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Sara K. Barker, ed. Revisiting Geneva: Robert Kingdon and the Coming of the French Wars of Religion

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Sara K. Barker, ed. *Revisiting Geneva: Robert Kingdon and the Coming of the French Wars of Religion* (St. Andrews, U.K.: Center for French History and Culture of the University of St. Andrews, 2012).

This volume, consisting of seven essays, honors Robert M. Kingdon (1927-2010) and his pioneering work on sixteenth century Geneva. Beginning in 1956 with the publication of *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563*, this American scholar profoundly shaped the historiography of this Reformation city.

In the first essay, Andrew Pettegree notes that Kingdon's work triumphed in three ways. First, his book did "revolutionize the study of Calvin and Calvinism" by investigating ecclesiastical and secular sources beyond the writings of Calvin himself. Secondly, Kingdon understood the significant role played by French religious exiles in their native land. Thirdly, Kingdon was one of the progenitors of the new social history (p. 6-7).

Karin Maag's contribution on the recruitment and training of pastors focuses on alternatives to obtaining a pastor from Geneva. The dearth of ministers led to "vagabond ministers" intruding into pastorates. Congregations also tried to adapt by expanding the role of lay leaders—deacons and elders—to include ministerial duties.

Philip Conner challenges the idea of a Genevan hegemony over the Protestant church in France. While acknowledging Geneva's essential role in fostering the missionary enterprise, Conner argues that local churches felt free to be flexible in their particular circumstances. But Conner believes that "congregationalism"—that is, congregational participation in the selection of ministers and members of the consistory—was the most serious threat to the Genevan church order.

One noteworthy minister who followed his own path was Pierre Viret, whose experiences in Switzerland's Pays de Vaud shaped his ideas of church polity. But beyond particular individuals, Conner stresses that there was a geographical divide, in which the congregations in the north, including around Paris, received much attention from Geneva—largely because of the struggle for survival in the wake of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572), while the congregations in the south were allowed to find their own way.

Conner concludes that recent historiography has shown that French Protestantism is far less uniform than what had initially been thought.

Hugues Daussy argues that Calvin reached out to the elites so that the movement would survive in hostile France. The best and brightest of the pastors were “sent to infiltrate the aristocratic houses to convert the family to Calvinism” (p. 39). The politicizing of the Huguenot party included not only attempts at peaceful persuasion, but also armed rebellion and an international dimension through the recruitment of Protestant princes from other lands. This politicization was not merely the result of pressures from within France, but was fostered by Calvin and Geneva’s Company of Pastors.

Andrew Pettegree writes on the influence of Genevan publications on the Wars of Religion. There were three pillars of Geneva’s printing industry: Calvin’s works; the vernacular Bible; and the metrical Psalter. However, after a couple of decades of dominating the printing of Reformed works written in French, in 1560, there was a significant drop, to 25% of the total published that year—a third of what it had been the year before. Pettegree attributes the precipitous fall to three factors: the need for shorter supply lines; the relative safety for Paris printers to publish these works; and impatience by French Reformed churchmen with the cautious approach of the Genevan leadership.

Jeffrey R. Watt highlights the roll of the Consistory in Calvin’s Geneva. Discipline, he writes, is of the essence of the Reformed Church. In Geneva, the Consistory often focused on matters of marriage, since that is a fundamental institution. Ecclesiastical minutes tell of domestic violence; wife-beaters were often censured. But whether crimes were involved or not, “the Consistory felt duty-bound to nurture healthy rapports among family members, at times laying the blame on one party but seeking above all reconciliation” (p. 77). Watt notes that barring a person from the Lord’s Table was not unique to Calvinistic Protestants, but is found, for example, among the Lutherans. He opines that the Consistory “was actually a much more intrusive institution than the Roman Inquisition and had the ability to effect greater change on contemporary society.” He also suggests “that the Consistory of Geneva was more akin to the Catholic confessor than the inquisitor,” since “the Consistory often resembled more a form of mandatory counselling service than a tribunal *per se*” (p. 83).

William G. Naphy’s contribution deals with Genevan historiography since the 1960s. In his view, it is now possible to write on Geneva and treat Calvin almost incidentally. This new approach owes its

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development to Kingdon's pathbreaking pen. "Kingdon's work began a process of leaving behind the few great men and their writings and delving into the lives and records of 'lesser men'. In so doing Genevan history has ceased to be just the history of the city to become the history of its peoples. The result is that early modern Genevans—both men and, more importantly, women—are increasingly seen and heard to be surprisingly 'modern'" (p. 98).

This volume should benefit those interested in the interaction between Geneva and France during Calvin's day. It continues the insights gleaned from social history, which gives texture to history—as long as the broad, overall view is not forgotten.

~ *Frank J. Smith*
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