



Wim Janse, Barbara Pitkin, eds. *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005. viii + 569 pp. \$237.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-14909-0.

Reviewed by Robert Bireley (Department of History, Loyola University Chicago)  
Published on H-HRE (February, 2007)



## Variations on Confessional Identity

This volume contains twenty-four contributions that all deal with aspects of confessionalism—that is, the creation of new personal or collective confessional identities in the changing world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—or of confessionalization—that is, the impact of the confessions on politics, society, and culture. Of varying quality, they have been selected from papers given at two conferences, the Symposium on Reformed (Theological) Education in the Early Modern Period held at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on June 4, 2004, and at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in Toronto, from October 28 to 31, 2004. The contributions are divided into three sections, “Education and Theological Training,” “Interpretation of Scripture and Confessional Preaching,” and “The Construction of Clerical and Communal Identities.” Twelve of the contributions deal primarily with the Reformed tradition and seven with the Catholic; two take up the Lutherans, one the Collegiants, a Dutch sect that emerged in the seventeenth century, and two are fundamentally comparative. Since this is a volume of the *Dutch Review of Church History*, the last 132 pages contain book reviews.

As one might expect from such a collection, there is no predominant thesis. But taken together, as the editors point out in a fine introduction, the contributions show clearly that the confessions were anything but monolithic and that confessional identities were often highly complex.

Apart from an initial article by Riemer A. Faber

that shows how their differing understandings of human nature influenced the thinking of Erasmus and Martin Luther on education, the contributions of the first section look at the Reformed tradition from various angles. Stefan Ehrenpreis provides a broad survey of Reformed education during the early modern period that functions as an introduction to the following articles. One can agree that the Reformed “shared common aims and methods with the educational models of other confessions,” but it is questionable that they “put them into action earlier and with greater force” (p. 50), given that the first Jesuit college was founded in 1547 and thirty-two colleges existed by 1556. Nor were the Lutherans slow in starting. According to Leendert F. Groenendijk, the Reformed church never succeeded in controlling the schools in the Dutch Republic where in 1600 its members constituted only 10 percent of the population. Two articles, by Andreas Muhling and Wim Janse, deal with two of the Reformed academies in the Empire, at Herborn and Bremen respectively. These and the other Reformed academies in the Empire were prevented from securing the status of universities because they lay outside the parameters of the Religious Peace of Augsburg. Both these institutions aimed to educate pastors and nobility for Europe and were supported by their governments. In general they represented a moderate, more irenic form of the tradition, especially on predestination, and illustrate the variations within the Reformed tradition. The treatment of Bremen is particularly welcome because the academy there has not elicited much scholarly attention thus far. F.G.M. Broeyer looks at the varying views of four leading

professors at Dutch universities during the seventeenth century with particular attention to their attitude toward the rationalism of the emerging Enlightenment. Karen Maag points up deficiencies in the homiletic preparation provided future pastors at the Geneva Academy and the frequent need to develop their ability to preach at the parishes to which they were posted.

The second section begins with Reformation exegesis. Raymond A. Blacketer argues that the contemporary political situation affected John Calvin's exegesis. He looks at Calvin's *Commentary on Joshua* (1562), his last biblical commentary, and considers the author's purpose to have been to portray the Calvinists as a "people of peace, love, and order" (p. 150). Significant is Calvin's characterization of the Israelites' military exploits as exceptional rather than exemplary, at a time when some religious leaders saw them as an inspiration to action. G. Sujin Pak compares Luther's, Martin Bucer's, and Calvin's exegesis of Psalms 8 and 16; he finds Calvin to have interpreted them from the perspective of the universal element in David's experience, and he locates signs of Jewish exegesis probably drawn from Bucer. Calvin's *Commentary on John's Gospel* is the subject of Barbara Pitkin's essay; she considers his approach principally soteriological, requiring self-understanding as a prerequisite for salvation. From his study of the paratext Rady Roldan-Figueroa contends that the first Spanish translation of the Bible by the former monk Casiodoro de Reina belongs firmly in the Reformed tradition.

The focus then turns to preaching. Robert J. Christman analyzes the preaching strategies of the "Mansfelders" and the "Eislebners," both of the Gnesio-Lutheran party, in their efforts to win the support of the laity for their positions, and then Sven Tode studies sermons of the Calvinist Jacob Fabritius, director of the Danzig Academy from 1580 to 1629, as he promoted the Second Reformation while at the same time attempting to maintain Protestant unity. The last two contributions here turn to the Catholics. Emily Michelson reports that the sermons of the Italian Augustinian preacher Gabriele Fiamma (1533-1584) remained firmly rooted in Scripture, contrary to frequent representation of post-Tridentine Italy. Importantly, she states that the study of early modern Catholic preaching needs to be based much more on actual sermons than on books of instruction on preaching. There are, indeed, many sources to be exploited. Finally, Jason Sager finds an irenic tone and a desire to maintain harmony in France in sermons of Francis de Sales, the bishop of Geneva.

Most contributions of the final section deal with

Catholics. Robert Scully considers the missionary strategy of the Jesuits in England that concentrated on the gentry and aristocracy as perhaps necessary but still unfortunate in that it attached them to traditionally minded benefactors. Many Jesuit missions of the early modern period, it can be noted, did follow a top-down model. According to Gary W. Jenkins, the Louvain recusants' writings against the Elizabethan settlement in the first decade of the queen's reign concentrated their criticism on the national character of the church and the leadership of a layperson. Catholic and Anglican manuals of clerical conduct written between 1560 and 1660 exhibited a common element in their emphasis on the need for spiritual formation and lifelong study and preparation, reports Ellen A. Macek. To Patrick J. O'Banion early modern Spanish confessional manuals show that confession was not a means to clerical domination of the laity and often involved negotiations between an understanding priest and a penitent. Kathleen M. Comerford evaluates Tridentine reform through the seventeenth century in three Italian dioceses, Florence, Lucca, and Arezzo. To this end she relies chiefly on a comparison of Tridentine as well as synodal and conciliar legislation with visitation reports. Despite the bishops' genuine efforts at reform, success was minimal, she concludes. Wietse de Boer in an insightful contribution questions the validity of investigating the identity of a parish priest through the standards of institutional reform that Comerford employs. He turns his attention to the lengthy diary of Girolamo Magni (1531-1595), a long-time, conscientious pastor in Pistoia. His benefice and his family constituted major elements of his identity. Nothing appears in his diary of the visitation of the parish in 1570 nor does he even mention the Council of Trent. Of course, not many such diaries exist.

In perhaps the outstanding essay of the collection, Margo Todd demonstrates through an investigation of language and material culture how long after its embrace of the Reformed tradition the Scottish town of Perth retained its identity as the city of John the Baptist, "Sanctjhonstoun." Identities often changed slowly. David Fors Freeman analyzes the strategy by which the Lutheran minority in the German city of Wesel insured its survival there after the city went over to the Reformed. In the last contribution, Gerrit Voogt locates the sixteenth-century roots of the seventeenth-century Dutch Collegiants, a non-denominational church that emerged in the Dutch Republic after 1619.

This is a useful volume. But perhaps the editors should have included fewer but longer contributions.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-hre>

**Citation:** Robert Bireley. Review of Janse, Wim; Pitkin, Barbara, eds., *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe*. H-HRE, H-Net Reviews. February, 2007.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12876>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).