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Sara K. Barker, *Protestantism, Poetry and Protest: The Vernacular Writings of Antoine de Chandieu (c. 1534-1591)*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009. xiv + 335 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$124.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7546-6491-8.

Review by Raymond A. Mentzer, University of Iowa.

The various celebrations that in 2009 marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin and, by extension, the origins of Reformed Protestantism in France and elsewhere did surprisingly little to inform us regarding the multitude of “lesser” men and women who contributed significantly to the momentous religious transformations of the sixteenth century. Chief among the “others” whose activities bore directly and appreciably upon whatever success Calvinism had in the French orbit was Antoine de Chandieu. Scholars generally agree that he was a central figure in the development of the Reformed Churches of France. Yet few have given him more than passing mention. Aside from some journal articles, there is no recent comprehensive scholarly examination of Chandieu and his significance. Barker’s study is a welcome corrective to this omission. As the book’s title suggests, she locates the significance of Chandieu’s contribution in both his ecclesiastical activities and his literary endeavors. Accordingly, Barker successfully explicates and elucidates many intriguing aspects of Chandieu’s career—his role in the 1560 Conspiracy of Amboise, for example. The study’s most original contribution, however, is its close examination of Chandieu’s French writings and, in particular, his sharply polemical poetic exchange with Pierre de Ronsard as well as his celebrated prose work, the *Histoire des persécutions et martyrs de l’église de Paris*. From an interpretative perspective, Barker casts the volume as not simply the examination of a single person, “but rather [of] a man who represented the strengths and weaknesses of French Protestantism” (p. 11).

The study begins with a brief overview of Chandieu’s life and, above all, his role in the founding of the French Reformed Churches during the critical half decade between 1555 and 1560. Born at Chabottes in the Mâconnais around 1534 — only two years prior to the initial publication of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* — Chandieu spent his early years at Paris where he developed Protestant sympathies. He then studied law at the University of Toulouse. Yet his interest soon refocused on theology which he pursued at Geneva where Calvin took note of his talent and promise. Upon returning to Paris in 1555, he became, despite his youth, co-pastor to the city’s growing but illegal Reformed church. The circumstances offered the opportunity to exercise enormous influence over the development of Protestantism and to observe close-hand the movement’s achievements and its frustrations.

Barker is particularly attentive to Chandieu’s role in the Conspiracy of Amboise, which erupted in March 1560. It was an ill-advised attempt by restless young Protestant nobles to eliminate the ultra-Catholic Guise faction and “rescue” the king from its malevolent influence. Incredibly, Reformed church leaders in France and Geneva appear to have lent support to the reckless scheme. Barker carefully explicates Chandieu’s close involvement, underscoring the importance of the link to Geneva for those religious leaders who sanctioned the enterprise. Aside from the foolhardy nature of the conspiracy and its part in plunging France headlong into decades of religious factionalism and violence, the incident according to Barker left the French Churches in an ambiguous position. To what extent were they an independent national church? Conversely, what role ought Calvin and others at Geneva to play in, for

example, formulating statements of belief and molding the institutional character of the church in France? The question was paramount and it plagued French Reformed Protestants well beyond Calvin's death in 1564.

The half decade prior to the eruption of the Wars of Religion witnessed phenomenal expansion of the French Reformed community, and by the early 1560s Chandieu had become a significant presence in the formulation of its ecclesiastical structure. Already at the first National Synod of the French Reformed Churches meeting at Paris in 1559, he seems to have had a strong hand in drafting a Gallic *Confession de foi*, a basic statement of belief, and a national *Discipline*, which established the panoply of regulations and usages that governed the functioning of the churches. Later, he presided over the third National Synod held at Orléans in April 1562. At this latter gathering, he was a decided leader in meeting the challenge posed by Jean Morély whose *Traicté de la discipline et police chrestienne*, published shortly after the Orléans meeting, contained a vigorous call for the right of local congregations to decide doctrinal and disciplinary matters. According to Morély, the assembly of the faithful ought to exercise supreme authority in the church. The notion undercut the authority of pastors and elders as well as that of the colloquies and synods. Under Chandieu's pressure and guidance, the National Synod rejected Morély's notion of congregationalist governance and denounced the *Traicté*. Several years later, Chandieu wrote *La confirmation de la Discipline ecclésiastique*, a starkly critical reply to Morély. In the end, Morély and his followers had raised questions that occasioned a major debate over ecclesiastical polity among French Protestants, and Chandieu emerged as a vigorous defender of national ecclesiastical discipline and consistorial-synodal polity.

