De praedestinatione is one of the most interesting works to have emerged from the world of the Italian heretics of the late sixteenth century. It has never before been published — Biagioni observes that the manuscript, which remained concealed, can hardly have had any influence — and this superb edition adds to our knowledge of a fascinating, albeit somewhat isolated, thinker.

A. Hamilton, Leiden


Scott Manetsch’s new study examines Theodore Beza’s efforts to deal with the many difficulties that beset the Calvinist cause in France from the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (1572) up to the Edict of Nantes (1598). Using published and unpublished letters, city archival materials in Geneva, and printed Huguenot books and pamphlets, Manetsch argues convincingly that Beza, despite the fact he never returned to his homeland after 1572, remained a very active participant in the confessional politics in France during the period. Although not a biography of Theodore Beza, the book does view the issues and challenges facing the Calvinist movement in France almost exclusively from his perspective.

By doing so, Manetsch must perforce take up the old chestnut of whether Calvinism might have fared better in France under different leadership. I tend to agree with him that Beza probably did the best that anyone could do under the circumstances. In fact, the high water mark of French Calvinism predates Beza’s emergence as Calvin’s successor in 1564; its decline in France was much too complex to be ascribed to any one person or set of factors. One of the many virtues of Manetsch’s book is his close analysis of the dynamic interplay between internal tensions among the Huguenots and the challenges posed by Catholicism’s resurgence after the Council of Trent. The reader comes away with the sense that Beza played the hand that was dealt to him as well as could be expected.

The book opens by setting Beza’s career path against the backdrop of the French Reformation up to 1572. A brilliant student, Beza initially intended to go into the legal profession until, like so many young men of his day, he felt himself drawn to a more spiritual calling. Upon converting to Calvin’s evangelical reform movement, Beza fled to Geneva in 1548. His intellectual talents drew the attention of Pierre Viret and Jean Calvin and soon led to an appointment at the Academy of Lausanne. He also became a minister of the reformed faith. Beza quickly cultivated relationships with most of the leading reformers across Europe; he also became quite close to Calvin, who increasingly relied upon him for advice. In 1559, Beza assumed leadership of the new Genevan Academy that soon became a nursery for thousands of Reformed pastors and missionaries who went forth across Europe to foster reform. Although not mentioned by Manetsch, it is worth noting that these men served as crucial conduits for information and influence that Beza relied upon as he strove to manage the weighty responsibilities that fell to him upon Calvin’s death in 1564. In the 1560s, Beza spent a good deal of time in France; he participated at the ill-fated Colloquy of Poissy (1561) and got to know leading figures in the movement, including Jeanne d’Albret, Queen of Navarre, and her young son, Henri.

As France lurched into the Wars of Religion, Beza found it necessary to devote his attention as much to military and political matters as to those of the mind and faith. This was especially true after the St. Bartholomew’s Day
Manetsch shows how Beza coped with the humanitarian crisis posed by the refugees who flooded into Geneva. Beza also rallied dispirited Huguenots by denouncing apostates such as Hugues Sureau Du Rosier and Catholic critics like Pierre Charpentier. It is difficult to draw the line between the pastoral and propagandistic impulses behind Beza's frenzied activities in organizing and justifying resistance to Catholic oppression. Manetsch argues that monarcho-mach theorists such as Beza, François Hotman, and Lambert Daneau, played a crucial role in encouraging Huguenot rebellion against the Valois after 1572. In fact, Beza's active incitement and actual efforts to recruit troops and furnish funds for Huguenots in France between 1572 and 1584 belies to some extent the supposed "quest for peace" signaled in the title of the book. Yet Manetsch makes a good case that the success of Huguenot resistance in time only compounded the plight of the reformed movement, for by impugning the crown's legitimacy, the monarchomachs opened the way for radical Catholic militants to come to the fore in the Holy League. Huguenot security thus was bought at the price of the disintegration of what might be called "the royal middle".

It was also during these years that Henri de Navarre, who assumed leadership of the Huguenot movement in 1576, came to rely heavily on Beza's advice and support. Beza even held an appointment as minister in Navarre's household. Beza worked assiduously to promote Navarre's cause across Calvinist Europe, soliciting funds and diplomatic support on his behalf. He reckoned quite rightly that the future of French Calvinism rested on Henri's continuing commitment to the faith, especially after Navarre became presumptive heir in 1584. Henri gladly welcomed Beza's efforts through the 1580s, though their relationship became much more problematical when Henri became king in 1589. On the one hand, Beza helped manage the simmering divisions that rent the Reformed community in France, especially from those who mistrusted Henri IV's intentions. On the other hand, Henri IV could not overtly appear to rely too heavily on Beza's good offices lest he alienate his Catholic supporters. Especially worrisome for Beza was the growing influence of the so-called moyenneurs, such as François de La Noue and Jean Hotman, who promoted establishing a broad consensus between Catholics and Calvinists in a united Gallican church founded upon a general Christian creed. Up until Henri IV's leap back to Catholicism in 1593, Beza refused — naively, in retrospect — to think that the king would ever go through with such an act of betrayal. Even after Henri IV's conversion, which in turn sparked new defections, Beza urged Huguenot leaders not to take up arms against their former protector. His preaching to take the path of peace during these years, Manetsch argues, helped avert such a potential catastrophe. It also helped to pave the way for the Edict of Nantes, which, though not a triumph for the Huguenots, did ensure them a good measure of security over the next twenty years.

For all its insights, there are three points of criticism that can be made of this fine book. First is Manetsch's decision to treat the debates roiling Calvinists in and outside France as strategic and ideological matters as opposed to theological ones. This line of analysis seems unnecessarily limiting, since theology so deeply informed all the issues at stake in these controversies. This actually comes through in the long passages quoted from Beza's correspondence found in the footnotes as well as occasionally in the book itself, particularly Manetsch's discussion of the Lescaille affair. The related debates over the limits of clerical authority, the desirability of ecclesiastical discipline and the validity of distinctive Calvinist doctrines posed troubling problems for the Huguenots every bit as much as the confessional choice facing Henri IV. For readers interested in these important topics, Nicola Sutherland's *The Huguenot Struggle for Recognition* (1980)