

OXFORD STUDIES IN  
HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

# Morality After Calvin

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*Theodore Beza's Christian Censor  
and Reformed Ethics*



KIRK M. SUMMERS

# *Morality After Calvin*

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## *Preface*

THIS BOOK HAS its genesis in a chance encounter some ten years ago when I picked up Beza's 1591 *Cato Censorius Christianus* and marveled over it. What was the purpose of this little moralizing book of Latin poetry? I could see that Beza was admonishing various types of sinners through the voice of a fictional Cato. Still, other questions nagged me. What brings cohesion to this volume? What is the generic tradition behind it, the social and theological context, and the pastoral concern? What is the moral paradigm being advocated? I found it interesting that Beza had chosen a typically humanistic form as his means of expression. The period following the death of Calvin is frequently characterized as a time marked by the employment of scholastic methodologies and the systematization of doctrine. However, here was something more creative and personal. Yet for all of its application of the rhetorical power of art to practical, down-to earth concerns, it seemed to harbor something larger than itself. A coherent and well-formulated worldview reverberated quietly through the poems.

As I pursued the matter, I was surprised to discover that no scholarship whatsoever exists on the work. In fact, at a time when so much documentary evidence about life in Geneva in the latter half of the sixteenth century is coming to light, many of Beza's writings are still inadequately studied. To overlook them is to lose a valuable commentary on events. Beza's New Testament annotations, treatises, sermons, and correspondence often explain the *why* of ecclesiastical and civic action. In a unique way, so does the poetry. I decided, therefore, to study these works for what they could tell me about Beza's ethics. I was not looking for and did not find a radical departure from Calvin, but I did want to know how Beza articulated his view of sanctification. The subject matter of the *Cato* suggested this line of inquiry and provided a way to frame the argument. Throughout the book I anchor my arguments to the poems from the *Cato* and then pull in other



works of Beza to bolster and clarify the argument I am trying to make. I did not want to content myself only with the works of Beza, however. I compare and contrast other writers in the Reformed tradition, some of whom were colleagues of Beza at Geneva, friends from other cities, or directly influenced by him. These include Simon Goulart, Lambert Daneau, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and the English puritan Thomas Beard.<sup>1</sup> Naturally, I considered it important to read Beza in the context of Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, Musculus, and many others. The goal throughout is always to ascertain more clearly Beza's own ethical thought and to provide the scholar with a key to unlocking much of what he writes. The hope is that this will help to bridge a theological gap between Calvin and the later Reformed tradition.

I approach this study as a Classical philologist, one who wrote his dissertation on Cicero and Lucretius and has a deep appreciation for the ancient world. I combine this love of Classical languages with training in Reformed theology and an upbringing in the Calvinist tradition. These two assets would not have seemed so disparate to Beza and I hope they have equipped me to comprehend his thought in a unique way. They manifest themselves in the book by a close attention to detail, the unraveling of sometimes-compact Latin, and attention to the exact meaning of words. A historian undoubtedly would have a different way of interrogating the same material, but since the problem being investigated is one of ideas primarily, and given that Beza was a master of Latin who wrote with precision and purpose, my own skills also seemed to offer a valid means to the end. Additionally, there is what I would call a "dialectic with antiquity" that runs through Beza's writing which, properly discerned, allows for a nuanced understanding of what he is saying.

Punctuation and orthography always present a challenge to the scholar dealing with Early Modern texts. Some choose to punctuate and spell texts exactly as they find them. I made some choices that I believe will make the Latinity more accessible to a wider audience. Since no consistent rule of punctuation existed in texts of this early period, I preferred to follow modern conventions for the benefit of the reader. For example, often Beza's sentences employ a colon where today we would place a semicolon. In those cases I made the change. In the case of orthography, I have altered unusual spellings to their Classical counterparts, with only a few easily

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1. Beard draws heavily on the Huguenot writer Jean de Chassanion (1531–1598) and his work *Histoires memorables des grans et merueilleux jugemens et punitions de Dieu* (Geneva: Jean le Preux, 1586).

understood exceptions. Otherwise, I left the French and English texts as I found them, with one notable deviation: I chose to convert citations from the Geneva Bible into modern English diction. I did this because I want the reader to have a clearer sense for how Beza's Latin version of the New Testament would be understood by his contemporaries without the burden of having to decipher the English itself. Because Thomson's Geneva Bible is so closely tied to Beza's own work on the New Testament, I turned to it more often than not for citations. In the case of Thomas Beard and his *Theatre of Gods Judgments*, however, I left the English as it was so as not to distort Beard's own voice. Every translation of Beza's texts is my own unless otherwise noted. For Calvin, I relied on translations in the public domain except when I felt a more precise rendering of the original was needed. All translations of the Old Testament are either standard ones or, when relevant, my own renderings of the Vulgate. I supplied the original text (Latin or French) in most every case in a footnote. I incorporated the Latin of the poems of the *Cato* into the text of the book itself, because they are central to the overall argument of the book.

As is usual in studies of this nature, I have so many people to thank. When I was only just formulating the ideas presented here, Scott Manetsch (Trinity Seminary) offered much needed encouragement and valuable direction. Carl Springer (Southern Illinois) also took the time to read versions of early chapters and lend his support. During the course of my research, Jeffrey Watt (University of Mississippi) supplied me with several unpublished texts from the Consistory minutes that I could not have done without. I am especially grateful to David Steinmetz for showing an interest in the project when it was still in its nascent stages and recommending it to Oxford University Press; I regret deeply that he could not see its fruition before his passing. Several friends and colleagues read drafts of some or all the chapters and thankfully challenged my argumentation in many places, made corrections to grammar and syntax, and pressed me to improve my writing style. Among these are Erin Isbell, Alecia Chatham, and Kelly Shannon. Other colleagues, Metka Zupancic, Molly Robinson Kelly, and Jean-Luc Robin, graciously offered their expertise to review my translations and interpretations of various difficult passages of sixteenth-century French. In all cases, however, I assume full responsibility for any remaining errors and infelicities. Finally, I am indebted to my wife and children for their patience through the three years in which this project consumed my time and thoughts. Their confidence in me and what I was doing along the way has truly been inspirational.



# *Morality After Calvin*



# Introduction

## CONTEXTUALIZING BEZA'S ETHICAL THOUGHT

ON JUNE 24, 1582, the same year that he published the magisterial third edition of his *Annotationes maiores in Novum Testamentum* and a series of lectures on Romans 9 titled *De praedestinationis doctrina*, Beza sat down and, “sated with this life and longing for the next,” penned the following poem to mark his sixty-third birthday:

Hail, birthday, repeated now six times ten  
years, plus another three,  
during which, though in sin I strayed from the straight path,  
even so I did not completely lose my way.  
Be frank and tell me, is the end goal of my old age far off,  
or does this mark the beginning of my troubles?  
But I am a fool for demanding of you these hidden things,  
since the very day itself does not know!  
As it is, whether this returning sun is my last, or  
he will come ‘round again,  
O God, be gracious and grant this my prayer:  
Cover what was, and what will be, govern.<sup>1</sup>

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1. From Beza, *Poemata* 1597, 188; Beza, *Poemata* 1599, 95<sup>r-v</sup>; and subscribed to a letter addressed to Laurent Dürnhoffer in Beza, *Corr.* XXIII (1582), n° 1528. It really marks the completion of his sixty-second year and the commencement of his sixty-third. Max Engammare (“Soixante-trois: La peur de la grande année climactérique à la Renaissance,” *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres: Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 2008*, 152 [2010]: 279–303, esp. 294) notes its appearance in the 1588(?) *Carmina* (=Gardy n° 8) and the importance of the sixty-third year as a “climacteric” in astrology. The poem itself is titled “Theodorus Beza, annum vitae iniens, huius vitae satur, alterius cupidus; xxiv Iunii, anno

These words reveal a different side of the reformer than can be gleaned from his celebrated works of exegesis and theology. Here the doctrinal principles of those works meet with the practical realities of everyday life. We find him reminiscing over his life's journey, how he has struggled with shortcomings and sin—*errans* mirrors the NT ἀμαρτάνων—yet throughout has continued to persevere; he has been wayward and inconstant (*devius*), but not lost and completely astray (*avius*).<sup>2</sup> Does the sixty-third year, as tradition holds, really mark the climax of life at which it turns and winds its way down a bitter path to death? With a measure of mortal trepidation, he wonders what remains for him. At the same time, however, he understands that the path ahead belongs to the arcane things of God and that he does not and cannot know what tomorrow brings. Thus he relinquishes all things into the Father's hands, to his providence, now no finely formulated theological concept suited to academic disputes, but a truth with immediate application in his world: Beza himself cannot correct what has gone by, nor can he control the future. God must graciously cover over (*tege*) his past mistakes and providentially guide (*rege*) what will be. This same resignation and inner conviction steadies him still seven years later, in a poem written for his seventieth birthday, where he wrestles with similar concerns. Again he feels burdened by his own sin, and, as he

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ultimi temporis MDLXXXII." The text runs as follows: "Lux natalis ave, senos repetita per annos | decies, tribus superadditis; | quos ego, quantumvis per devia devius errans, | tamen peregi haud avius. | Dic vero, nostrae procul hinc an meta senectae | vel duriora nos manent? | Verum o stultus ego, qui te haec arcana reposcam, | quum seipsa non norit dies. | Sive autem volvendus adhuc, sive annuus iste | sol me revisit ultimus, | o Deus, hoc Bezae facilis concede precanti: | Tege quod fuit, quod erit rege." Here Beza shows himself to be the consummate Renaissance poet through his masterful execution of the pythiambic verse, the classical allusions (he echoes, for example, Statius, *Achill.* 1.45: "donec sol annuus omnes conficeret metas"), the poignant deliberative question, the various word plays ("devius/avius" and "tege/rege"), the AB/BA structure between the third and fifth couplets, and the chiasmus of the last line.

