdom of France and neighboring Geneva, it squarely addresses the francophone milieu. For their part, the Huguenots

strongly affected events in the French realm during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; many carried Huguenot culture to every corner of the European and Atlantic world in the diaspora that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; and their modern descendants emerged as an energetic political force in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France. The present volume reveals much about these French protestants as well as the larger Calvinist movement in which they were important participants.

Benedict's self-announced objective is ambitious and multifaceted. He wants to present the essential narrative of the origins of the Reformed tradition. Who was John Calvin and how did the movement, which observers frequently attach to his name, unfold? Benedict also proposes to re-evaluate classical theories focusing on the importance and effect of Calvinism. Here, the obvious example is the Weber thesis and the assertion of connections between Calvinism, capitalism, and democracy. On another level, Benedict assesses early modern Reformed ecclesiastical institutions, whose power and impact scholars have increasingly underscored in recent decades.

Finally, no study of this sort would be complete without careful scrutiny of the distinct features of Calvinist religious culture and devotion. The book itself divides into four major sections: the early years of the Reformed movement to its triumph at Geneva in 1555, expansion to other parts of Europe during the ensuing decades, the theological and political complexities of the seventeenth century, and the critical institutional nexus of Reformed christianity.

The study opens with some general considerations regarding the nature of the Reformation and then moves quickly to a discussion of Zwingli and Calvin, the twin founders of the Reformed tradition. Zwingli, who died in 1531, five years before Calvin's arrival in Geneva, established the theological foundations of Reformed christianity. He explicitly distanced himself from the ideas of Martin Luther, notably on the doctrine of the Eucharist. Calvin further elaborated this distinctive theological position, contributing above all to the Reformed understanding of predestination.

In addition, he brilliantly summarized Reformed beliefs in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the first systematic presentation of protestant theological views. Finally, Calvin developed the enduring features of Reformed ecclesiastical polity and stressed the necessity of church discipline. In this regard, he instituted the reform of manners which complemented the reform of doctrine. As Benedict rightly points out, the Calvinist reform of life through institutions such as the consistory has been the object of increasing scholarly inquiry in recent years.

Secure in their Genevan base by the mid-1550s, Calvin and other principals in the Reformed movement soon launched an international movement that spread rapidly across Europe. Here, Benedict accentuates the sizeable, if ultimately unsuccessful, effort to evangelize France. By the end of the devastating sixteenth-century wars of religion, the Huguenots were permanently consigned to the minority status. The only place in the French orbit where the movement dominated was the kingdom of Béarn, whose protestant political authorities had imposed reform from above. Still, the French experience served as a model for the introduction of Calvinism in other regions of Europe.

A straightforward political analysis with obvious attention to the religious sphere underpins much of this section of the book. Distinctive patterns emerge. Governing authorities in Scotland, England, Béarn, and a half dozen German principalities effectively fashioned "established" churches; the Reformed churches in the Netherlands are perhaps better understood as legally privileged; and the Calvinists were, at best, powerful minorities in France, Hungary, Poland, and the Rhineland. Although some differences existed among them, these churches generally drafted remarkably similar national confessions of faith, promoted the organization of local consistories to govern the individual churches, and established presbyterian-synodal hierarchies of ecclesiastical assemblies which orchestrated the whole.

During the seventeenth century, Calvinist theologians expounded a Reformed orthodoxy. They engaged in the necessary, if less exciting, process of systemization and, in the process, built a Reformed scholasticism. The age also witnessed an array of theological disputes of which the most famous is likely the Arminian controversy. These religious quarrels reverberated emphatically in the political arena. Presbyterians in Scotland and Congregationalists in England openly and actively challenged the suitability of episcopal polity. In the end, the English civil war was the most spectacular of the political upheavals.

Yet Benedict is mindful of the persecution of the Huguenots during Louis XIV's long reign, the Sun King's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the Huguenot diaspora that ensued. In all of this, the French influence over European Calvinist circles persisted in a variety of ways. Refugee communities, which had existed already in the sixteenth century, mushroomed after 1685. Military contacts were ongoing and profound. Intellectual exchanges and theological understandings often emanated from a core of French protestant theologians and philosophers.

