

Alain Dufour. *Théodore de Bèze. Poète et théologien.*

Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance 78. Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 2006. 272 pp. index. illus. €25.62. ISBN: 978-2-600-01103-7.

It has been over half a century since Paul-F. Geisendorf's authoritative *Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva, 1949). Who better qualified to hit the refresh button than Alain Dufour, editor for almost as long of Bèze's correspondence, of which twenty-eight volumes have appeared to date (1587 being the latest)? With a style at times almost as relaxed as the preceding sentence, Dufour has reworked for Droz his 2002 biographical sketch, which first appeared among a heteroclite *vitae* collection of other, lesser-known figures, in volume 42.2 of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres' *Histoire littéraire de la France* series. Dufour makes no claim to exhaustive coverage — at under 272 pages *in toto* the volume scarcely exceeds even the slimmest tome of the edited correspondence — but he does offer an accessible, unexpectedly readable sprint through the otherwise ponderous life of Calvin's influential, long-lived successor. It is as suitable for the nonspecialist reader interested in the history of French Protestantism, of the Wars of Religion, and of French-speaking Switzerland, as it is for the professional intent on renewing his or her acquaintance with Bèze and his chronology.

This reader particularly appreciated the measured treatment of both Bèze and Castellion in one of the few controversies that still resonates with modern humanists, secular or otherwise. Similarly, Dufour offers a usefully clear and succinct explanation of the Lutheran ubiquitarian debate (chapter 6), which consumed so much of Bèze's polemical energy in the 1560s. The most notable update (or correction), perhaps, since Geisendorf, is Dufour's decisive laying to rest of doubts concerning the authorship of the monumental 1580 *Histoire ecclésiastique*. As one might expect, he turns his intimate and unparalleled knowledge of Bèze's correspondence to profit in refuting Geisendorf's "obstinate" (the word is Dufour's)

skepticism regarding Bèze's involvement, even as he acknowledges what was, necessarily and by design, a collective effort.

To follow up briefly on the earlier reference to Dufour's relaxed style. It is not often the serious student of the early modern period is encouraged to believe that theological disputation, in all its rhetorical excess, was for contemporaries as passion-rousing as a soccer match — when not, that is, as interminable as a game of ping-pong. Nor does one expect to find in a sober Droz publication the latest stage reviews, such as Dufour's manifest delight in a recent Genevan revival of Bèze's 1550 *Abraham sacrificiant*, one that apparently not only moved its audience to tears but consequently enjoyed an extended run. (What next? A headline in *Le Temps'* arts section: “Bèze's Abraham Still Slays 'Em at the Box Office” or “Bèze Still Boffo at the BO”?) But as Bèze himself was quite capable of doing, I jest in earnest. From such an *éminence grise* of Reformation historiography as Dufour, a light but thoroughly informed touch is most welcome. The solid evening's worth of biographical diversion his *Théodore de Bèze* provides serves admirably both to anchor the much more long-winded (and thankfully so) *Correspondance*, and to remind us of the continuing centrality of this “monument qu'on visite” (as Dufour's penultimate chapter title would have it) to a full and nuanced understanding of Calvinism in particular and of the Protestant Reformation in general.

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