2. The translation of *devius* here is confirmed by verses that Beza placed at the head of his second edition of his paraphrases of Ecclesiastes, which are transcribed at Beza, *Corr.* XXXIX (1598), 272 (=Append. VIII), and which will be discussed in chapter 9. For the subtle differences in meaning between *devius* and *avius* as a personal descriptor, see TLL s.v. *devius* 2b (e.g., Cic., *Phil.* 5.37: "in omnibus consiliis praeceptus et devius homo"; Aug. *Doctr. Christ.*, 2.13.19: "a sensu auctoris devius aberrat interpret") and s.v. *avius*, ad fin. (e.g., Aug. *In evang. Iob* 13.11: "Nullus in rebus humanis tam avius a genere humano est, qui quod dico non sentiat"). Beza expresses a similar sentiment in a poem written to Simon Grynaeus on the occasion of his own seventy-sixth birthday in June of 1595: "But not completely immoral" (At non degeneres prorsus). For the whole poem, see Beza, *Corr.* XXXVI (1595), 75.

looks ahead to the future life, he cannot but throw himself helplessly but hopefully upon the work of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

This portrait of the reformer who is trying to live the Christian life and lead others to do the same has often times been missed. A more accurate picture is coming into view now that new information has become widely accessible that speaks to the more mundane activities at Geneva during this period, including those involving Beza, which allows us to peer behind the curtain, so to speak. The data includes 1) the records of the Consistory, the Church's moral court; 2) the records of the Company of Pastors, that body of Genevan city and country ministers who met every Friday to deal with Church business;<sup>4</sup> and 3) the publication of Beza's voluminous correspondence, which, as of this writing, extends from a letter written to his friend Alexis Gaudin in 1539 all the way through 1598, the year that the Edict of Nantes was issued.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in the last two decades, scholars writing in the area of Reformed Orthodoxy have been calling attention to a new set of assumptions that guide their research.<sup>6</sup> Few scholars of the Reformation would now accept the old dichotomy between Calvin and the Calvinists, or more specifically, the notion that the Reformed movement immediately after Calvin took a decidedly negative turn from the spirit of the progenitor toward Medieval Scholasticism and rigid systematizing. Beza and Lambert Daneau have borne the brunt of the criticism in the past. But Richard Muller, along with a few others whom he has inspired, have done much to rehabilitate their standing by stripping the discussion of its emotional content and undertaking a more nuanced examination of the historical circumstances in which the works of Calvin's successors

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3. Beza, *Poemata* 1597, 209 (also transcribed at Beza, *Corr.* XXX [1589], 334). These two poems, the one written on his sixty-third birthday, and the one written on his seventieth, will be examined in much greater depth in chapter 9.

4. *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève*, vols. 1–13, eds. Jean François Bergier, Robert Kingdon, et al. (Geneva: Droz, 1962–2001). Most important for the present study are volumes 1–9, which cover the period from shortly before Beza's arrival at Geneva to his death. The first two volumes, covering 1546–1564, have been translated by Philip Hughes, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

5. *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, vols. I–XXXIX, eds. Hippolyte Aubert, Henri Meylan, Alain Dufour, et al. (Geneva: Droz, 1960–present). Indicated by “*Corr.*” throughout the book, along with the volume number and year covered.

6. In particular, see Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 241–45; Jeffrey Mallinson, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.



appeared.<sup>7</sup> Restored to their context, theological treatises from this period (roughly 1564–1605) take on a different character. Part of Muller’s contribution has been to define more precisely the nature of the scholastic writing of the late sixteenth century, seeing it more as a methodology that many theologians, even those attracted to the humanists’ agenda, borrowed in order to more precisely define their confessional positions. This is essentially Beza’s point in the preface to his *Quaestiones et responsiones* where, after dismissing the “empty curiosity” (*inanis curiositas*) of the Academic Skeptics, he affirms that not only is it permitted to deliberate about things that are necessary and useful, but also it is something that we should do, provided the back-and-forth aims at finding the truth, and not merely arguing for the sake of arguing.<sup>8</sup> Another part has been to sharpen our understanding of Calvin’s relation to Medieval thought and thus establish some continuity through him to the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. The effect of Muller’s work has been to shift scholarship about Beza from the dominant Calvinist model, which frequently focused on a purely academic Beza who was devoted more to a system than to a way of life, to a more balanced representation of Beza that takes into account his work as a pastor, mentor, and administrator within the Reformed Church.<sup>9</sup>

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7. The most important statement of Muller’s views can be found in his two-part article “Calvin and the ‘Calvinists’: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy,” *CTJ* 30 (1995): 345–75 (part one) and *CTJ* 31 (1996): 125–60 (part two), both of which are updated and revised in his *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63–102. Various rehearsals and applications of these ideas can be found in some of his other works, including *Christ and the Decree* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008 [originally published elsewhere in 1986 and 1988, but this edition stands as a corrected and de facto third edition]), esp. 1–13; “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review and Definition,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 45–64; “The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza’s *Tabula Praedestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, eds. Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 1999), 33–61; *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 of 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003<sup>2</sup>), 40–52; “Reassessing the Relation of Reformation and Orthodoxy: A Methodological Rejoinder,” *American Theological Inquiry* 4 (2011): 3–12. Also valuable in this regard is Ian McPhee, “Conservator or Transformer of Calvin’s Theology? A Study of the Origins and Development of Theodore Beza’s Thought, 1550–1570,” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1979); and Carl Trueman, “Calvin and Calvinism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 225–44.

8. Beza, *Tractationes theologicae*, 1, 654.

9. In addition to the aforementioned *Calvin’s Company of Pastors* of Scott Manetsch, which treats the practical ministry of Beza and others, and Jeffrey Mallinson’s *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), where the author uses the tools and assumptions mentioned here to show that Beza promoted a “balanced

It is with a combination of these tools and assumptions that the current work carries out its program of investigating Beza's ethical thought. As much as possible, texts will be read against their historical context. Only then can Beza's ideas be properly understood. For example, chapter 5 of this study examines a poem that Beza wrote about the ills of usury. Taken by itself, one would come away with the impression that Beza ignored the innovations and flexibility of his mentor Calvin on the matter of lending money at interest and instead embraced a somewhat anachronistic Medieval view. In fact, this is not borne out by the reality of Beza's actions in Geneva at the time. Beza did nothing to overturn the rate of 6.7 to 7 percent that was used during Calvin's lifetime. And while undeniably he detested high interest rates, turning against the bank established at Geneva due to its excessive 10 percent rate and the corruption that naturally ensued from it, he himself had been involved in its inception in 1568. He had begrudgingly approved the rate because of extenuating circumstances, specifically, Geneva's dire need for money and the possibility that some of Geneva's merchants could leave for another more favorable city, such as Lyon.<sup>10</sup>

In trying to say something significant about Beza's ethical thought, this study has set for itself another goal. There has been a tendency in the scholarship on Beza to return over and over again to the same texts, while some texts of his corpus are being overlooked.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for this may have to do with language: some of Beza's works were translated from

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epistemology" of faith and reason and not just a rationalistic, speculative or scholastic approach, some recent notable examples of this scholarship include *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): Actes du colloque de Genève (septembre 2005)*, ed. Irena Backus (Geneva: Droz, 2007), a collection that, as the editor notes, draws the diverse aspects of Beza's activity into one organic whole (esp. 17–18); Alain Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze: Poète et théologien* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), who accepts Muller's thesis and does much to contextualize and humanize the literary and theological contributions of this complex reformer; and Shawn Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 2004).

10. André Biéler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005; originally published as *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin* [Geneva: Librairie de l'université, 1961], 147; E. William Monter, *Studies in Genevan Government, 1536–1605* (Geneva: Droz, 1964), 28–56.

11. R. Scott Clark, in his otherwise positive response to Thomas Davis's paper on "signification" in Calvin and Beza, describes it as "a too frequent failure of Beza scholarship" that many people talk about Beza but few are reading (or quoting) him. See his "Hardened Hearts, Hardened Words: Calvin, Beza and the Trajectory of Signification," in *Calvin, Beza, and Later Calvinism*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Studies Society, 2006), 161–64.

Latin into French or English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is those texts that have received the most scrutiny. They are read because they are the most accessible. One may easily retort that those texts were translated and disseminated because they are most representative of Beza's views and therefore most worthy of study. While they may have been the most important works in a period of emerging confessionalization, as magistrates and pastors cooperated to define themselves and exercise social control along confessional lines, they cannot by themselves tell the whole story. Beza was not just a theologian and polemicist on the world stage. He was a Genevan pastor, a poet, an exegete, and, as noted above, a man running the race of the Christian life. He cared deeply about the spiritual health of those around him. With that in mind, here we take as our starting point or organizational framework for the present study a text that has received no attention at all within the scholarship: the *Cato Censorius Christianus* (1591).<sup>12</sup> The *Cato*, as we will call it, is a collection of moralizing poems that warn various types of sinners about the folly of their assumptions and actions. The moral suppositions of those poems will in turn be analyzed and interpreted vis-à-vis not just the better known works, but also the equally neglected *Poemata* of 1597<sup>13</sup> and the underused *Annotationes*, the last revision of which appeared in 1598.<sup>14</sup> This approach, I believe, will allow us to appreciate Beza from a fresh perspective.

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12. Editions and a fuller generic analysis will be given in chapter 1 of this book.

13. Beza, *Poemata* 1597. This is a deluxe in-quarto edition. The editors of the correspondence for this year (Beza, *Corr.* XXXVIII [1597], v–vi) have detailed the involvement of Venceslas Zastriselius the Younger and his family of Moravian nobility and the financing that they provided for its publication. In fact, the book would have been published in Moravia after Venceslas took the manuscript there in 1596, but at the prompting of friends, Beza asked for it back so that the editing of it could be overseen in Geneva (n° 2513). Appendix I of the volume reprises the preface of the *Poemata* written by the aforementioned Venceslas to Venceslas Zastriselius the Elder. There is also a letter written to the latter (n° 2529), where Beza offers a response to the critics of his poetry.

