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**Walter C. Utt and Brian E. Strayer**, *The Bellicose Dove: Claude Brousson and Protestant Resistance to Louis XIV, 1647-1698*. Brighton, U.K. and Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2003. x + 220 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$69.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 1-903900-31-X.

Review by W. Gregory Monahan, Eastern Oregon University.

It is always admirable when a scholar brings to fruition the work of a deceased colleague. Brian E. Strayer, professor of history at Andrews University, has performed that service in continuing and refining the work of the late Walter C. Utt, for whom a study of Claude Brousson was the work of a lifetime. Strayer is himself a published scholar, having written two books on the old regime, and his familiarity with the history of the religious struggles of early modern France makes him an excellent co-author of this study. [1]

Claude Brousson was the most famous of the lay preachers who traveled through the mountains of the Vivarais and the Cévennes keeping an outlawed protestantism alive and active in the aftermath of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. He was born in protestant Nîmes in 1647 to a merchant family with some noble connections and higher aspirations. Taking up the study of law, he completed his Masters at the Protestant Academy of Nîmes and a law degree at the University of Montpellier before heading to Castres to practice in its *chambre de l'Édit*, one of the many protestant courts established under the Edict of Nantes. As the authors show in the book's early chapters, Brousson quickly demonstrated considerable talent, but he had found his *métier* at a tumultuous time. The court at Castres was abolished in 1670, forcing him to move on, and his life for the next fifteen years became inextricably bound to the furies of the approaching revocation. As royal pressure on the Huguenots increased, Brousson tied himself ever more tightly to his confession. Moving to Toulouse in 1679, he helped to establish a temple at nearby Portet, gaining election there as an elder and member of its consistory. He continued to practice law, and, as the authors note, he performed brilliant legal rearguard actions in defense of protestants in the royal courts, occasionally winning his cases by craftily interpreting and manipulating the precise wording and timing of the royal edicts and declarations designed to obliterate the protections supposedly guaranteed them in the Edict of Nantes.

Such was his skill that Brousson was offered a high position in the Parlement of Toulouse if he would convert. He refused, and protestant lawyers were soon forbidden from bringing cases before the courts at all. Denied the opportunity to practice his profession in the traditionally accepted fashion, Brousson put his talents to less orthodox uses, forming the Toulouse Project in 1683 to preserve an illegal underground protestant practice in the face of royal opposition while launching what would be a lifelong effort to get the king to see the error of his ways. Indeed, the Revocation in many ways "converted" Brousson, who would have been happy to practice law in the protestant courts to the end of his days, but who now committed himself to explicit resistance and ever greater religiosity. His role in the Toulouse Project drew the wrath of the monarchy and forced him into what would be the first of several exiles, first in Lausanne and later in The Hague. Here he found a new role as a polemicist and active member of

the Refuge, churning out books arguing against the legal foundations of the Revocation while he traveled Europe engendering support for the protestant cause.

Motivated by an increasing sense of his calling, however, Brousson gradually made the transition from lawyer to preacher. He returned in secret to France on several occasions where he harnessed his early religious education and natural speaking abilities to become first a lay preacher and then a pastor.<sup>[2]</sup> Finding himself comfortable with this new role, Brousson became a leader among the rapidly increasing group of itinerant or lay preachers called the *prédicants* whose history Charles Bost so ably recounted some ninety years ago.<sup>[3]</sup> Brousson's return quickly came to the attention of the powerful intendant, Nicolas de Lamoignon de Basville, who placed a price on his head and forced him into an underground life of sleeping outdoors and moving quickly from village to village even as he organized late-night assemblies of the faithful in remote places in the mountains. Through it all, Brousson continued to write and to preach, copying his often lengthy sermons so that they might be read out to assemblies of protestants he could not personally reach. As the authors note, by the time he was caught and executed in 1698, his written legacy amounted to over 4,000 pages, firmly establishing his legend as the gentle and pacifistic victim of a brutal power and making him the focus of a lively hagiographic literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

While the authors admire Brousson's abilities and his devotion to his cause, they are determined in this book to dispel the myth of Brousson as the pacifist saint and to show that he was effectively guilty of the charges brought against him. They argue in chapters four through six that he did indeed go armed in the mountains of the Vivarais and the Cévennes in the late 1680s and early 1690s, did take part in small battles against royal forces, and did conspire with the Duke of Schomberg and others to engineer a foreign invasion of France. And if he finally rejected physical violence after the death of his far more militant and ferocious colleague, François Vivent, in February 1692, he never rejected active resistance to the policies of the crown, and the violence of his rhetoric, especially against the Roman church, became increasingly apocalyptic through the remaining six years of his life.