Chandieu also published a substantial number of polemical works, histories and religious poetry. In her analysis of these various publications, Barker hits her stride in making the case for his pivotal importance to the French Reformation. Chief among Chandieu's vernacular writings were a series of polemical poems known as the *Palinodies*. They were a response to the *Discours* of Ronsard, who lamented the strife and factionalism engendered by confessional differences. In truth, Ronsard also disagreed fundamentally with Reformed belief and practice. This was in Barker's apt phrase "war poetry" waged by both sides. Words crafted into elegant poems became their weapons. Even more remarkable is that fact that Chandieu and other Protestants who replied to Ronsard were pastors, men trained in theology and devoted to the organizational details of the Reformed movement. Yet poetry became the medium for their defense of Protestantism. Barker concludes that few if any participants in these elegant if heated exchanges changed their religious position. Rather, the literary efforts of both sides provide the modern observer an "insight into confessional thought processes at the outbreak of the Wars" (p. 160). Later, following the shattering experience of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 1572, Chandieu's poetry, in for example his acknowledged masterpiece the *Octonaires*, became far more introspective as he developed themes centering on human weakness and the futility of the earthly experience.

Equally intriguing and illuminating from the historian's point of view is Chandieu's *Histoire des persécutions et martyrs de l'église de Paris*. While the text is long and, for technical reasons, not especially inviting or accessible, this martyrology narrates the untimely deaths of nearly three dozen persons from the Reformed community. The fact that as a Parisian pastor Chandieu knew many of them or at the very least had personal knowledge of their lives lends poignancy and conviction to these stories of those who died heroically for their religious convictions. His martyrology was distinctive in several respects. To begin, he brought his personal experience to bear upon the subject. More importantly, his narrative moved beyond the individual martyrs to the persecuted and suffering Church, thereby laying emphasis on a community unified through a shared theology and the maintenance of discipline.

Forced to flee France in the aftermath of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Chandieu went to Geneva and eventually Lausanne where he taught theology from 1573 to 1579. Naturally he continued to write, engaging Jesuit polemicists, penning prose meditations on Scriptural passages and developing

a “scholastic” approach to Reformed theology. He also maintained his active ministry and eventually became a pastor at Geneva. He returned to France briefly in the 1580s and finally settled in Geneva where he taught Hebrew at the Academy until his death on 23 February 1591.

Barker’s study of Chandieu’s French publications finds solid foundation in the printed sources meticulously catalogued by the University of St. Andrews French Vernacular Book Project. This is a wonderfully beneficial enterprise which has produced a comprehensive list of over 52,000 books published wholly or partially in the French language before 1601.[1] Thus, Barker’s monograph, aside from its obvious merit as a detailed examination of an individual who was central to the French Reformation, also displays the potential of the Book Project led by Andrew Pettegree of the St Andrews Reformation Studies Institute. Scholars will for years to come benefit enormously from this critical compilation of French printed works. Barker’s analysis of Chandieu speaks eloquently to its significance.

Broadly speaking, there are two principal approaches that scholars tend to adopt with a figure such as Chandieu. He can be seen as a neglected reformer whose contribution was far greater than previous historians have been willing to acknowledge. Hence, the study becomes an exercise in rehabilitation and rediscovery. Alternatively, Chandieu could be viewed as an especially revealing example of a larger and wider movement whose members collectively formed the backbone of leadership for the attempted reform of France. According to this rendering, Calvin himself would be embedded in a far more extensive canvas. In her approach to the subject, Barker seeks to blend the two, underscoring at every turn the critical importance of Chandieu’s role in the French Reformation and well as his value as an example of the larger process. Implicit in her view is the notion that historians have heretofore failed to recognize his dynamic leadership, enormous strength and crucial prominence. In addition, Barker argues that Chandieu’s life “mirrored the life of the Reformed movement very closely” (p. 49). The uniqueness of Chandieu is that he left an enormous body of published works, a feat accomplished by no more than a handful of reformers. One could hardly disagree with Barker’s assessment and the resulting approach. She has deftly identified and drawn together the elementary threads in Chandieu’s life – poet and martyrologist, theologian and systematizer, pastor and theoretician of ecclesiastical polity. The result is an informative volume whose conclusions reach well beyond the life of a single individual in revealing the scope and character of the Reformation in France.

NOTES

[1] Andrew Pettegree, Malcolm Walsby and Alexander Wilkinson, eds. *French Vernacular Books: Books Published in the French Language before 1601* (2 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2007).

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