14. The larger or “major” annotations appeared in five editions from 1556 to 1598 (for the latter, see “Abbreviations”): 1556 (with the Latin Vulgate and Beza’s own Latin translation), 1563 (adding the Greek text), 1582 (called the “third” edition on the title page), 1589 (a notes-only version was published in 1594) and 1598. On this see Kenneth Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting from Erasmus to Bèze, 1516–1598* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981), 90, n. 52. While several scholars have turned to the annotations on specific topics (e.g., Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza: Development of Reformed Doctrine* [Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972]), a more systematic approach to them is needed in order to come to grips with their contribution and to fully appreciate Beza as an interpreter of Scripture. Valuable work has been done already by Irena Backus, *The Reformed Roots of the English New Testament* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Press, 1980); Backus, “The Church

As the title of this book intimates, then, this study aims to identify an underlying theory of ethics in Beza's thought by looking at the practical application of it in a particular moralizing work, the *Cato*. The editors of Beza's correspondence have called Beza's ethical thought "a delicate and little known subject."<sup>15</sup> The current study aims to remedy that deficiency while at the same time adding to the growing body of work on early Reformed Orthodoxy, the period stretching roughly from the death of Calvin and the appearance of the Heidelberg Catechism to around 1640, when many of the doctrines formulated by Calvin and the early reformers were being applied to complex, real-world situations and disagreements.<sup>16</sup> As we make our way through this study, there are essentially two questions that will occupy our attention: first, how Beza's ethical thinking connects to his broader theological program, and, second, how it coheres internally, that is, what theoretical principle ties it all together. The pastoral bearing will become apparent as well. In fact, at stake for Beza was the very social organization of the Church and the lives of its members. Far from being an ivory-tower theologian who, in a detached manner, rationally and systematically expounded upon the true nature of God and the execution of his plan as revealed in Scriptures, Beza also found in that revelation a detailed blueprint for how individuals should conduct themselves on a daily basis. The goal here, therefore, is to shed light on how Beza, as one of the foremost leaders of the Reformed movement after the death of Calvin, was envisioning and constructing a paradigm of Christian life and society.

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Fathers and the Canonicity of the Apocalypse in the Sixteenth Century: Erasmus, Frans Titelmans, and Theodore Beza," *SCJ* 29 (1998): 651–66; Backus, *Reformation Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Backus, "Piscator Misconstrued? Some Remarks on Robert Rollock's Logical Analysis of Hebrews IX," in "Text, Translation and Exegesis of Hebrews IX: Papers Presented at a Seminar Held at the IHR, Geneva on 14–15 June 1982," in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Spring 1984; *Théorie et pratique de l'exégèse: Actes du troisième colloque international sur l'histoire de l'exégèse biblique au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, eds. Irena Backus and Francis Higman (Geneva: Droz, 1990); Kirk Summers, "Early Criticism of Erasmus' Latin Translation of the Bible," *Comitatus* 22 (1991): 70–86; Jan Krans, *Beyond What is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Jean-Blaise Fellay, "Théodore de Bèze exégète. Texte, traduction et commentaire de l'Épître aux Romains dans les *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*," PhD diss., University of Geneva, 1984.

15. Beza, *Corr.* XXXVIII (1597), x: "sujet délicat et peu connu."

16. This dating of "early Orthodoxy" comes from Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1987<sup>1</sup>), 1:28–9. Muller adopts the timeline proposed by Otto Weber.

### *Ethical Ideas: Calvin to Reformed Orthodoxy*

As much as the word “ethics” surfaces when talking about religion, it can still be a somewhat elusive term, especially as it relates to the sixteenth century. What exactly do we mean if we say we are investigating Beza’s ideas on ethics? What precisely do we hope to learn? We can benefit by looking at the existing scholarship on Calvin’s ethical thought. Günther Haas observes that “ethics” in its modern usage as a self-contained field of enquiry did not occupy the earliest reformers.<sup>17</sup> Calvin, in fact, does not even use the term, nor did he ever write a work on ethics per se. Thus, to investigate what we would call the ethical thought of Calvin, Haas looks for specific markers in the *Institutes* and in his commentaries that lead into discussions of right behavior. These he succinctly identifies as the following: obedience, the life of a Christian, and the moral life. Calvin typically ties his discussions of an obedient and moral Christian life to his doctrine of the union with Christ, which effectively ends believers’ separation from God and allows them to share in the benefits that come from the Father through his Son. Union with Christ means participating in both the savior’s death and resurrection, which manifest themselves in the Christian as the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the Spirit, that is, a turning away from sin and a walking in the newness of life according to God’s righteousness. The latter can be known through the Law and, to a lesser extent, nature. The ultimate goal is to repair the “image of God” (*imago Dei*) that was so thoroughly damaged in the Fall (*Inst.* 1.15.4),<sup>18</sup> and

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17. Günther Haas, “Ethics and Church Discipline,” in Herman Selderhuis, *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 332–44. One may also consult his article “Calvin’s Ethics” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. McKim, 93–105. Haas synthesizes his own previous work with that of other scholars, most notably W. Kolffhaus, *Vom christlichen Leben nach Johannes Calvin* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1949); Ronald Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959); John Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989); and James B. Sauer, *Faithful Ethics According to John Calvin: The Teachability of the Heart* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1997). Still more can be gleaned from *Calvin and Christian Ethics: Papers Presented at the Fifth Colloquium on Calvin and Calvin Studies*, ed. Peter de Klerk (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Studies Society, 1987). For more bibliography on Calvin’s ethics, consult H. van den Belt, *Restoration Through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 74, n. 85.

18. For Calvin’s *Institutes* I have used the following edition throughout this study: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). For the Latin text I have used the 1559 edition: *Institutio christianae religionis, in libros quattuor nunc prima digesta, certisque distincta capitibus, ad aptissimum methodum; aucta etiam tam magna accessione ut propemodum opus novum haberi possit* (Geneva: Robert Étienne, 1559).

that is represented visibly now through Christ. Thus ethics, which is an aspect of sanctification, is a process of becoming more Christlike; that is, of imitating Christ through loving others, patiently obeying the will of the Father, looking with hope to Christ in his glory and coming kingdom, and reclaiming dominion over creation. Haas also discusses the role of natural law in Calvin's ethics, a subject to which we will return in chapter 1, but here let it suffice to say that Calvin believed that natural law assists with reinforcing the mandates of the second table of the Ten Commandments, the ones that have to do with human interactions. The order of creation, or the order in creation, reflects the principles of moral law necessary for social life.

Erich Fuchs in his study on Calvin's ethics agrees with Haas's assessment in many of its details but derives them not from Christians' union with Christ, but from God's providence.<sup>19</sup> In this regard he writes:

Providence is the foundation of ethics, because it guarantees that there is a promise attached to human existence; ethics are therefore understood as man's response, whether conscious or unconscious, to this promise.<sup>20</sup>

Fuchs is suggesting that mankind's activity within the world is determined first and foremost by God's providential guidance of creation itself to its appointed and just end, where all things are made new again and brought back into harmony with God. Since human beings have been endowed with reason that helps them to understand the overall plan and their place in it, and which allows them to seek out aid from others and to reciprocate it in order to realize their place, ethical behavior can be seen as an alignment with that plan within a social setting. Simply put, Christians have a responsibility to work with God (through penitence, i.e., personal reform to the image of God through Christ) and others (through the love of neighbor) to restore order in creation.<sup>21</sup> This commitment to

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19. Erich Fuchs, "Calvin's Ethics," in *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509–2009*, eds. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 145–58. The book was originally published in French in 2008 with the title *Calvin et le Calvinisme: Cinq siècles d'influence sur l'Eglise et la Société* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2008).

20. Fuchs, "Calvin's Ethics," 146.

21. Fuchs (151) points out that the mention of penitence in the *Institutes* leads to the long discussion on the Christian life at III, vi–x.

responsible behavior displays itself as an ascetic attitude, a hopefulness about the future life with Christ in glory, and an understanding of the right use of earthly benefits. It also shows up as a response to God's "calling," which is the Christian's active employment in work that carries out God's purpose here on earth.

These investigations of Calvin's thought provide a useful starting point for us in our investigation of Beza's ethics, which should be understood in the context of the sixteenth century as a shorthand for Christian conduct to the glory of God or, conceived more abstractly, as the rationale for that conduct. Unity, harmony, restoration, and the social nature of human existence, all important to Calvin's thinking about ethics, do indeed emerge as major themes in Beza's ethical system, even if the nature of the source in which that thought appears is quite different. While Haas and Fuchs find Calvin's teaching about what faith must practice almost inextricably integrated into his discussions about what faith must believe,<sup>22</sup> whether that be the doctrine of the union with Christ or that of God's providence, with Beza we have the opportunity to see the practice of faith distinct from and not overshadowed by theoretical or doctrinal exposition. Beza understood the whole of Christian doctrine to be divided between the knowledge of God's covenantal plan for mankind and the demands made in the Scriptures for personal righteousness. This assertion is borne out by a statement in Amandus Polanus's monumental work of theology titled *Syntagma theologiae Christianae*.<sup>23</sup> In looking for a way to structure his work Polanus follows that very course, with a section on what to believe followed by a section on what to do, and he defends his decision by claiming recent precedent in Beza, Daneau, Ursinus, and Zanchius.<sup>24</sup> On Beza specifically he writes:

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22. The point is also made in Donald Sinnema, "The Discipline of Ethics in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *CTJ* 28 (1993): 10–44, esp. 12: "Calvin did not produce an independent ethics, not even an independent theological ethics, and so, strictly speaking, he is not part of the story of early Reformed ethics as a discipline. Ethics for him is simply an integral dimension of his whole theology."

23. Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae Christianae, juxta leges ordinis methodici conformatum, atque in libros decem digestum* (Hanau: Wechel, 1609–1610). All quotes here come from his 1615 single-volume edition, also printed at Hanau.

