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*The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*

Martin I. Klauber

**The Theology of the French  
Reformed Churches:  
From Henri IV to the Revocation  
of the Edict of Nantes**

Edited by  
Martin I. Klauber



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*The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*

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To **John D. Woodbridge** and

**Robert M. Kingdon**

*(in memoriam)*

for their inspiration, mentorship, and  
teaching on the French Reformed churches.



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## Introduction

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*Martin I. Klauber*

The theologians of the seventeenth-century French Reformed churches displayed a theological richness rarely remembered even among Reformed believers in the centuries following their labor. This particular volume is an attempt to resurrect some of this vitality to a new audience. The book is divided into two sections. The first focuses on the history of the movement and the second on particular theologians. The idea is that we must get a sense of the historical context in which they ministered to gain a full appreciation for the depth of their thought. The period was an unusual one in which France boasted two state religions, Roman Catholic and Protestant, due to the protections afforded the latter by the Edict of Nantes. These protections limited the locations in which they could worship, but the clergy were supported by the state. The Edict also afforded them military protection. Few of the French Reformed theologians of the early seventeenth century still had personal memories of the religious wars, but they had heard the stories and never regained trust for the Roman Catholic elite, although they remained loyal to the king.

The opening salvo in Roman Catholic-Protestant polemics in seventeenth-century France began with a major theological debate at Fontainebleau, the palace of King Henri IV. The major combatants were the Roman Catholic Jacques-Davy du Perron and the Huguenot leader, Philippe du Plessis-Mornay at the famed Conference at Fontainebleau presided over by King Henri IV. Du Perron was one of the most capable Roman Catholic scholars of his generation. He was raised in the Reformed faith of his father, a physician turned Reformed pastor who fled to Bern to escape persecution in France. As a teenager,

Jacques-Davy converted to Roman Catholicism while under the tutelage of the French abbot and poet Philippe Desportes, and then devoted himself to the study of theology and service in the Roman Catholic Church. He then returned to Normandy and became such an impressive scholar that he was made a reader to King Henri III. He also delivered the funeral oration for the famous poet Ronsard and delivered the eulogy for Mary, queen of Scots. Having obtained the bishopric of Évreux in 1591, he then was responsible for the negotiations with Henri IV that led to the king's conversion to Rome, leading the delegation sent to Rome to obtain Henri's official absolution from the pope.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of the conference was to determine the accuracy of Mornay's five thousand citations from the church fathers cited in his *De l'institution, usage et doctrine du Saint Sacrement de l'Eucharistie en l'Eglise ancienne* (1598).<sup>2</sup> This was a comprehensive treatise that served as a foundational document for the debates on the church fathers that raged between Protestant and Roman Catholic polemicists throughout the following century. It also became the talk of the town within the French intellectual and religious world because Mornay challenged the twofold argument that the teachings of the early church supported Roman Catholic theology and that Protestantism was an innovation. Mornay claimed that transubstantiation had been a theological innovation, unknown in the early church. His use of patristic sources continued the trend that went back to the earliest days of the Reformation. Although the early Reformers held to *sola Scriptura*, they also believed that they had the testimony of the fathers to support them and to show that Protestant theology was not new, but could trace its roots back to the New Testament era. Mornay's defeat at Fontainebleau threatened this narrative, and many of his followers took up the pen to vindicate his honor.

Although the Lord's Supper was the subject of much controversy, there were a host of other matters that occupied the attention of Reformed theologians. One major issue was how they were going

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1. On Du Perron see Pierre Feret, *Le Cardinal Du Perron: orateur, controversiste, écrivain* (Paris: Librairie Académique Didier, 1876).

2. Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, *De l'institution, usage et doctrine du Saint Sacrement de l'Eucharistie en l'Eglise ancienne. Ensemble quand, comment, et par quels degrez la Messe s'est introduicte en sa place* (La Rochelle: Jérôme Haultin, 1598).

to respond to the canons of the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619. King Louis XIII would not allow the French Reformed delegates to attend the conference, so the French input was limited. However, the French Reformed synods weighed in and adopted the Canons of Dort at the Synod of Alais in 1620. Acceptance of these decisions was by no means unanimous; many, most prominently the theologians at the Academy of Saumur led by Moïse Amyraut, posited a response to the doctrine of limited atonement, referred to as hypothetical universalism or sublapsarianism. The real architect of this view was John Cameron, a Scotsman, who taught briefly at Saumur and influenced a host of French theologians, including Amyraut and Jean Daillé.

