



Sacred Heart  
UNIVERSITY

Sacred Heart University  
DigitalCommons@SHU

---

History Faculty Publications

History Department

---


2012

# Dire l'interdit: The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition

John B. Roney

Sacred Heart University, [roneyj@sacredheart.edu](mailto:roneyj@sacredheart.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his\\_fac](http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac)

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [History Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Roney, John B., "Dire l'interdit: The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition" (2012). *History Faculty Publications*. Paper 13.

[http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his\\_fac/13](http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/his_fac/13)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History Department at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact [ferribyp@sacredheart.edu](mailto:ferribyp@sacredheart.edu).

*Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* ([London: Routledge, 1989], 74, 175). The book is cited but the quotation marks are missing.

Despite these shortcomings this book will be of considerable value for scholars of Protestant historical theology, of Protestant patristic and biblical scholarship, and indeed of the wider practice of the construction of traditions. It is an important attempt to elucidate the ways in which major Protestant theologians read, misread, and appropriated the fathers to support their understanding of the Eucharist and their interpretations of the scriptural passages upon which their views were founded.

**Michael L. Monheit**  
University of South Alabama

doi:10.1017/S0009640712002211

***Dire l'interdit: The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition.*** Edited by **Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moriel, and Philippe Chareyre.** Brill's Series in Church History 40. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010. xii + 360 pp. \$147.00 cloth.

In an age of growing confessionalization throughout Europe it is no wonder that Reformed churches, like other Protestant and Catholic counterparts, developed elaborate means to teach, censor, protect, and discipline as a means to enable correct faith and doctrine in order to thrive. By 1648 the already established practice of *Cuius regio, eius religio* was universally accepted at the Peace of Westphalia. In reality, however, most new states had a variety of beliefs within one church and a small percentage of members of other churches among their residents. Added to a purely theological interest were the entangling alliances between church and state. Whether the new states continued as monarchies or established republics, one's confessional standard was an important component in the unity of the emerging state.

*Dire l'interdit: The Vocabulary of Censure and Exclusion in the Early Modern Reformed Tradition*, edited by Raymond A. Mentzer, Françoise Moriel, and Philippe Chareyre, has added to our knowledge of more specific cases in studying how certain regions negotiated the realities of less than fully committed members of one faith and their interaction with persons of divergent faiths. They also demonstrate that church discipline, while punishing offenders, gave protection to many women and helped restore

penitents to the community. *Dire l'interdit* is a collection of original essays based on the work of a number of conferences on Reformed consistories held in France in 2005, 2007, and 2009. This collection has taken up the challenge of constructing a picture of the similarities and differences in Reformed churches throughout early modern Europe. The volume covers a wide range of topics with fifteen chapters under several headings: Women Confront the Consistory; The Uses and Functions of Censure; The Application of Discipline in Protestant Lands; and The French Case. This study will be very useful to scholars interested in the history of Reformed thinking and practice, as well as to social and cultural historians of early modern Europe.

Reflecting the latest developments in scholarship, several authors examine the role of women in consistorial discipline. While the modern observer may decry the lack of women's rights, and perhaps the harshness of ecclesiastical discipline in general, in reality where women had little voice in the family and no voice in the state there were ways and means through the consistory to make their views and needs known. Despite the widespread distrust in the ability of females to control their sexual desires, there are clear indications that some woman became moral guardians for the community, and they made their specific concerns known to the consistory. Pollmann argues that rather than church discipline acting as a deterrent to membership, it was often an attraction. Since Reformed churches were voluntary in principle, many women officially joined after their husbands died, and this "filled a void and offered a rare chance to engage in a form of sociability that conferred honor to them" (38). Thus Protestant women found in the local consistory a means to air their opinions, and found security in the position they played between men and the state. This parallels the role that many Catholic nuns experienced by joining a religious order.

Throughout the volume it is clear that discipline came in many forms: exclusion from Communion, several means of contrition, private and public confessions, suspension from office or ministry, and eventually excommunication. It is helpful that the editors included several appendices with selected documents such as the "Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France" and "Formula of Excommunication." Overwhelmingly, all these essays underline the fact that the ultimate goal of censorship was to bring the offender into a contrite position and restore them to the church and community once the matter was properly dealt with: "l'exclusion toujours temporaire est un instrument pédagogique et non pas un dispositif de rejet" (83). Subsequently, there were far fewer excommunications than many historians might have expected. In almost all cases it was a matter of last resort, with stages of discipline, beginning with exclusion from Communion. Margo Todd suggests that perhaps one of the reasons many Reformed

churches avoided excommunication if they could was in contrast to prior Roman Catholic clerical abuse of it, where even “laymen could invoke excommunication against those who had wronged them or owed them money” (222). Protestant consistories were also cautious that more severe discipline might cause more defections to the Catholic Church. The volume, unfortunately, does not say much about the more complex economic dimensions of consistorial discipline.

Robert Kingdom reminds us that the so-called “myth of Geneva,” something Knox had propagated through his insistence that it was the most perfect school for Christ, was indeed more complex. The supporters of discipline came equally from the pastors and laity, but they had to constantly negotiate with the opposition. Thus any assessment that Geneva was a theocracy is unfounded. Not only were nation-states growing rapidly in terms of bureaucracy, but *laïcisation* was a growing reality whereby many areas originally under church authority more directly were being transferred to the public sphere. At the same time church discipline had to walk a fine line between traditional privileges given to nobility in contrast to previous practices of very little recognition of the lower orders in society. In the special situation of France, the few Huguenot strongholds offered a *place de sûreté* and, therefore, tensions between Protestants and Catholics could either be held in check or exasperated. Bezzina has found that the consistory in Protestant strongholds, such as Loudun, had a tendency to attract more nobility, wealthy merchants, and prominent officials in order to bolster its protection of the embattled Protestant community.

**John B. Roney**  
Sacred Heart University

doi:10.1017/S0009640712002223

***The Pietist Impulse in Christianity.*** Edited by **Christian T. Collins Winn, Christopher Gehrz, G. William Carlson, and Eric Holst.**  
Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2011. xxvi + 340 pp. \$40.00 paper.

The Pietist movement that originated in Germany in the late seventeenth century played an important role in the creation of modern Protestantism, Western culture, and global Christianity, but it has been only in recent years that American scholars have begun to take it seriously as an object of research. Pietists experimented with new forms of spirituality, created new

Copyright of Church History is the property of Cambridge University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.