

Beza's Pastoral Calling: Combat, Encouragement, and Duty

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Abstract

Too often in current debates of Reformed theology the focus seems to be solely upon great figures at the expense of their successors. Theodore Beza should have his proper place in the spread of Calvinism. Beyond the constant struggles between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, Beza saw greater battles between God and the forces of darkness. In this context, he developed the Calvinist doctrine of political resistance. Far from being a dry Scholastic systematizer, Beza supported a pastoral use of the doctrine of predestination. Ultimately, Beza as faithful shepherd risked his life to care for the flock. In this essay, several French sources are rediscovered in order to point out Beza's personal experience and historical context behind the theological doctrines that he discussed.

One of the biggest challenges for a leader is the choice of a suitable successor, one to whom the baton can be entrusted, who will carry on the work and the name of the predecessor. Moses had his Joshua, Paul his Timothy, and John Calvin his Theodore Beza. Beza's task was to consolidate what was begun in Geneva, which had become the "Jerusalem of the Reformation" thanks to men such as Guillaume Farel and Calvin.¹ Often the memory of

¹ Fernand Aubert and Henri Meylan, eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 1, 1539–1555 (Geneva: Droz, 1960), 245.

such theological giants leaves their disciples in the shadows. Beza's theology, though in harmony with that of his predecessor, was no mere copy. He achieved his own Reformed synthesis by refining and extending certain areas of thought through careful definitions, systematic constructions, and reasoned explanations that opened the way for the future fruitful development of Reformed Scholasticism.² Much of the Calvinist heritage existing today is therefore indebted to Beza. But why did Calvin choose Beza as his successor? What did he see in Beza to entrust him with such a weighty task after his departure? As a counterpart to Philip Melancthon in the Calvinist Reformation, Beza once wrote to Heinrich Bullinger, a fellow Reformer, saying,

I see myself charged with a triple task, for the accomplishment of which I plead you to ask the Lord to help me. I have to examine all the papers of our dear Master Calvin. ... Also, I will consecrate myself with all my heart to the service of my country [France].³

He expressed a sacrificial concern for the preservation of what his teacher left and the good of his French homeland. The third dimension was that of the shepherd whose pastoral concern for the good of the church was evident in all that he did.

Despite the great foundation from which he drew, Beza faced many challenges. The Catholic armies under the Savoy leadership were waiting to besiege the vulnerable city, Lutherans attacked his view of the sacraments and predestination, and the future of the Academy of Geneva was in jeopardy—not to mention the horrors of the Black Death and the persecution of his compatriot Huguenots in France. The pressure on his shoulders was more than the weight of just the problems of the previous generation. For Beza the Reformation was not over, and the church needed always to keep reforming, not just theologically but also ethically, to provide direction in a specific time and place. In light of these historical challenges, we will seek to evaluate the pastoral legacy of Beza's writings, preaching, and personal life as he engaged in spiritual warfare, trusting in God's sovereignty and fulfilling the duties of a true servant of Christ.

² Ian McPhee and Clare Hall, "Conserver or Transformer of Calvin's Theology? A Study of the Origins and Development of Theodore Beza's Thought, 1550–1570" (Doctoral Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979), 3.

³ H. V. Aubert and Eugene Choisy, "La Réforme Française après la mort de Calvin: Extraits de la Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, 1564–1575. Théodore de Bèze à H. Bullinger," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 49.2 (February 1900): 87–88. Unless indicated, translations into English are my own.