24. On the importance of Beza's student Polanus and his theology, see Robert Letham, "Amandus Polanus: A Neglected Theologian?" *SCJ* 21 (1990): 463–76. A full biographical treatment is available in Ernst Staehelin, *Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf* (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1955). For a discussion of Polanus's *Syntagma* and the ethical thought there, see Luca Baschera, "Ethics in Reformed Orthodoxy," in Herman Selderhuis, *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 519–52, esp. 521–27. On Polanus's influence



Theodore Beza, the Irenaeus of our time, embraces the same idea [sc. as presented here] when summarizing the contents of Psalm 119. He says the following: “The term ‘heavenly doctrine’ simply refers to those things that are revealed by God himself and included in the Bible, whether we understand it to be the part that prescribes what we should do and prohibits what we should not do, which we might term “law” in the narrower sense of the word, or the second part, in which is taught what we must believe in order to be saved, which we call “Gospel.”<sup>25</sup>

The wider passage that Polanus quotes from here, Beza’s *argumentum* at the beginning of his paraphrases on Psalm 119, is particularly enlightening. Beza maintains that the psalmist’s chief aim is to attract people to the study of “heavenly doctrine,” or more clearly, “divine revelation” (*doctrina coelestis*).<sup>26</sup> This he identifies as both precepts for living and Christ’s saving work. He goes on to say that God revealed this from Heaven not just for us to grasp with our intellect, but so that each individual might follow it with continual and indefatigable zeal as the norm of life. The Holy Spirit enables individuals to follow the Word by dispelling the shadows from their intellect (showing them what to believe) and correcting their “deeply depraved affections” (leading them on the path of right living). God’s Word, he continues, prescribes a way (*via*) and a journey (*iter*) and helps those who follow it to navigate and overcome the obstacles and difficulties of life.

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on Barth, consult Rinse H. Reeling Brouwer, “The Conversation Between Karl Barth and Amandus Polanus on the Question of the Reality of Human Speaking of the Simplicity and Multiplicity of God,” in *The Reality of Faith in Theology*, eds. Bruce McCormack and Gerrit Neven (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 51–110.

25. Polanus, *Syntagma* 2.1, 130: “Theodorus Beza nostrae aetatis Irenaeus, eandem complectitur in argumento Psal. 119 his verbis: ‘Doctrina caelestis nomine (sive partem illam intellegamus quae facienda praecipit et non facienda inhibet legis nomine angustiori significatione accepto; sive alteram partem, in qua quid sit nobis ad salutem credendum docetur, quam Evangelium vocamus) ea demum significantur, quae sunt a Deo ipso patefacta et scriptis comprehensa.’”

26. Francis Turretin (*Inst. theol.* I.1.5) defines “theology” itself as *doctrina coelestis* and equates it to λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ in the NT, and finds synonyms at 1 Cor. 2:7 (“wisdom in a mystery”), 2 Tim. 1:13 (“the form of sound words”), Titus 1:1 (“knowledge of truth according to piety”) and Titus 1:9 (“doctrine”). The idea, drawn from Aquinas, is that this sort of doctrine is unknowable by human capacity alone, since it is heavenly, and must be revealed by God himself. Thus the Word of God is given by God about God and leading to God. On this see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics*, vol. 1, (1987), 103–4.



Thus we see a heavy emphasis on what path a Christian must follow *after* obtaining the truth provided by faith. Knowledge cannot stand on its own in the life of a Christian. The other reformers, Polanus notes, have a similar clear division. For Daneau, Christian piety signifies “either teaching about faith, or sanctification and moral improvement.”<sup>27</sup> Zanchius sees the sum of the Christian religion as faith and obedience,<sup>28</sup> and Ursinus divides catechetical learning into the “doctrine of faith” and the “doctrine of works.” As for Calvin, Polanus says, while he approached the problem of “true wisdom” in a different way in his *Institutes*, dividing his work into two sections covering the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves, the difference is basically a matter of semantics:

From the knowledge of God the worship of him cannot and should not be separated. The knowledge of ourselves is bound up with the knowledge of God. And so in words only do these distributions differ, but in substance they agree.<sup>29</sup>

What Polanus recognizes here while simultaneously invoking Calvin as a theological model is that the tendency toward a categorically distinct treatment of ethics in fact finds its fullest expression in those that immediately followed Calvin.

Beza with his *Cato* composed a work dealing separately and prescriptively with matters of behavior. And while Beza’s contribution in no way contradicts Calvin’s essential dogmatic starting points, nor his belief that right living depends on right knowledge, it does allow us to see the question of ethics from a new perspective, with different emphases and a vision for the Christian life that would not otherwise be apparent. At the very least we see a sense of urgency and a recognition that something concrete is being constructed. Beza’s contribution, far from being a purely philosophical

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27. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 2.1, 131: “Christiana pietas tradit, aut doctrinam de fide, aut morum reformationem et sanctitatem.”

28. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 2.1, 131: “Fide et obedientia constare summam totam Christianam religionem docet.”

29. Polanus, *Syntagma*, 2.1, 131: “Et a cognitione Dei non potest nec debet cultus eiusdem separari. Cognitionis nostri est destinata ad cognitionem Dei. Ita verbis duntaxat hae distributiones differunt, reipsa consentiunt.”

treatise on the subject,<sup>30</sup> is instead a poetic work with a very practical tenor to it. The “censor” of the *Cato*, just like the censors of ancient Rome, actively supervises and regulates public morality. He is Christian in the sense that he reproaches the wayward sinner with reminders of the expectations of a righteous God, but Roman in his position of *gravitas* and in his power to brand offenders (*nota censoria*) and even strip them of their title of citizenship. We will return to the latter concept below when discussing the Consistory.

Before looking in chapter 1 at the central ethical ideas of the *Cato*, which then will be developed in detail in the chapters that follow and correlated with statements by Beza in other works, it will be profitable to consider what attitude prevailed in regard to ethics and morality in the period of Reformed Orthodoxy. The question is a complex one, but recent studies have made great strides in describing the coalescing of Calvin’s lofty theoretical thought into a vision for society and the Christian life.<sup>31</sup> These studies are not simply concerned with the practical implementation of discipline in the Christian community, but with the more accessible works that sought to shape how the community was ordered to reflect the righteousness and justice to be expected in God’s kingdom. The most obvious place to start is Lambert Daneau’s *Ethices Christianae* (1577),<sup>32</sup> since it explicitly aims to lay out the rationale and program for moral behavior in a godly society. He does so not merely on the basis of works of Classical philosophy, such as Aristotle’s

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30. Not until the mid-seventeenth century did philosophical ethics, that is, thinking of ethics in Aristotelian and civic terms, give way to, or at least coexist with, theological ethics as a field of study in academic institutions, where it often was referred to as “practical theology.” On this see Sinnema, “The Discipline of Ethics,” 41–43.

31. The most important studies on the topic are the following: Christoph Strohm, *Ethik im frühen Calvinismus. Humanistische Einflüsse, philosophische, juristische und theologische Argumentationen sowie mentalitätsgeschichtliche Aspekte am Beispiel des Calvin-Schülers Lambertus Danaeus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); Strohm, “Ethics in Early Calvinism,” in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, eds. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen (Leiden: Springer, 2005), 255–82; idem, “Petrus Martyr Vermigli’s *Loci communes* und Calvins *Institutio christianae religionis*,” in *Peter Martyr Vermigli*, ed. Emidio Campi (Geneva: Droz, 2002), 77–104; Christian Grosse, “Il y avoit eu trop grande rigueur par cy-devant.” La discipline ecclésiastique à Genève à l’époque de Théodore de Bèze,” in *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605)*, ed. Irena Backus, 55–68.

32. Lambert Daneau, *Ethices Christianae libri tres, in quibus de veris humanarum actionum principiis agitur, atque etiam legis divinae, sive decalogi explicatio, illiusque cum scriptis scholasticorum, iure naturali sive philosophico, civili Romanorum, et canonico collatio continetur; praeterea virtutum, et vitiorum, quae passim vel in sacra scriptura, vel alibi occurrunt, quaeque ad singula legis divinae praecepta revocantur, definitiones* (Geneva: Eustache Vignon, 1577). Hereafter referred to as Daneau, *Ethices Christianae*.

*Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De finibus*, as Melancthon and others had done, but by weighing and synthesizing those ideals with the moral wisdom and prescriptions in the revealed Word. In this regard he was the first in the Reformed tradition to attempt a comprehensive, independent work on ethics.<sup>33</sup> Daneau seeks to discern God's will—his plan and expectations for the individual pursuing holiness, both internally and externally—through a new enlightenment made possible through the Renaissance.

Christoph Strohm's study of Daneau's ethical thought offers insights that are particularly apropos of our study of Beza's moral thought. Beginning with the conviction of those who followed Calvin that the reform of doctrine (*reformatio doctrinae*) should be matched by a reform of life (*reformatio vitae*), Strohm looks to the *Zeitgeist* of the late sixteenth century to identify four trends that shaped the approach to ethics developing in Reformed Orthodoxy. He notes first that the shifting social structure of the period that marked the transition from Medieval life to the Early Modern period had reached a crisis point during this time. Whereas God had created everything, from the cosmos and nature, to the individual, society, and the church, in a certain hierarchical order, mankind's sinful tendency has always been to challenge and break down that order. The more mankind drifts away from God, the more moral decline is evident through the changes in social dealings, and, consequently, the more the symmetry and harmony inherent in God's creation is disrupted. The result is chaos in all levels of creation.<sup>34</sup> And since the end of the sixteenth century marked a time of acute political upheaval and change, Daneau's ethic expresses the longing for a return to order both in social structure and in personal conduct. One should resist any self-indulgent swings or surges of passion and emotion, including those represented by such happy events as festivals and dances, and instead strive for regimentation in all areas of life. Strohm elsewhere characterizes the *Loci communes* of Peter Vermigli as "the widespread yearning for clear order in a world undergoing upheaval."<sup>35</sup> The

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33. On this see Sinnema, "Discipline of Ethics," 21–22.

34. The order of the universe was an important pillar of Daneau's thought, as is summed up in his comment in the introduction to his commentary on Timothy (*In D. Pauli priorem epistolam ad Timotheum commentarius*, 1577): "The very world itself, God's work of utmost beauty, takes its name *cosmos* from the Greek word for *order*." (*Mundus ipse, pulcherrimum Dei opus, ab ordine κόσμος nominatur.*)

35. Strohm, "Petrus Martyr Vermigli," in Campi, *Peter Martyr Vermigli*, 78: "der verbreiteten Sehnsucht nach klarer Ordnung in einer im Umbruch befindlichen Welt."

importance of this kind of thinking for understanding Beza's *Cato* cannot be overstated: Beza is constantly exhorting his representative sinners to reintegrate themselves into an ordered society and creation.