The book's final chapters take up a series of questions that are at the forefront of current research on Calvinism. How did Reformed communities translate their innovative theological insights into a coherent system of everyday habits and practices? In what ways did the Calvinists restructure ecclesiastical institutions and the related ministerial offices? How do we understand the ecclesiastical discipline that historians so frequently associate with Calvinism? What were the repercussions in terms of worship and devotion? Indeed, who were the men and women that observers have long dubbed Calvinist and Puritan?

Benedict begins with consideration of the reform, reeducation, and reconstitution of the parish ministry: the pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. Who were they and how did they perceive their roles and set about accomplishing the appointed tasks? The pastors were certainly better educated and aimed to behave with greater decorum than their medieval predecessors, even if they faced similar financial constraints. The office of elder was perhaps the most original element in the Reformed transformation of the ministry.

Drawn largely from the ranks of the bourgeoisie, these laymen had charge over the enforcement of morals in the local churches and shouldered considerable financial responsibilities. They were educated and professional city dwellers from the middling social and economic ranks who found the status accorded them by Reformed christianity exceedingly attractive. The development undoubtedly helps to explain the appeal of Calvinism among urban elites in many towns large and small.

The efforts by Reformed consistories, kirk sessions, and presbyteries from Geneva and Nîmes to Amsterdam and St. Andrews towards morals reform through the imposition of church discipline have been the subject of significant fresh inquiry. Quantitative analyses have tended to dominate the recent literature. Yet, as Benedict and others point out, this approach is not without its flaws and ambiguities. In any event, the pastors and elders, who assembled for weekly consistory meetings, were determined to eradicate a wide range of faults and, in the process, refashion the community of the faithful. The goal was to pacify a quarrelsome populace, inculcate biblically sanctioned devotional habits, regulate marriage and sexuality, and reduce unlicensed sociability.

For the accomplishment of these purposes, the local churches and consistories had at their disposal a range of penitential options and shaming techniques. Some scholars view this offensive against sin as a process of social disciplining that the early modern state warmly welcomed. Disciplined and well-behaved Calvinists presumably made for model subjects. Assessing church discipline is, of course, a complicated affair and a consensus has yet to emerge.

Even more profound in Benedict's view was the Calvinist reform of worship and devotion. Simply put, how did the practice of piety serve to foster Calvinist identity? What were the rituals that cemented people's awareness of their Reformed religious culture? Men, women, and children gathered each week to hear the pastor's sermon; they sat quietly and attentively, much as school children, listening to God's word as contained in Scripture and Scripture alone.

At less frequent intervals they celebrated the Lord's Supper, partaking of both the bread and the wine. These Calvinists christened their infants with strikingly biblical names, drawn above all from the Hebrew Bible. Marriage was strictly regulated and burial rites seemed woefully inadequate. Calvinists sang psalms and recited prayers in the vernacular, studied catechism, and instituted family worship each evening in their homes. Altogether, they succeeded in creating a new and distinct devotion.

Make no mistake. This study goes well beyond the parameters of protestantism in the kingdom of France. It embraces the far larger phenomenon of European Calvinism of which the Huguenots were but one, albeit important, component. In addition, the focus, much as the book's subtitle suggests, is the social character of the movement. Theological and political aspects are not neglected, but they tend to be treated within the matrix of social history. At the same time, Benedict's approach is synthetic and interpretative. He presents the broad narrative of Reformed protestantism in France and Europe while simultaneously offering his own reading of these events.

The approach, to be sure, has its drawbacks. The reader can now and again be frustrated by the desire to know more about a given topic. Yet the grand sweep never fails. It offers a firm grasp of the place and significance of Calvinism in early modern Europe. We discover the international character of Calvinism as well as the pivotal role played by francophone communities. And Benedict's concluding reflections on the ongoing meaning of these changes are an enriching and rewarding exercise. For scholars of French history, it is worth noting that Calvinist communities across Europe engaged in a rich array of adaptations, each of which highlights in its own way the significance of the Genevan and French versions of a church purely reformed.

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