The scholars who have participated in this project have already done significant work in the history and theology of the French Reformed churches. Richard A. Muller needs no introduction, and in many ways he has been the dean of scholarship of post-Reformation Reformed thought for many years. His publications have been voluminous, and his magisterial four-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* is a treasure trove of information and areas for further study. His essay here on Amyraut is significant because it goes beyond the typical focus on his views of the atonement. Three of Dr. Muller's former students, Albert Gootjes, Theodore van Raalte, and Jason Zuidema, are also contributors to this volume. Albert Gootjes has recently completed a fine dissertation on Claude Pajon based on extensive research at the *Institut d'histoire de la Réformation* in Geneva, and he has been very successful in translating major works on the post-Reformation era from Dutch, German, and French into English. He is also on the editorial board of the Post-Reformation Digital Library (PRDL) sponsored by the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and Calvin Theological Seminary.<sup>3</sup> Ted van Raalte, former co-pastor of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba, has done extensive research on the spiritual theology of Guillaume Farel along with Jason Zuidema.<sup>4</sup> For the present volume, Van Raalte has written an extensive essay on the French Reformed synods in the seventeenth century. The majority of

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3. Albert Gootjes, "Claude Pajon (1626–1685) and the Academy of Saumur" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2012).

4. Jason Zuidema and Theodore van Raalte, *Early French Reform: The Theology and Spirituality of Guillaume Farel* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011).

historical studies of these synods have focused on the sixteenth century, as illustrated by Glenn Sunshine's important work on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Jason Zuidema has produced an impressive amount of publications on the early Reformed movement, including an important work on the theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli.<sup>6</sup> He has also published much on Reformed thought in French-speaking Europe. His essay here on Pierre Jurieu continues that work.

Part of the goal of this volume has been to include studies by outstanding European scholars. One of the most prominent among them is the late Willem van Asselt, who has also done wide-ranging work on post-Reformation Reformed thought and has recently published a very helpful introduction to the topic as a whole. His major work was on the federal theology of Johannes Cocceius, and many of his own students from Utrecht have gone on to continue research in the same vein.<sup>7</sup> Jane McKee is a prominent scholar of the French Reformed movement. She has written on the Huguenot diaspora and on Charles Drelincourt and is editing the extensive correspondence of the Drelincourt family.<sup>8</sup> Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard has enjoyed a distinguished career at the Institut Protestant de Théologie in Paris. She has written extensively on the history of the Huguenots<sup>9</sup> and the Camisard rebellion.<sup>10</sup> She has also served on the board of directors of the Bibliothèque de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français and on the editorial board of its journal.

Several prominent North American scholars also have contributed to this work. Donald Sinnema has recently retired from Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, and has long been a leading expert on the Synod of Dort. He writes here on the so-called French

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5. Glenn S. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557–1572* (Kirksville, Mo.: Truman State, 2003).

6. Jason Zuidema, *Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) and the Outward Instruments of Divine Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

7. Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

8. Jane McKee and Randolphe Vigne, eds., *The Huguenots: France, Exile and Diaspora* (East Sussex, U.K.: Sussex Academic Press, 2012).

9. Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard and Patrick Cabanel, *Une histoire des protestants en France, XVIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998).

10. Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, *Comprendre la révolte des Camisards* (Éditions Ouest-France, 2008).

connection with the synod. His current project is the publication of the Acts of the Synod of Dort, under the sponsorship of Ref0500.

Scott Manetsch has written extensively on Theodore Beza and his relationship with the French Reformed churches.<sup>11</sup> He has also recently published a major monograph on pastoral theology in Geneva from Calvin's arrival through the early seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> His contribution in this book is to show the connection between Beza and the Reformed movement in Geneva with their French counterparts. One must remember that both Calvin and Beza were Frenchmen and that there was significant interaction between Geneva and France, as Robert Kingdon has so eloquently shown.<sup>13</sup>

Jeannine Olson of Rhode Island College has examined the French-Genevan relationship and published a major work on the *Bourse française*; she is now researching the life of Calvin's friend Nicholas des Gallars.<sup>14</sup> John Roney of Sacred Heart University has published a major book on the nineteenth-century Reformation historian Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné.<sup>15</sup> Roney's major research area is the historiography of the Reformation. Michael A. G. Haykin of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, the author of the chapter on Jean Claude, has a wide array of research interests including eighteenth-century British Baptist life and thought, as well as patristic trinitarianism and Baptist piety.<sup>16</sup> He is a leading expert on the spiritual formation movement.

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11. Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

12. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

13. Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555–1563* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1956); Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1571* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1967).

14. Jeannine Olson, *Calvin and Social Welfare: Deacons and the Bourse française* (Selingsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 1989); Olson, "The Mission to France: Nicolas Des Gallars' Interaction with John Calvin, Gaspard de Coligny, and Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London," in *Calvinus clarissimus theologus: Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012).

15. John B. Roney, *The Inside of History: Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigné and Romantic Historiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996).

16. Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

One of the most difficult decisions in editing this volume has been which theologians to include and which to exclude. If not for the limits of space, it would have been desirable to include essays on other professors at Saumur, including Josué de La Place, Louis Cappel, and Isaac D'Huisseau. Other French Reformed thinkers worthy of consideration include David Blondel, Daniel Chamier, Michel Le Faucheur, Edme Aubertin, and Jean Mestrezat. These were all important theologians, but not well known to a contemporary audience. As always, there is room for further research.