The strengths of the book are many. It is based on a thorough reading of Brousson's works and a fair grounding in the secondary literature of the Refuge. The argument against Brousson's pacifism, first made by Bost many years ago, is thoroughly supported, and the authors do a fine job of tracing his movements, no small feat given his often strenuous efforts to keep them secret. They mine his letters to illustrate his sometimes strained relations with his second wife (his first wife having died prior to the Revocation) brought on by his often lengthy absences from her. In a particularly valuable chapter, they delve into his published sermons to explore and analyze his message, the ways in which he used language, and his differences in this respect from the more formal, classically trained pastors with whom he was occasionally at odds. Here, I think, a more thorough analysis of Brousson's theology would have been interesting, especially a more explicit comparison to the work of Pierre Jurieu, whose influence on Brousson was substantial. Readers would also have benefited from a fuller analysis of Brousson's eschatology. He shared with Jurieu and many of the *prédicants* a belief that he was living in the last days, and his influence in this respect on the later Camisards was profound. That said, the authors offer a fine analysis of Brousson's troubled partnership with Vivent, who finally rejected preaching altogether in favor of armed action against the crown, as well as of the lawyer turned preacher's efforts to induce various protestant powers to intervene in France in order to restore by force the protections of the Edict of Nantes.

Naturally, in any book, small errors inevitably find their way in. The duc de Bourgogne was not dauphin in 1685, his father being very much alive in that year (p. 35). Antoine Court held the first synod of the restored French Reformed church at the small village of Les Montèzes, and not near Nîmes (p. 158), and the intendant Basville is twice given the first name of his parlementaire brother, Chrétien (pp. 73, 199). The authors occasionally use the word "camisard" to refer to the peasants of the Cévennes in the 1690s when that word was not used until the rebellion in that region a decade later (as, for example,

on p. 82), and a bit more clarity in differentiating between the words “pastor” and “*prédicant*” would have been helpful to readers unfamiliar with the period.

To the extent that there are any substantive problems with the book, they are largely errors of omission rather than commission, a function of the fact that this is a fairly short book with only 161 pages of text. The authors correctly credit the French catholic church with a substantial role in pushing for the Revocation, but they do not analyze the structure and power of that church in any detail, especially in the south. Here, a reading of Robert Sauzet’s excellent work on the Languedocian church would have deepened their analysis.[4] Sauzet argued that divisions and weaknesses in the southern French church prevented it from bringing about the kind of decline in protestant numbers that Philip Benedict and others have documented for other parts of the country in the seventeenth century.[5] Basville himself complained ceaselessly about the quality of priests and the lack of a strong catholic presence in the Cévennes and Vivarais, and it is certainly this, and not only resentment of and reaction to the Revocation, that helped maintain the strength of protestantism in the region. Likewise, the authors follow Bost in assuming that Brousson approved of and embraced the young prophets who were only beginning to be heard in the southern mountains toward the end of the 1690s, but there is no explicit evidence to support this argument. Brousson never embraced prophetism in any of his letters, making only a few ambiguous allusions to “marvels” he had seen. Indeed, it is a little odd that the authors cite one *côte* from the departmental archives of the Hérault in Montpellier but do not cite the one substantial folder there (C191) which collects together all the interrogations of Brousson.[6] They have depended instead on the published versions of many of these documents collected together at the Bibliothèque de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français in Paris. Finally, it would have been valuable to have a chapter exploring the ways in which Brousson was re-fashioned and revised in the historiography of the Refuge. Such a chapter would have strengthened the authors’ argument that Brousson was not the saint he was later made out to be and would have placed his life in the larger context of the French protestant movement after his death.

Still, it is probably unfair to take a book to task for what it might have done and better to laud it for what it does well. Professors Utt and Strayer have performed a valuable service in bringing the life and work of Claude Brousson to an English-speaking audience. The *Bellicose Dove* helps to deepen our understanding of the extent to which the second half of the reign of Louis XIV could be said to be very much about religion, religious conflict, and the tensions such a conflict posed for a monarchy on the cusp of the Enlightenment.

## NOTES

[1] Brian E. Strayer, *Lettres de Cachet and Social Control in the Ancien Régime, 1659-1789* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) and *Huguenots and Camisards as Aliens in France, 1598-1789* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

[2] Preachers, or *prédicants*, were not officially confirmed pastors.

[3] Charles Bost, *Les Prédicants protestants des Cévennes et du Bas-Languedoc, 1684-1700* (Montpellier: Presses du Languedoc, 2001). This is a reprint edition of the original published in 1912.

[4] Robert Sauzet, *Contre-Réforme et réforme catholique en Bas-Languedoc. Le Diocèse de Nîmes au XVIIIe siècle* (Brussels: Nauwelaerts, 1979).

[5] Philip Benedict, *The Huguenot Population of France, 1600-1685: The Demographic Fate and Customs of a Religious Minority* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1991).

[6] C191 also includes documents found on Brousson at the time of his arrest, including a letter over his signature—which might or might not be genuine—that appears to condemn prophetism, and fragments of sermons that were not to my knowledge published.

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