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James K. Farge, ed., *Religion, Reformation, and Repression in the Reign of Francis I*. 2 vols. Vol. 1, Documents 1515-1543. Vol. 2, Documents 1544-1547. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015. xlvii + 1463pp. ISBN 978-0-88844-196-6.

Review by Robert Knecht, University of Birmingham.

In sixteenth-century France, the Parlement of Paris was the supreme court of law under the king. Having “gone out of court” in the thirteenth century, it was permanently housed in Paris. It contained several chambers, the most important being the *Grand Chambre*. Originally, the Parlement’s *ressort* or area of jurisdiction encompassed the whole of France, but as the kingdom became larger, a number of provincial courts were created. The Parlement of Paris, however, retained control of two-thirds of the kingdom. It judged a wide range of cases while acting as a court of appeal from lesser courts, but it was also more than a law court. It regulated matters such as public hygiene or the upkeep of roads, ensured that Paris received enough food supplies, fixed wages and hours of work, intervened in academic matters, and controlled the book trade. It was also much concerned with religious matters and in matters of doctrine looked for guidance to the Faculty of Theology of the university of Paris.

In his latest book James K. Farge, who has already given us several excellent studies of this faculty during the reign of Francis I, offers a large selection of documents taken from the Parlement’s archives housed at the *Archives nationales* in Paris. As he indicates in his introduction, although the registers have been much used by scholars, relatively few have consulted them with regard to religion. An exception was Nathanaël Weiss, who published a book on the *Chambre Ardente* in 1860, but he used only documents taken from the reign of Henry II. Yet, religion filled much of the Parlement’s business during the reign of Francis I. Farge has drawn on nearly 1200 documents, most of them unpublished, from over one hundred of the Parlement’s registers. They are mostly in Middle French, and each one carries a descriptive title. Except for two appendices that deal respectively with the Concordat of Bologna and a royal commission to suppress heresy in Alençon in 1534, the documents are arranged chronologically. This is a very sensible arrangement, as it enables the researcher to see at a glance the issues that dominated each decade. As might be expected, some years carry relatively more documents than others, reflecting changes in the religious life of the kingdom, especially the growth of heresy and the king’s growing awareness of the need to check it. The busiest years were 1525 with eighty-seven documents, 1526 with fifty-five, and the last years of the reign culminating in 1546 with 177 documents that were mainly concerned with heresy. A third appendix (vol. 2, pp. 1275-1334) lists all the royal and papal documents published or mentioned in the collection, and a fourth (vol. 2, pp. 1335-1338) lists all the heretics sentenced to death by courts in the Parlement’s jurisdiction between 1526 and 1547. This shows a huge increase culminating in forty-eight in 1546.

France, like other parts of Christendom, was afflicted by a serious religious malaise at the close of the Middle Ages. The monastic ideal in particular was often disregarded. Particularly shocking was the behavior of the mendicant friars who competed fiercely with parish clergy in administering the sacraments. Many voices called for reform, and between 1518 and 1520, several French bishops began to take their pastoral duties seriously. One such was Guillaume Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux, who, in 1518, was shocked to find his flock “starved of divine food” and poisoned by the superstitious claptrap of the local Franciscans. He formed a group of evangelical preachers who became known as the *Cercle de Meaux*. After dividing his diocese into twenty-six zones, Briçonnet assigned preachers to each for Lent and Advent. This upset the local Franciscans who feared for their livelihood. They hit back by accusing the bishop and his friends of heresy and looked to the Parlement and Faculty of Theology for assistance (vol. 1, pp. 149-196).

Several documents chosen by Farge illustrate the Parlement’s concern for monastic life in the early years of Francis I’s reign. It tried to ensure that monasteries and convents performed their traditional duties, including prayer, but the court encountered so many disciplinary problems that Farge has only

been able to publish a small sample of documents covering this aspect. On the other hand, he includes in his collection all the documents concerning the Parlement's role in religious processions. These were organized either to thank God for favors received or to appease His anger over public sins. Other processions called on His help to overcome plagues, floods, or droughts (vol.1, pp. 80-82).

