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Book Reviews: Pierre Viret: A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation: The Apologetics, Ethics, and Economics of the Bible, Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation

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John-Marc Berthoud. *Pierre Viret: A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation: The Apologetics, Ethics, and Economics of the Bible* (Tallahassee, FL; Zurich Publishing, 2010). ISBN: 978-0984378500. USD \$12.00.

R.A. Sheats, *Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation* (Tallahassee, FL; Zurich Publishing, 2012). ISBN: 978-0-98-43785-1-7. USD \$30.00.

In the last five years, Zurich Publishing has released two English biographies of Pierre Viret (1511-1571), the great Swiss reformer of Lausanne, Geneva and southern France. Though influential in the 16th century and an intimate colleague of John Calvin, Viret has become the “forgotten Reformer.”

Pierre Viret was born in Orbe, in a French-speaking section of Switzerland, and was educated in Paris. He trained for the ministry and became a committed Reformed Protestant. Viret labored with Calvin in Geneva on two different occasions, but he is best remembered for being the leading Reformer in Lausanne for nearly a quarter century (1536-1559). He closed his ministry laboring in southern France during difficult years of religious warfare. Viret was a prolific author, whose work, unfortunately, is largely unavailable in English.

Jean-Marc Berthoud’s brief biography, *Pierre Viret: A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation: The Apologetics, Ethics, and Economics of the Bible*, introduces the future work of Zurich Publishing and the Pierre Viret Association. The volume includes lengthy quotations from the works of Viret and contemporary reformers. Berthoud provides an impressive discussion of Viret’s thoughts on apologetics and ethics, placing his writing in the context of his time, and tracing its impact on later philosophers and theologians. The presentation of Viret’s economic views is particularly interesting, illustrating Viret’s remarkably diverse interests, his application of Biblical principles to every aspect of life, and his surprising ability to predict the dangers of economic systems un-regulated by God’s word. Berthoud compares Viret’s breadth of application with Calvin’s *Institutes*, and Rousas Rushdoony’s *Systematic Theology*, noting that few theologians have so carefully applied Scripture to every arena of life.

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The biography is quite brief and therefore limited in scope. Berthoud, for instance, scarcely mentions dramatic episodes of Viret's life. There are lengthy direct translations (good because Viret is largely inaccessible in English), but the reader longs for more of Berthoud's insightful analysis. Of particular value is the lengthy bibliography of Viret's French language work. Zurich Publishing next plans to release Viret's magisterial three-volume *Christian Instruction in the Doctrine of the Law and the Gospel*.

In *Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation*, Rebecca Sheats provides an affectionate and engaging narrative overview of Viret's life. Sheats's biography thoroughly describes Viret's ministry, the challenges faced by 16th century Reformers and the Providence of God in the Swiss Reformer's life. Viret twice escaped Catholic assassination attempts; he was severely wounded in one attack by sword, and his digestive system was permanently injured by another attempt with poisoned spinach soup. Sheats capably guides the reader through the major periods of Viret's life and highlights irenic spirit and Christian devotion.

The Sheats biography will have limited appeal for an academic audience. It is largely based on older, secondary sources, largely in French. Sheats does not appear to incorporate insights from Robert Lindner's work on Viret and his political thought. Indeed, the book would have been stronger with greater analysis of Viret's prodigious work—some 50 volumes.

Pierre Viret: The Angel of the Reformation is beautifully produced and is filled with maps, images and color illustrations. It includes a lengthy Viret bibliography to complement a complete Viret chronology. Readable and inspiring, it is an outstanding volume for general audiences.

These new biographies are timely. Viret was a master of applying Biblical teaching to contemporary issues, and this strain of the Reformation needs further study. With the increasing interest in the political thought of the Swiss Reformation, the implications of covenantal theology on emerging Republican ideology, and its influence on Anglo-American theo-political theory in the 17th and 18th centuries, Viret deserves greater attention. While Viret was not widely known in America, Swiss writers influenced by Viret and his generation were known to the American founders.

Zurich Publishing (<http://zurichpublishing.org/>) is currently commissioning translations of Viret's massive corpus into English. The related Pierre Viret Association (<http://www.pierreviret.org/>), also based in Tallahassee, Florida, provides excellent resources and secondary articles on Viret. It is hoped that these biographies and the work of the Association will bring greater attention to a neglected giant of the Swiss Reformation.

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