Strohm also identifies the emphasis on the active role of the Holy Spirit in the process of regeneration and sanctification in Reformed thought (as opposed to its weaker presentation in Luther's thought) as another important basis for deciphering the ethics of Calvin's successors. The determining event that lies behind this process of internalizing obedience—sanctification—is the Holy Spirit's operation to unite believers with Christ, who shows us what it means to be in perfect agreement with the Father. Since the Holy Spirit directs us to a *spiritual* God, the law of God is a matter for the whole being, heart and body. The Gospel did not abrogate the law, but instead heralds the internalization of it through the work of the Holy Spirit, who changes Christians' very instincts and inclinations. This tendency in Reformed Orthodoxy was complemented and bolstered by the juristic training that so many of its leaders had received; Daneau, himself a lawyer, Strohm observes, is particularly drawn to passages of Scripture that have to do with the regulation of life. Finally, Strohm sees a certain sympathy in Daneau for Stoic moral philosophy, especially its suppression of the passions and the attention paid to one's inner being, over and against Aristotle's espousal of the golden mean.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, there was a growing interest in how a Christian society might be constituted, or rather, what sort of ethical theory could restore mankind to its rightful place in creation. The period from the death of Calvin in 1564 to the death of Beza in 1605 saw a power struggle between city councils and Church authorities, particularly as represented by their Consistories, concerning the oversight of morals not just in Geneva, but throughout the Reformed world. Christian Grosse has shown that while the various town councils gradually usurped many of the disciplinary powers of the Consistories, the Consistories themselves tried to protect their power by softening their rigor and by meting out their punishments with

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36. Beza himself shows a great affection for *sophrosyne* (moderation and balance) as a guiding moral principle, particularly Horace's formulation of it as the "golden mean" (*aurea mediocritas*) in *Odes* 2.10. Beza wrote a poem in praise of moderation (*Eleg.* 2) that appeared in his first edition (1548) and was retained in several subsequent ones, in which he used not only the Daedalus and Icarus myth as an illustration of the principle, but also numerous historical examples. "The very drugs that help the sick," he observes there, "when taken in moderation, often hurt them when used excessively." Then he ends facetiously by refusing to praise moderation immoderately.

more discrimination so as not to offend the powerful. The aim was to gain the favor of the townsfolk and stave off the erosion of their power. With the lack of concrete disciplinary authority, Grosse observes, came an increase in the moralizing efforts of Church authorities. Now ministers filled their sermons with even sterner directives concerning conduct. More treatises touching on the particulars of moral behavior appeared, as did more sumptuary ordinances.<sup>37</sup>

It is important to recognize that Beza's pronouncements about morality, whether presented through the medium of the *Cato* to be analyzed in this study or in other exegetical and theological works, were born from the incubator of certain historical realities and a prevailing *Weltanschauung* and *Zeitgeist*. The contributions of Strohm, Grosse, and others have made that undeniable. Even so, that does not in any way diminish the fact that Beza built his case and derived his principles from a careful reading of Scripture. Beza had a passion for uncovering the exact meaning of every passage, and he was motivated by an unwavering belief that his particular set of skills in language, coupled with a thorough knowledge of history and theology, positioned him to recover God's Word faithfully.<sup>38</sup> He saw himself, in other words, in his presentation of ethics, as a leader in efforts to reestablish the one true Church of God.

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37. Christian Grosse, "Il y avoit eu trop grande rigueur par cy-devant," 55–68.

38. See Scott Manetsch's observations about Beza's "sense of vocation" as a defender of doctrinal truth in *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 137–38, esp. n. 77. One can observe his appreciation for the minutiae of language while preparing his *Annotationes* (1598): his correspondence from 1597 includes several intense philological discussions with Isaac Casaubon, former chair of Greek at the Genevan Academy, about the correct reading and rendering of numerous New Testament passages. See, for example, Beza, *Corr.* XXXVIII (1597), n° 2498 n. 5, and n° 2503. Similar cases abound throughout the 1598 edition. For example, at Philippians 1:21 he rejects the Vulgate translation, "Mihi enim vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum," which almost all modern English translations follow (usually, "for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"), and, building on the comments of Calvin on the same passage, argues instead that the Greek articular infinitives (τὸ ζῆν and τὸ ἀποθανεῖν) should be taken as accusatives of respect, an Atticism. Thus, Thomson's Geneva Bible renders it: "For Christ *is* to me both in life, and in death advantage." Eph. 1:9 provides another example: There, following the lead of Lorenzo Valla, he highlights the incorrect rendering of μυστήριον as "sacramentum" in old Latin versions and shows how that one small mistake led to great theological error. The details of the application of philological principles to the Biblical text, including this word, are treated by J. Pelikan in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrines*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–1989), 3:209–14; 4:257, 295, 308–09.

## *The Consistory as Background*

Several literary, social, and theological dynamics current in the sixteenth century played a role in shaping the form and content of Beza's *Cato*. The literary and generic traditions Beza draws from for creating his collection will be explored in depth in the next chapter. Here we look to an institution, along with the rationale on which it was founded, to better comprehend the intellectual and moral climate surrounding the work. That institution, which was established throughout much of the Reformed world, and which was particularly important in the life of the Genevan church, is known as the Consistory.<sup>39</sup> One of the stipulations that Calvin made for answering pleas to come back to Geneva after his abrupt expulsion in 1538 was that the city magistrates agree to set up a tribunal of moral discipline and supervision. This was achieved immediately upon his return in 1541, when the city magistrates adopted a set of *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* that were drafted for the most part by Calvin himself and included a provision for a body of Church discipline. This body, known as the Consistory, was

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39. The basic bibliography on the Reformed disciplinary institution known as the Consistory includes the following: Ronald Cammenga, "Calvin's Struggle for Church Discipline," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 43 (2010): 3–16; Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline in Geneva: The Institution and the Men Who Directed It," *Dutch Review of Church History* 70 (1990): 158–72; Robert M. Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Robert M. Kingdon, "The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, eds. L. Buck and J. Zophy (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 3–16; Scott Manetsch, "Pastoral Care East of Eden: The Consistory of Geneva, 1568–82," *Church History* 75 (2006): 274–313; Raymond Mentzer, "Marking the Taboo: Excommunication in French Reformed Churches," in *Sin and the Calvinists: Morals Control and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Raymond Mentzer (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 1994), 97–128; William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559–1569," *BHR* 38 (1976), 467–84; William Monter, "Crime and Punishment in Calvin's Geneva," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 69 (1973): 281–87; William Monter, "Women in Calvinist Geneva (1550–1800)," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6 (1980): 189–209; Jeffrey Watt, "Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva," *SCJ* 24 (1993): 429–39; Jeffrey Watt, "Calvinism, Childhood, and Education: The Evidence from the Genevan Consistory," *SCJ* 33 (2002): 439–56; Robert M. Kingdon and Thomas Lambert, *Reforming Geneva: Discipline, Faith and Anger in Calvin's Geneva* (Geneva: Droz, 2012). Even more research on Reformed consistories outside Geneva is catalogued at Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors*, 361, n. 4. For the editions of the registers, see *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au Temps de Calvin*, eds. Robert M. Kingdon, Thomas A. Lambert, Wallace McDonald, Isabella M. Watt, Jeffrey R. Watt (Geneva: Droz, 1996–present). Vol. I (1542–44); vol. II (1545–46); vol. III (1547–48); vol. IV (1548); vol. V (Feb. 20, 1550—Feb. 5, 1551); vol. VI (Feb. 19, 1551—Feb. 4, 1552); vol. VI (Feb. 25, 1552—Feb. 2, 1553); vol. VIII (March 25, 1553—Feb. 1, 1554); vol. IX (Feb. 15, 1554—Jan. 31, 1555). See also *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, eds. Robert M. Kingdon, Thomas A. Lambert, Isabella M. Watt, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), translating vol. I (1542–44) of the *Registres*.

composed of three parts. On one side sat twelve lay elders, drawn from the higher governing bodies of the city (the Small Council, the Council of Sixty, and the Council of Two Hundred) and representing all quarters of the city. On the other, all the urban pastors were expected to participate, with Calvin, and then Beza after him, sitting in a place of honor and primacy. In the middle, presiding over the entire body and its proceedings, was one of the four, annually elected magistrates known as syndics. The syndic was, in essence, the Consistory chairman. The body was also served by a secretary, whose recordings make up the registers, and a summoner, whose job it was to bring alleged offenders before the ecclesiastical tribunal.

It was instituted that the tribunal would meet every Thursday to hear the cases of those who had been charged with some sort of moral lapse and misdeed. Generally speaking, the members would state the charge, question the defendant as to the accusation and reports, elicit information and the defendant's point of view, and hear out witnesses who would either corroborate the story or not. If they deemed that the defendant was indeed guilty of immorality, they enacted any number of remedies to elicit repentance and true contrition. According to the minutes, most Consistory sessions dealing with one individual ended when one of its members (usually one of the ministers) would stand before the accused and issue a censure or "remonstrance."<sup>40</sup> These scoldings warned the offender that he or she had violated some principle of Scripture and reminded them of the terrible consequences if the behavior continued. Sometimes, in order to ensure that the offenders fully understood the gravity of their error, the Consistory would levy a suspension from one or more communions; that is to say, they would temporarily excommunicate them. In those instances, the person was barred from participating in the next administration of the Supper but was expected to exhibit suitable remorse so as to be restored for future ones. Some cases were of a different nature. At times it was necessary to foster reconciliation between parties or take action to correct doctrinal deviations or deficiencies. Such cases often included remonstrances as well, though when ignorance was the problem these could be delivered gently. When laws had been broken and stronger

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40. The typical proceedings of the Consistory are explained succinctly in Robert M. Kingdon, "A New View of Calvin in the Light of the Registers of the Geneva Consistory," in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex*, eds. Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 21–33; and Kingdon and Lambert, *Reforming Geneva*, 17–24.

corrective actions were warranted, such as fines and imprisonment, or even execution, the Consistory would send a recommendation to the city magistrates. Occasionally, when the sin was deemed egregious and/or the sinner was unrepentant, the Consistory could impose major excommunication, whereby the individual was completely cut off from the Supper and also from any social or business dealings with the townsfolk.

