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Raymond A. Mentzer, ed., *Les Registres des consistoires des Eglises réformées de France--XVI-XVII siècles: un inventaire*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2014. 170 pp. Bibliography, indexes. 57.90 € (cl). ISBN 978-2-600-01786-2.

Review by Carolyn Chappell Lougee, Stanford University.

From the founding of the *Eglises réformées de France* in the 1550s down to their criminalization by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, many hundreds of temples—with pastor, elders, and consistory—created religious communities for French Protestants. Most dense in the South but spread throughout the kingdom, the temples kept, by royal mandate, the same registers of baptisms, marriages, and burials maintained by Catholic *curés*. But in addition to these, the temple consistories also kept registers of their management of the spiritual community, including admissions and exclusions, social disciplining, and the refining of religious practices.

It is these uniquely Protestant consistory registers that Raymond Mentzer has for the first time inventoried and made accessible to historians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As his introduction and annotations make clear, they constitute a source that has been little utilized but which offers a valuable new pathway into early modern communities.

Mentzer identifies 309 registers from 156 different temples, which he estimates to be about 10 percent of those once extant. One quarter of them date from the sixteenth century (1560 onward), and a few come from as late as the eve of the Revocation. About a third (117) are in Paris: 69 at the Archives nationales, 30 at the Bibliothèque de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français, others at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal and the Bibliothèque nationale. The rest are scattered, most in departmental archives, some in temple archives or diverse local repositories, and a few in private hands or across the Atlantic.

The relative scarcity of these registers, by comparison to the Catholic registers that are everywhere preserved and are now so readily accessible on microfilm or even online, is one of the tragedies of the Revocation. When royal authorities closed and (most often) demolished the temples, their determination to eliminate all physical traces of what they called heresy led them to destroy Protestant records of all kinds, with the sole exception of the still useful registers of baptisms, marriages and burials. The survivals among consistory registers were those that for some reason were bundled with other records of the persecution rather than destroyed or were archived as evidence of malfeasance far from the temples. The dozen registers now in the Arsenal, for instance, were taken from unsuccessful escapees imprisoned in the Bastille who had evidently tried to take them along into the Refuge.

Mentzer lists the manuscript registers of consistory deliberations that have survived, alphabetized by locality, with the dates they cover, their length, and whether they are original or copies. He also includes a listing of research guides and for each register notes any work that may have been published on it or by using it. Though so few in number, these documents turn out to be more numerous than previously assumed and hence more significant as exploitable historical sources.

As important as the list itself is the case Mentzer makes in his three introductory chapters for the potential value of this source, both for the history of Protestantism itself and, equally, for the history of early modern communities beyond confessional boundaries. It is the breadth of consistory activity that gives the registers such extensive relevance. As instituted by Calvin in Geneva and adopted with local amendments in France, the consistory organized worship services, managed finances, directed charitable assistance to the poor, set up education (vocational as well as religious), and enforced moral discipline among their communicants. The registers' documentation of consistory activities in morals regulation, sometimes including recorded testimonies of those being examined, offers access to the thoughts, experiences, and values (social as well as religious) of the mass of the faithful: the poor, the uneducated, women, children. It may reveal much about popular culture: the dynamics inside families and the relationship of religious authorities to them, the beliefs of ordinary persons, religious mentalities and practices, and the consequences for them of having changed religion. The role of the consistory in church operations and as representative of the congregation to the community at large may illuminate the effects at the grass roots of theological and ideological prescriptions from above as well as practices of the church in negotiating between social levels, across confessions, and with the state.

Realizing these potential gains will not come easily. The registers vary in the degree of detail they offer and in length, averaging 100-200 folios per register. The handwriting is variably legible, their survival is so fragmentary that no serial analysis is possible, and methodical approaches to this body of documents have yet to be firmly developed. Moreover, Mentzer's decision to arrange the list alphabetically makes some kinds of inquiry more difficult than they might otherwise have been. The alphabetical ordering of locales allows one to determine quickly whether a particular locality has a surviving register, but it is not conducive to questions about geographical or chronological variation. Do surviving registers over- or under-represent the South, where most temples were located? What was the experience of destruction? Did it differ by region or by whether Protestant communities were clustered or scattered, large or small? What impact does the geographical distribution of surviving registers have on possibilities for investigating Protestantism in different regions? Might a chronological ordering, on the other hand, have facilitated questions about differentials in destruction before and after key events (the Siege of La Rochelle, the Fronde, the personal rule of Louis XIV)?

Nonetheless, this volume is a gift to scholarship from the historian who knows these registers better than anyone else, at a time when research into French Protestantism and recognition of its centrality to early modern French experience are gaining momentum. Mentzer's inventory and the expertise with consistory records that his numerous articles to date have already demonstrated effectively open the door to their systematic future use.

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