THEODORE BEZA

1519-1605

I. A Pastor's Spiritual Combat

Despite the fact that the great Reformers, such as Calvin, Farel, and Beza, had been expelled from France, the Catholic authorities were not able to stop the significant advancement of the Reformed faith, especially in the south. This situation led to an aggravated relationship between Protestants and Catholics in a series of open conflicts. Beza played an active and exhortative role, not only in writing but also in action during the three civil wars. It is for this reason that the pastoral heart of Beza must be seen first and foremost toward his nation in the context of Christian civilization (*Corpus Christianum*) today largely lost. The church, according to this perspective, is to speak to the government, the magistrate, in bringing true religion in society as a whole. The second-generation Reformers, unlike the Anabaptists, kept working together with the civil magistrates, addressing crimes and promoting godly decisions, together with the matters of the church. In this sense, Beza's theology went hand in hand with his actions, as he used the covenant as a theological basis for his conviction concerning resistance to political authorities.⁴ His view made room for addressing moral reform in the public sphere, while guarding society against the subversion of justice by some Anabaptist extremists, where the church took over all matters of life into its hands and created a separation between religious and civil spheres with the effect that, as in much of modern society, ethics are no longer a matter for the public sphere. Instead, the Reformed sought a state of affairs where the two spheres were to go hand in hand for the good of society. Beza was a good example in his deep commitment to the cause of the Huguenots as chaplain, diplomat, propagandist, and secretary of the Prince de Condé in Orléans (1562–1563).

Behind these events taking place in France Beza saw a decisive battle between the forces of God and Satan; his teaching must therefore be framed in the language of watchfulness and spiritual warfare. Commenting on the reproach and afflictions experienced by the church, he stated, "You fought both closely and at a distance. You felt what it is to fight for the gospel."⁵ The religious wars were also spiritual combat. In his correspondence with Elizabeth I of England, who well knew the damage that might be wrought by the seemingly invincible Catholic Armada, Beza informed the queen that "Satan and his henchmen afflicted Geneva," but God turned their

⁴ John F. Southworth Jr., "Theodore Beza, Covenantalism, and Resistance to Political Authority in the Sixteenth Century" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003), 5.

⁵ Théodore de Bèze, *Cours sur les épîtres aux Romains et aux Hébreux, 1564–1566* (Geneva: Droz, 1988), 306.

schemes to nothing but “shame, loss, and pain.”⁶ Beza’s role was to bring back the leaders of the nations of his days so they submitted to the Lordship of Christ instead of plotting in vain against the Lord and against his anointed, Christ (Ps 2:1–2). Such was the challenge Beza faced in the social context of the French Wars of Religion, which risked bringing about a collapse of a civilization. Beza offered ethical guidelines in these dark times.

Beza in his writings urged European Protestants to stand firm amid this spiritual battle raging against them with the confidence that God’s truth will finally prevail despite all the obstacles Satan would put in the way.⁷ His writings became a key source for justifying political resistance against the increasingly hostile French authorities and for preserving the true Calvinist faith. According to this view, as expressed by Beza in *Du droit des magistrats sur leurs sujets*, once tyrannical princes fail to preserve public morality and piety, they lose their legitimacy; therefore, subordinates or “lesser magistrates” have the right to resist, as long as such resistance is led by governmental members.⁸ This view of obedience to government in light of ethical issues flows from the application of the *sola Scriptura* to all of society. In particular, it concerns the ethical issue of how not to violate the sixth commandment in relation to both oneself and others. Legitimate force has a place as a means of defense, though not in rebellion or insurrection, but under the control of a lower magistrate.

The most decisive moment for the French Calvinists came when Henry of Navarre, the “lower magistrate” Beza might have had in view, born of a Huguenot family, was brought to the throne of the Kingdom of France after the death of the Valois king. Beza saw this event as an act of providence, since God had miraculously used a monkish assassination to send from heaven Henry as God’s chosen instrument to resolve the French crisis.⁹ Beza had known the future king since childhood through Henry’s devout Huguenot mother, Jeanne d’Albret, and had, as chaplain, supervised the studies of the future king. Throughout Henry’s reign, Beza had confidence in him and always encouraged him to follow the path of truth. He exhorted the king to pray without ceasing for guidance, to discern among his friends the just from the unjust, and to establish a group of counselors composed

⁶ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 43, 1603–1605 (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 6.

⁷ Alexandre Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze, poète et théologien* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), 571.

⁸ Richard C. Gamble, “The Christian and the Tyrant: Beza and Knox on Political Resistance Theory,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984): 132. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* 4.20.31.