It should be noted that the remonstrances that so markedly characterized the duties of the Consistory also appeared in other guises at Geneva. For its part, the Company of Pastors occasionally issued “grand” remonstrances directed at the magistrates and general public in which they warned against a litany of sins observed throughout the populace. From 1570 to 1600 these grand public remonstrances appeared almost every two years, with a notably long one recorded for November 3, 1579 in the minutes of the Company of Pastors.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, before each of the quarterly communions, the ministers and professors of the Academy would engage in private fraternal censuring, sometimes called *Ordinary Censures* (*Censura Morum Pastorum*), in an effort to maintain a high moral standard among the ecclesiastical leadership.<sup>42</sup> In these sessions clergy and doctors admonish their colleagues for inappropriate contact with female parishoners, lax attention to duties, engaging in usurious practices, and the like. In turn, the ministers would deliver sermons that amounted to remonstrances in the days leading up to the quarterly celebration of the Supper. These were calls for the congregation to repent from sins that the minister himself knew about or suspected and to prepare their hearts for spiritually partaking of the blood and body of Christ. The Genevan presses also issued remonstrances in the form of treatises written by the city’s scholars and ministers. The books of Lambert Daneau on games of chance and François Étienne on dancing are representative of this phenomenon.<sup>43</sup>

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41. RCP IV, 300–8. On these grand public remonstrances see esp. Grosse, “‘Il y avoit eu trop grande rigueur par cy-devant,’” 64; E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger, 1975), 215.

42. Scott Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 127–28; Herman Speelman, *Calvin and the Independence of the Genevan Church* (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2014), 134, esp. fn. 422).

43. Lambert Daneau, *Briève remonstration sur les jeux de sort ou de hazard, et principalement de Dez et de Cartes* (Geneva: Jacques Bourgeois, 1574); François Étienne, *Traité des danses, auquel est amplement résolve la question, asavoir s'il est permis aux Chrestiens de danser* (Geneva: François Étienne, 1579).



Even outside the Consistory, therefore, remonstrances were a familiar facet of the lives of Genevans. It was only in the Consistory, however, that the threat of excommunication provided additional teeth to the scolding.

As several scholars studying the registers have pointed out, while modern Westerners might consider the mission of the Consistory intrusive and restrictive, the tribunal really had a positive, pastoral function in Genevan society, at least when truly controlled by the Church and not the magistrates. It offered spiritual medicine to those who were struggling with worldly passions, attempted to reconcile neighbor to neighbor and spouse to spouse, and protected the weakest in society (wives, servants, children, etc.) who were being abused and bullied by the strongest. There was likewise an educational aspect to the work of the Consistory. Many Genevans were not so much blatantly immoral as ignorant of rudimentary doctrine, so it was up to the Consistory to identify these deficiencies and impose the proper regimen of study. Sometimes parents would be admonished to work harder at teaching their children certain basic Scriptural ideas and passages (e.g., the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments), along with basic doctrinal statements, such as the Apostles' Creed.

These duties assigned to the Consistory were not created as part of a strategy on the part of the Genevan leadership and pastorate to browbeat, coerce, and punish the members of the congregation, but were seen as an expression of the shepherding and nurturing responsibilities of the Church. Even so, debauchery and sin were rampant enough in Genevan society, or so the sermons preached from the city's Reformed pulpits would have us believe, and frequently warranted a more powerful medicine, something more concretely disciplinary.<sup>44</sup> Calvin had perceived one indisputable tool at the disposal of the Church for the purpose of discipline, and that was removal from the community. At *Institutes* 4.12 Calvin argues that if a person persists in wickedness, even after private and public admonitions (*remonstrances*), or commits some egregious sin, such as breaking one

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44. Mentzer, "Marking the Taboo," 126, observes that excommunication was used more at Geneva than elsewhere. On sermons, see Thomas Lambert, "Preaching, Praying, and Policing the Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1998); Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors*, 146–52 and 352 n. 43 (referring to published sermons of Michel Cop, Pierre Viret, and Jean-Raymond Merlin). Grosse, "La discipline ecclésiastique à Genève," 62–64, as stated earlier in this chapter observes an increase in the "moral discourse" at Geneva, in both sermons and treatises, as the Consistory's influence weakened. See also Tadataka Maruyama, *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza: The Reform of the True Church* (Geneva: Droz, 1978), III.

of the Ten Commandments, that person should be excommunicated. This is done to protect the reputation of the Church by disassociation, segregate the saints from the corrupting influence of the wicked, and awaken the sinner to the sin. This latter “end” (*finis*) of excommunication should not be underestimated. The public shaming that was suspension from communion, when imposed—and, aside from rebuking or reconciling offenders, it by far was the most common action taken by the Consistory—always had as its aim the moral rehabilitation and readmittance of the sinner into the fellowship of believers. It is the rod of chastisement that stings the sinner with the realization that sin is separating him or her from the society of good people. At the same time, to other observant Christians it serves as a stark and visible object lesson of the isolating consequences of sin.

This type of disciplinary action was held in high regard among many Reformed churches, especially for those that had some significant contact with Geneva. As Kingdon has noted, the Belgic Confession of 1561, a truly Reformed document, states in article twenty-nine that one of the “marks” of the true Church is the implementation of ecclesiastic discipline as a means for reining in wayward sinners.<sup>45</sup> In the *Harmonia confessionum fidei* of 1581,<sup>46</sup> a project to collate and translate into Latin the several Reformed confessions (for which Beza himself served as a compiler and editor along with Jean-François Salvard,<sup>47</sup> Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, Lambert Daneau, and Simon Goulart) it is rendered this way:

Therefore, by these marks the true Church is distinguished from the false one: If in it the pure preaching of the Gospel and the legitimate

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45. Kingdon, “Calvin and the Establishment of Consistory Discipline,” 161.

46. *Harmonia confessionum fidei, Orthodoxarum et Reformatarum ecclesiarum, quae in praecipuis quibusque Europae regnis, nationibus, et provinciis, sacram Evangelii doctrinam pure profitentur; quarum catalogum et ordinem sequentes paginae indicabunt* (Geneva: Pierre de St. André, 1581). The first English translation of it was published as *An Harmony of the Confessions of the Faith of the Christian and Reformed Churches* (Cambridge: T. Thomas, 1586). On the *Harmonia*, see especially Francis Higman, “L’*Harmonia confessionum fidei* de 1581,” in *Catéchismes et Confessions de foi*, eds. M. Fragonard and M. Peronnet (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 1995).

47. According to Lambert Daneau, Salvard was the primary editor; on this see Girolamo Zanchi, *De religione Christiana fides, Confession of Christian Religion*, eds. Luca Baschera and Christian Moser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 526, n. 6. For all the available evidence on Salvard’s role, see Fritz Büsser, “Freedom in Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century (the *Harmonia confessionum fidei* of 1581),” in *Zwingliana* 16 (1984): 281–300; idem, “Reformierte Katholizität: Zur ‘*Harmonia Confessionum Fidei*’ von J. F. Salvard,” in *Die Prophezei: Humanismus und Reformation in Zürich* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 95–104.

administration of the sacraments according to the prescription of Christ are flourishing; likewise, if the correct ecclesiastical discipline is being used to control vices; and, finally (to sum up everything succinctly), if it adheres to the Word of God as its standard and rejects anything that is contrary to it, while acknowledging Christ as its sole head.<sup>48</sup>

By this account, the central mission of the Church can be narrowed down to just three elements: the preaching of the Gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and the curbing of vices (*ad coercenda vitia*) through proper discipline. For the most part, the latter mark manifested itself in the form of the Consistory.

Several other confessions within this section of the *Harmonia* have similar statements about discipline, an indication that it was a widely accepted mission of the Church. The Bohemian Confession of 1535, which appears in section X, p. 13 of the *Harmonia*, adds some important details about the limits of discipline: the Church does not exercise discipline through human force (*politica potentia*), but according to the dictates of Christ at Matthew 18 and by various commands from the apostles. In other words, there must first and foremost be a confrontation with the offending person and a chance for repentance. Those who cannot be brought to repentance through due admonition and warning, or who habitually commit sins and cause scandal among Church members, can be publicly disciplined (*publice puniantur*) by the ecclesiastical punishment commonly called banishment, excommunication, or anathematisation (*quae vulgo bannus, aut excommunicatio, seu anathematismus nominantur*), that is, they can be cut off from the holy community. This accords with what Calvin taught in the *Institutes* (4.12.1–3) and with the actual practice in the Reformed churches in France. Mentzer shows that, generally speaking, the Huguenots adopted a graduated process of disciplinary action that moved from private censure to public censure, then to *suspensio* (minor or temporary excommunication), an act of partial banishment and a warning of the complete isolation that was major excommunication.<sup>49</sup>

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48. *Harmonia*, section X (“De catholica et sancta Dei ecclesiae, et unico capite Ecclesiae”), 18: “His igitur notis vera Ecclesia a falsa discernetur: Si in illa pura Evangelii praedicatio, legitimaque sacramentorum ex Christi praescripto, administratio vigeat; si item recta disciplina Ecclesiastica utatur ad coercenda vitia; si denique (ut uno verbo cuncta complectamur) ad normam verbi Dei omnia exigat, et quaecunque huic adversantur, repudiet; Christumque unicum caput agnoscat.”