In 1521 the Parlement established the censorship of religious books following a spurious claim by local Franciscans that the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris had approved a perfectly orthodox book by Duns Scotus. Concerned to protect its authority at a time when the multiplication of books was beginning to be seen as a threat, the Parlement granted the faculty power to determine the orthodoxy of all books dealing with religion (vol.1, pp. 28-33). In 1522, the Faculty asked the Parlement to extend its ruling on censorship to the whole of France in order to check the spread of heresy (vol.1, pp. 49-50), and in 1523 the Parlement approved a request by the Faculty to censure the Gospel commentaries of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (vol.1, pp. 56-58). The printer Simon de Colines was also summoned to appear in court. The Parlement ordered the seizure of all the books owned by Louis de Berquin and of all Luther's books found in Paris. On 1 August it ordered Berquin to be imprisoned (vol.1, p. 61). A week later, the king removed jurisdiction over Berquin from the Parlement and bishop of Paris to his own *Grand Conseil* (vol.1, pp. 62-63). An especially lengthy document concerns a hermit, Jean Guibert, who appealed to the Parlement against his conviction for heresy (vol.1, pp. 65-71).

Farge's collection bears witness to the love/hate relationship that governed relations between the king and Parlement. In June 1522 Francis responded to the Parlement's opposition to his confiscation of church treasures to raise money for his military campaigns (vol. 1, pp. 53-54). Yet, in August 1523, the Parlement ordered a procession with the relics of Sainte Geneviève for the king's prosperity (vol.1, pp. 61-62). Quarrelling soon resumed, however. In April 1524 Francis complained that the Faculty of Theology unduly influenced the Parlement's attitude to Lefèvre d'Étaples (vol. 1, pp. 82-83). Yet, following the king's defeat at Pavia in 1525, the Parlement ordered prayers for his prompt deliverance from captivity (vol. 1, p. 90). But the biggest area of conflict was the Concordat of Bologna that Francis signed with Pope Leo X in 1516 and then forced the Parlement to register (vol. 2, pp.1213-1244). By revoking the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges of 1438, the Concordat revoked the so-called Gallican liberties much prized by the French church. The payment of annates to Rome, for instance, was restored. Although the Parlement had been obliged to register the new regime, it seized every opportunity of defying it, especially during the regency of Louise of Savoy. In 1527, however, it had to give up its resistance after the king forced its hand in a famous *lit-de-justice* (vol.1, pp. 314-18).

As Farge indicates in his admirable introduction, historians have often presumed that it was the *Affaire des placards* of October 1534 that spurred Francis finally to oppose the Reformation, but, as his documents clearly demonstrate, the king had become aware of the Lutheran threat as early as 1526. By 1528, he had even abandoned Berquin to his grisly fate.^[2] The king's efforts to suppress heresy were only briefly interrupted by the tolerant Edict of Coucy, and they soon resumed in earnest. Early cases of heresy in various towns were recorded in the registers of the *Conseil* as late as 1535, but after 1536 or 1537 they need to be followed in the registers of the *Chambre criminelle*. In August 1545, Francis commissioned five of the Parlement's councillors to prosecute heretics in five different provinces as *ad hoc* inquisitors of the faith, but Farge's documents show that the Parlement several times ratified the appeals of persons they had convicted. An interesting lesson to be drawn from the collection is that the Parlement offered prisoners a real chance of substantiating their appeals. In about 200 of some 900 cases prisoners were sentenced to the relatively mild punishment of making *amende honorable*. Some were even set free on condition they remained in Paris subject to recall by the court (vol. 1, pp. 1054). A barkeeper convicted of heresy was simply required to assist as a public penitent at a mass celebrating all the saints (vol. 1, pp. 1043-1044). Farge rounds off his collection of documents by providing no less than three indexes: of persons, places, and topics. To cite but one example, anyone charged with a crime against the faith in hundreds of cities, towns, and villages within the jurisdiction of the Parlement of Paris is listed.

At a time when many libraries are getting rid of books as outmoded, and even academic publishers are limiting the size of their print-runs, the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto deserves

the highest praise for producing such a rich and meticulously edited collection of primary sources for the reign of Francis I. Professor Farge deserves our admiration and gratitude for the immense task he has accomplished so skilfully and which will be of incalculable value to future scholars.

NOTES

[1] Nathanaël Weiss, *La Chambre ardente. Étude sur la liberté de conscience en France sous François Ier et Henri II, 1540-1550. Suivie d'environ 500 arrêts inédits rendus par le Parlement de Paris de mai 1547 à mars 1550* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

[2] Berquin was burned at the stake on April 17, 1529.

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