⁹ Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1572–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 200.

of Protestants and Catholics in equal number.¹⁰ He also urged the admiral Gaspard de Coligny to rely upon the faithful heavenly Leader. For his part, Henry sought counsel from the Reformer.

In one of his letters, despite Henry's enactment of the Edict of Nantes, Beza laments over "overt disrupters of the kingdom, mercenaries employed for the destruction of the poor [Protestant] Churches which cannot be charged with any rebellion, nor deserve to be disturbed."¹¹ Beza wished the king to make known through his actions in France that Protestants are no political rebels, while at the same time guarding the right of legitimate defense should the government act against God's law.

Henry's reign was looked at by some at first with expectation as a model kingdom able to restore the pure worship in the incorruptible seed of the true church of God. This vision is seen in Beza's diplomatic as well as devotional writings. In his sermon on the Song of Solomon, he describes the true church of God as clothed with Christ, the spiritual bridegroom who awaits the final consummation of all things. This true church, however, with her infallible marks must be distinguished from the false church with its superstition and idolatry.¹² The sermon vividly depicts the situation of Geneva and France, in a fragile peace in both church and state. Catholicism and the papacy had subverted the nature of the true church and threatened to quench the efforts of the Reformation on French soil. Beza sensed this and lamented over the spiritual conditions of the church, issuing a call to orthodoxy and Reformed purity.¹³

A critical event for reformation in France was Beza's speech at the colloquy of Poissy in 1561. There he took the opportunity to seek reconciliation, appeasing the troubles caused by matters of religion in France, while also defending the antiquity and Scriptural basis of the Reformed faith before the royal court.¹⁴ The French Reformer started his series of speeches on his knees, identifying with the sins of his people. He used the confession of sins from Calvin's liturgy and freely declared in front of the court the need to

¹⁰ Alain Dufour, "Conseils de Bèze à un nouveau Roi," *Lettre de la Société Henri IV* 17 (December 2007): 2.

¹¹ Théodore de Bèze, "Instructions du Roi de Navarre à Théodore de Bèze: Son envoyé près les villes évangéliques de Suisse, 1586," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 11.1/3 (January 1862): 28.

¹² Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1587), 7.

¹³ Tadataka Maruyama, *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza: The Reform of the True Church* (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 150–51.

¹⁴ Paul M. Minus, review of *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Tome 3, 1559–1561*, by Théodore de Bèze, ed. Hippolyte Aubert, *Church History* 34.3 (September 1965): 356.

repent, to repair the temple of God (the Reformed church), and to aid God's scattered flock (the Huguenots).¹⁵ He enumerated the past and present afflictions of his brothers, taking a defensive approach in favor of Protestantism in the midst of frequent interruptions by the cardinals.¹⁶ On this occasion, Beza found it better to avoid dealing with controversial issues such as the Lord's Supper, but in other writings he considered transubstantiation as a "filthy forgery and device of Satan."¹⁷

One can also see the weight of these matters in Beza's commentaries on the Psalms of David and in his French translations of the psalter made while in Lausanne (1549–1551). The Psalms occupied a great place in the spiritual walk of Beza as he translated them, making practical meditations on the margins. One time he recorded how as he listened to a congregation singing Psalm 91 in their common French tongue he was

so strengthened as if God himself addressed me with comfort in the midst of the sickness and suffering, not only because of the plague that will afflict me three years later or as this sickness will attack my family but also for many other trials.¹⁸

As he translated the Psalms, Beza thought of Catherine de Medici and Charles IX as "new Sauls" and Henry IV or Gaspar de Coligny as "new Davids," representing the faithful remnant of the Huguenots. This is what perhaps resonated so strongly with Beza. Like David, Henry had the difficult task of restoring the purity of religion in the wicked environment of the de Medici family and preserving the people of God from attacks. History, however, later showed this to be a failure. Even when talking about David's downfall with Bathsheba, Beza seems to have in mind Henry's abjuration and embrace of Catholicism, as he considers that even the most virtuous can make terrible mistakes and give in completely. More realistically, in his paraphrases of Ecclesiastes, Beza compared the auspicious beginnings of Solomon and those of Henry IV, both being blessed by God with wisdom but in the end brought to temptation and idolatry because of their wives.¹⁹ Beza wrote the king, urging him to stand firm in the face of the temptation

¹⁵ Théodore de Bèze, *Oraisons at Poissy* (London: Powels, 1561), 19.