49. Mentzer, “Marking the Taboo,” 97–128.

In essence, then, the reformers interpreted their responsibility to “curb vices,” as they found it in Scripture, as a mandate to expel and isolate individuals who refused to submit to God’s will. As Mentzer remarks, “Simply put, excommunication barred an individual from the company of the faithful and participation in the sacraments of the church, especially the Lord’s Supper. It could also isolate her or him from ordinary social and business relationships (sc. in the case of major excommunication).”<sup>50</sup> This was possible because of the nature and purpose of the sacral meal of the Eucharist itself, which not only spiritually nourished believers on the substance of Christ’s body and blood through the power of the Holy Spirit, but also served to strengthen the fellowship and unity of believers. Since participation in the meal declared that the participant belonged to the community and all the standards that guide it, exclusion from it, along with being a significant spiritual punishment, signaled that the offender had stepped outside of the community and needed to be restored.<sup>51</sup>

But how does the Consistory, with its mandate to oversee ecclesiastical discipline and, as a shepherd of sorts, guide the sheep back into the flock, relate to the *Cato* and the view of morality presented there? At this point in the study we can only answer in a preliminary way: the *Cato* promotes the same moral vision as that represented by the Consistory. There Beza’s masterful skills as a neo-Latin poet—his ability to evoke colorful images in the mind, to create meaning through a series of vivid contrasts and associations, to manipulate sounds, rhythms, and poetic devices—are on display to underscore one central idea: the isolating consequences of sin. Those who ignore the clear indications of God’s will, as it is expressed either in the Scriptures or in creation itself, will find themselves rejected and banned from the aid and comfort of respectable people. They will find themselves outside the ordered world that God intended for his people. Understood in this way, then, the *Cato* can be read as containing stylized, poetic versions of remonstrances. By analyzing the *Cato* poems closely, we can uncover the essential elements of the ethical worldview of Beza and his colleagues. This is what makes the *Cato* such a valuable work.

It should be underscored that in the view of Calvin and his colleagues, God himself has handed over responsibility for the implementation of this

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50. Mentzer, “Marking the Taboo,” 100.

51. Mentzer, “Marking the Taboo,” 117–18.

disciplinary banishment to the Church. Calvin states as much emphatically in his *Institutes* when discussing the subject of discipline:

Now therefore we begin to see better how the spiritual jurisdiction of the church, which punishes sins according to the Lord's Word, is the best support of health, foundation of order, and bond of unity. Therefore, in excluding from its fellowship manifest adulterers, fornicators, thieves, robbers, seditious persons, perjurers, false witnesses, and the rest of this sort, as well as the insolent (who when duly admonished of their lighter vices mock God and his judgment), the church claims for itself nothing unreasonable but practices the jurisdiction conferred upon it by the Lord. Now, that no one may despise such a judgment of the church or regard condemnation by vote of the believers as a trivial thing, the Lord has testified that this is nothing but the publication of his own sentence, and what they have done on earth is ratified in Heaven. For they have the Word of the Lord to condemn the perverse; they have the Word to receive the repentant into Grace.<sup>52</sup>

Here are the same categories of adulterers, the whoremongers, the stealers, and the perjurers who, as we shall see, populate Beza's *Cato*. God has granted to his Church the authority to "expel from her community (*e consortio suo exterminat*)" such as these. This can only be carried out, however, in regard to "manifest (*manifestos*)" sinners. Those who rebel against God and mock his judgment need to understand that the Church's tool of discipline is but a reflection of the ultimate disciplinary action of God, that is, expulsion from his kingdom forever. So if they escape the Church, they still do not escape excommunication.

Similarly, Beza acknowledges in the *Cato* that many times sinners do not fully face the consequences for their sins until they reach the

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52. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.12 (emphasis mine): "Nunc ergo melius incipimus cernere quomodo spiritualis Ecclesiae iurisdictio, quae ex verbo Domini in peccata animadvertit, optimum sit et sanitatis subsidium, et fundamentum ordinis, et vinculum unitatis. Ergo dum Ecclesia *manifestos* adulteros, scortatores, fures, praedones, seditiosos, periuros, falsos testes, et eius generis reliquos, item contumaces (qui de levioribus etiam vitiis rite admoniti, Deum et eius iudicium ludibrio habent), e consortio suo *exterminat*; nihil sibi praeter rationem usurpat, sed iurisdictione sibi a Domino delata fungitur. Porro, nequis tale Ecclesiae iudicium spernat, aut parvi aestimet se fidelium suffragiis damnatum, testatus est Dominus, istud ipsum nihil aliud esse quam *sententiae* suae promulgationem, ratumque haberi in caelis quod illi in terra egerint. Habent enim verbum Domini quo perversos damnent; habent verbum quo resipiscentes in gratiam recipiant."

ultimate tribunal, the judgment seat of God himself. Although their sin invariably causes them to suffer in some way, they nonetheless have the potential to fool those around them and conceal the true nature of their character. Here we find a special emphasis of Beza's work: no sinner fully escapes punishment for sins committed. While good people will always shun the wicked, when they recognize them, and while Nature herself silently points an accusatory finger, sinners should be aware that ultimately the rebellion is against the very being of God. Therefore, sinners can be sure that God waits in judgment for them, and that the punishment that he imposes includes being cast out into the darkness. This is an idea that is developed with some vigor by the Bohemian Confession. In the passage immediately following the discussion of the right and responsibility of the Church to discipline comes the following:

And this also must be admitted, that at all times in the Church there have been many who exhibit the appearance of being Christian, but who are vile hypocrites, secret sinners, far removed from repentance, and they will always be with us up until this world ceases to exist. These sorts are neither chastised by this discipline of Christ, nor can they be easily excommunicated or separated completely from the Church, but must be reserved and committed to Christ alone, the chief shepherd, and to his advent. As the Lord himself said concerning these, "the Angels on the last day first will separate such ones as these from the righteous, and will cast them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."<sup>53</sup>

Beza's *Cato* conspicuously does not make even the slightest mention of Church discipline, not as it was specifically employed, even though most of the sins described in the poems are of a very public nature (laziness,

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53. *Harmonia confessionum fidei*, section X, 13: "Etsi hoc etiam non dissimulandum, omni tempore in Ecclesia multos fuisse qui speciem prae se ferrent Christiani hominis, et hypocritae essent nequam, aut peccatores occulti, a poenitentia alieni, atque futuros deinceps usque dum hic mundus esse desinat. Quales neque per hanc disciplinam Christi castigantur, neque facile excommunicari, aut penitus separari ab Ecclesia possunt, sed soli Christo, pastori principi, et adventui huius, reservandi sunt et committendi. Sicut Dominus de his ipse dicit, quod Angeli in novissimo die primum, tales a iustis separaturi sint, et coniecturi in fornacem igneam, ubi erit ploratus et stridor dentium."

drunkenness, pride, etc.) that could scarcely go unnoticed. The list of miscreants dealt with in the Consistory, in fact, corresponds very closely with the parade of sinners described in the *Cato*. But in contrast, Beza frequently makes reference to the high moral court to which all sinners must give answer. Manetsch observes that in a typical Consistory hearing sinners confessed their sins and begged for forgiveness, while a few, for whom the Consistory was unable to discern the truthfulness of an accusation, were sent away, without suspension (yet trusting in the “the judgment of God” to discipline or correct).<sup>54</sup> Given that, should we imagine that Beza addresses the secret conscience and undetected, hidden lives of the flock, especially those who “exhibit the appearance of being Christian,” while living lives in rebellion from God?

Here we are assisted by another work of Beza, published only one year before the *Cato*, and which indicates that Beza was at the time consumed with the issue of excommunication and keen to bolster the theoretical and theological basis for the consistory: *Tractatus pius et moderatus de vera excommunicatione, et Christiano Presbyterio*.<sup>55</sup> The treatise responds, in the kindest words possible (*pius et moderatus*), to the theses of Thomas Erastus, originally written in 1568 but not published until 1589, in regard to the role of the Church and the State in carrying out a judgment of excommunication.<sup>56</sup> In it, Beza introduces some subtleties into the debate over excommunication that are not apparent in the *Institutes* of Calvin, but which accord closely with the theme of the *Cato*. To fully appreciate the nuances

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54. Manetsch, “Pastoral Care East of Eden,” 279.

55. The full title is *Tractatus pius et moderatus de vera excommunicatione et Christiano presbyterio, impridem pacis conciliandae causa, cl[arissimi] v[ir]i Th[omas] Erasti d[octo]r[is] medici centum manuscriptis thesibus oppositus, et nunc primum, cogente necessitate, editus* (Geneva: Jean le Preux, 1590). By “presbyterium” is meant the consistory.

56. The full title is *Explicatio gravissimae quaestionis utrum excommunicatio, quatenus religionem intelligentes et amplexantes, a sacramentorum usu, propter admissum facinus arcet, mandato nitatur divino, an excogitata ab hominibus* (London: John Wolfe, 1589). It really comprises two works, the *Theses* of 1568, and the much longer *Confirmatio Thesium* of 1569. It was edited by Giacomo Castelvetro, who had married the widow of Erastus and who was staying at the house of John Wolfe at the time of publication. The treatise found sympathizers among those who were trying to resist the entrée of reformed discipline and ecclesiology into England, including John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury. Castelvetro’s edition was republished at Amsterdam in 1649. The first part, the theses themselves, appeared in translation many years later as *The Nullity of Church-censures: or, a dispute written by Thomas Erastus wherein is proved by the Holy Scriptures and Sound Reason that excommunication and Church-senates of Members exercising the same, are not of divine institution, but a meere humane invention* (London: G. L., 1659). The same translation was published in London again, in 1682, as *A*

of the *Cato* and of Beza's ethical vision, therefore, we must understand the issues addressed in this particular treatise.<sup>57</sup>

Erastus defined excommunication as the exclusion from the use of the sacraments, following an investigation by elders, for the correction and repentance of life. Beza finds this definition to be deficient because it does not sufficiently explain under whose authority and by whom a judgment is issued, nor about what sorts of things it is issued. Therefore, he offers his own definition:

Excommunication is the judgment whereby, in the name of the Lord, a gathering of elders, after a legitimate investigation, and with the full knowledge of the Church (if it is necessary), pronounces that someone who has alienated himself from God, and will not hear the Church (that is, the presbytery), also will be seen as cast out from the external fellowship of the Church, until such time as it is apparent from his attested repentance, to the extent that it ought and can be done, either to the whole church, if it is aware, or if it is not, the presbytery, that he is reconciled to God.<sup>58</sup>

Beza does not claim for the Church the power of excommunication per se; in a real sense, people excommunicate themselves by their own behavior. The Consistory merely pronounces its judgment that the excommunication is apparent.<sup>59</sup> He goes on to say that God himself is the author, both

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*Treatise of Excommunication.* In 1844, the Rev. Robert Lee of London revised the translation of 1659 and published it under the title *The Theses of Erastus Touching Excommunication* (Edinburgh: Myles McPhail, 1844). For a review of the dispute between Beza and Erastus, see most recently Charles Gunnoe, *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 163–209 and 387–93.

57. For a fuller study, see Kirk Summers, "The Theoretical Rationale for the Reformed Consistory: Two Key Works of Theodore Beza," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 105 (2014): 228–48.

58. Beza, *De vera excommunicatione*, 3: "Excommunicatio est sententia, qua in nomine Domini congregatum presbyterium, legitima praeunte cognitione, et conscia (si sit opus) Ecclesia, pronuntiat quempiam, qui a Deo sese alienarit, et Ecclesiam (id est presbyterium) non audierit, eiectum quoque videri ab externa Ecclesiae societate, tantisper dum ex ipsius testata resipiscentia, quoad eius fieri debet ac potest, vel toti Ecclesiae consciae, vel Ecclesia non facta conscia, presbyterio constitit, eum esse Deo reconciliarum."

59. Beza insisted that people excommunicate themselves through their actions, and that the Consistory simply recognizes what is already true. On this see Summers, "The Theoretical Rationale for the Reformed Consistory," 228–48.



of the presbytery (by which he means the consistory) and of this judgment, while the presbytery is only his administrator and interpreter. It is not an institution that exercises its power abusively for its own sake and its own advantage, but engages in a due process that includes a thorough investigation beforehand. He then underscores a very important subtlety of his definition:

We declare that the excommunication which takes place on earth is something that follows upon that removal which, as is plain from the Word of God and the hard-heartedness of the sinner, happened beforehand in the heavens. So clearly excommunication on earth is nothing else but the declaration of another, more hidden one made in the heavens. From this we are surely right to gather that someone who is not sanctioned in the heavens at the moment is unworthy to be counted among the faithful on earth. Besides, this latter declaration that is made on earth is ratified in the heavens.<sup>60</sup>

The excommunication is real whether the Church and the elders charged with discipline and moral oversight recognize it or not. And, conversely, a pronouncement of excommunication on earth is only valid if it follows upon a decision already made in the heavens, as evidenced by the sinner's rejection of God's Word and unwillingness to repent.

What is unmistakably clear is that in the *Cato*, read in tandem with the treatise on excommunication, Beza lays down in the broadest of terms the very same theological principles that guide and inform the Consistory. Sinners represent a danger to themselves and society because they are in rebellion from the natural order created by God in his holiness and purity. Adulterers demolish cities, destroy homes, and break the bonds of holy matrimony.<sup>61</sup> Since God is truth, deceivers and perjurers will eventually ruin themselves

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60. Beza, *De vera excommunicatione*, 4: "Dicimus praeterea excommunicationem quae in terris fiat, esse quiddam consequens eam abiectionem, quam factam esse antea in coelis ex verbo Dei et peccatoris duritie constet; ut videlicet nihil aliud sit excommunicatio in terris, quam declaratio alterius occultioris factae in coelis, ex qua nimirum merito colligatur eum qui in coelis eo quidem tempore non approbatur, indignum esse qui inter fideles in terris censeatur; quae posterior etiam declaratio in terris facta, rata est in coelis." The word *duritie[s]* here for "hard-heartedness" harks back to Beza's use of it in his translation of Matt. 19.8. Erastus considers this whole argument to be self-contradictory; see *Confirmatio*, I, 1, 72.

61. And so Mentzer, "Marking the Taboo," 107–08, notes of adultery and fornication: "They also seemed to threaten primary social institutions such as marriage and the family, which were themselves deemed fitting structures for leading a moral and useful life."

and the world. Flatterers, if listened to, will bring eternal shame. Pseudo-monks are the devil's agents for disrupting Christian society. A city is blessed when everyone is working and none are allowed to be idle. Drunkards, the greedy, and the envious all become a Hell-on-earth to themselves, while evil profiteers spurn God and thus lack the very success they long for. Some people, because they depend on human wisdom and philosophy and are deaf to the unassailable light of God, mislead others and lead misguided lives. But among people who are reclaiming society and creation according to the will of God, these sinners have no place and therefore should be banished from human intercourse. Thus Beza warns that adulterers must leave the world before they destroy it. The garrulous should be shunned by people, as should flatterers. No one anywhere, in Heaven, earth, or Hell, is willing to welcome the envious, nor can they tolerate the proud. And all these sinners should understand that if a godly society rejects and ostracizes them during their time on earth, that is, it excommunicates them because they stand at odds with godliness, they can all the more expect in the final judgment before the tribunal of God to be excommunicated from his holy presence forever.

When seen in the context of the institution of the Consistory and the arguments in the *De vera excommunicatione*, this persistent motif suggests that one of the keys to understanding the *Cato* lies in excommunication: excommunication from one's own inner peace, from social intercourse, from the natural order of things, from fellowship with God. What leads to that excommunication is sins, the most common of which are enumerated in the *Cato*. The *Cato* looks to the broader implications of sin, in the wider scope of one's life and in the ultimate final judgment. But it is precisely the threat of excommunication that ties the *Cato* closely to the mission of the Consistory. The Consistory's most powerful and valuable tool was the imposition of excommunication, the exclusion of people from godly society and the sacral meal, usually on a temporary basis as a way to draw people back to the fellowship in repentance. The *Cato* gives the theoretical rationale and justification for this sort of pastoral discipline, because it demonstrates that God deals with sinners in exactly this way, by excluding and excommunicating them, even though sins naturally in and of themselves isolate the sinner, and that the Consistory visibly expresses this aspect of God's plan by executing it here within the Church. And given that the Church is a body that nurtures its members along the path of sanctification, the Consistory, as its disciplinary arm, gently reminds its members of the consequences of sin and offers them second chances in

the here and now. In the final analysis, then, sinners are well advised to abandon their sins, confess them, and submit to the Church and the Word of God, since awaiting them is a greater and ultimate Consistory, of which the earthly Consistory is a mere shadow.

### *Union with Christ*

Since earlier in this introduction the rather complex matter of the Christian's "union with Christ" was broached, we cannot move forward without clarifying precisely what that phrase meant to Beza himself. The question has been addressed directly by Muller in an essay surveying how various reformers understood the union and how it was handled within the increasingly defined "order of salvation."<sup>62</sup> Relying mostly on Beza's statements in the *Questions and Responses*, Muller argues that for Beza union with Christ "should be understood as an apprehending (*apprehensio*), ingrafting (*insitio*), and incorporation (*incorporatio*)," not in the sense that Christians' spirits or bodies are actually united to Christ, nor that they merely receive Christ's power and efficacy, but unify with him in a mystical and spiritual way. By this he means "a full 'apprehension' in the soul, by faith, with the power of the Spirit conjoining things disparate in place—just as there is a spiritual union of Christ as head with the church as his body." The apprehension or "taking hold" of Christ becomes the source of a number of benefits for believers.<sup>63</sup> According to 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ blesses his own with "wisdom, justification, sanctification, redemption." These are to be understood as the acceptance of the message of salvation, the imputation of Christ's work on the cross to the elect, progress in holiness, and the final freedom that comes in eternal life.

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62. Richard Muller, "Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought," in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 202–43. See especially therein "Theodore Beza and the *unio*," 222–24. Muller provides an extensive bibliography on 202, n. 1. To this can be added J. V. Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2012), and W. Duncan Rankin, "Peter Martyr Vermigli on Union with Christ," *Haddington House Journal* 7 (2005): 101–24. The latter treats Vermigli's correspondence with Beza on the matter of the union.

63. Muller (223) makes the point that in the "order of causes" faith is prior to the union, though, if one takes into account the fact that God elected his own in Christ before the foundation of the world, Christ has, in a sense, reached out and "apprehended" those who will apprehend him.

Everything pertaining to the Christian life depends upon the union that was initiated by faith.

We gain further insight into the mysterious workings of the union by looking at Beza's observations on Romans 6:5.<sup>64</sup> There he highlights the phrase "for if planted with him we grow together," which he translates "*nam si cum eo plantati coaluimus*," to describe what is meant by the believers' union with Christ.<sup>65</sup> First, he observes, Paul elegantly compares Christ to a plant that was buried in the ground and sprouted (*germinarit*) in its own time. Second, Paul says that Christians are planted so closely with him that they bind with him and derive their life from him:

He had said earlier that we who are dead to sin and buried have risen again together with Christ unto righteousness. He did this to indicate that all these things are done in us through that sap, as it were, which we suck from Christ. Now he says that we have united with him into one living thing, like plants that are planted together with a tree entwine with it in such a way that that they live on one and the same sap.<sup>66</sup>

He goes on to say that this is a very fitting metaphor to describe both the very close union with Christ and the way that his life-giving power (*vivificam illam virtutem*) flows into his own. This is why Christ compares himself to the vine and his followers to the branches: they grow in him, and he himself in turn is said to increase (*adolescere*) in them. It is for this reason, Beza adds, that Isaiah compares Christ to a shoot, and that the Word is sometimes called a seed, or we are said to be trees that bear fruit, and ministers are described as planting and watering, while the faithful are said to take root. This is not the grafting metaphor of Romans 11:24, but a burial/planting metaphor. This union looks not to the Christian's imitation of the works of Christ but to the actual infusion of power, wrought by

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64. Beza, *Annotationes* 1598, part 2, 41.

65. For "union with Christ" Beza consistently use the phrase "*coniunctio nostra cum Christo*."

66. Beza, *Annotationes* 1598, part 2, 41: "Deinde vero quia nos quoque una dixerat cum Christo mortuos peccato ac sepultos, resurrexisse ad iustitiam, ut indicet haec omnia in nobis per eum quasi succum fieri quem ex Christo sugamus, dicit nos cum ipso in unam plantam coaluisse, sicut τὰ σύμφικτα cum arbore ipsa ita coalescunt, ut communi succo vivant."