¹⁶ Anne Marsh-Caldwell, *The Protestant Reformation in France: History of the Huguenots* (London: Richard Bentley, 1847), 261.

¹⁷ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons on the Lord's Supper* (London: Robert Walde, 1588), 59.

¹⁸ Auguste Bernus, *Théodore de Bèze à Lausanne* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1900), 41.

¹⁹ Kirk M. Summers, *Morality after Calvin: Theodore Beza's Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 346.

to betray the Reformed faith.²⁰ Concerning the abjuration of King Henry, Beza declared, “The French spirit is repugnant toward Calvinism Among the Huguenot party, how did they receive the defection of Henry IV? Was he trapped or was it a calculated adherence? Or have they mourned as for a mortal wound?”²¹ Despite this betrayal, Beza remained faithful to Henry IV; even late in his life, the correspondence witnesses Henry trying to call a national council to discuss the differences with the Catholics in matters of religion.²²

However, the greatest wound to the Huguenots in France came during the night of the Feast Day of Saint Bartholomew, August 23–24, 1572, when the regent King Charles IX ordered the massacre of the Huguenot nobility in Paris. This became an indiscriminate murder of Protestants and Protestant sympathizers throughout France.²³ Beza warned Admiral Coligny of the eventuality of such a catastrophe. After receiving the news of the massacre that took place in Paris, Beza wrote,

We are in mourning and groan. May God have mercy on us! Never we have seen such perfidy and atrocity. ... Our city, where the plague and the fever still reign, is filled with the most miserable people of the earth All were killed like sheep sent to the slaughter with the pretext of a conspiracy. Lord, you saw those things, and you will judge them! Pray for us that may have to face the same fate.²⁴

Struggling with the plague, the number of refugees flowing from France, and the news of this massacre, Beza had a lot to bear. His pastoral use of Psalm 52, occasioned by Saul’s massacre of innocent priests at Doeg’s suggestion, is evident in his comments throughout the letter on how kings or princes persecute pastors and churches among the innumerable poor lambs of Christ sent to the slaughter in the kingdom of France.

²⁰ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 33, 1592 (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 411.

²¹ C. R., “L’abjuration de Henri IV et le parti réformé: Lettre inédite de Théodore de Bèze communiquée par M. J. Bonnet,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 1.1/2 (June/July 1852): 37.

²² Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, Tome 42, 1601–1602 (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 13.

²³ Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564–1572* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 111.

²⁴ Tuus Beza, “Deux lettres de Théodore de Bèze: Sur la Saint-Barthélemy, 1572,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 7.1/3 (June 1858): 16.

II. *A Pastor's Consolation*

Beza has been caricatured as a rationalist systematizer for his predestinarian theology. He explored and refined Calvin's doctrine of predestination in tune with his predecessor while also opening the way for the schematic formulation of later Reformed Scholastic theology.²⁵ However, in light of the previous contextual considerations, this doctrine serves as ethical guidance for appeasement in times of warfare. Once again, the historical background of Beza helps us to see how he used God's sovereignty to comfort and strengthen the common man in his parish so that he might find true rest. In the midst of persecutions from without and sickness from within, and under the threat of all sorts of darts from the evil one, the only anchor for a scattered church was the comforting assurance of being among the elect. This is more visible in his sermons on the doctrine than in the theological discourses. In a plain, experiential style of preaching, Beza used homely language to edify his audience. He believed it essential to apply the medicine to patients through consolation, exhortation, and reproof.²⁶

This approach was particularly evident when Beza dealt with predestination. His supralapsarian doctrine, according to which God's decree of election logically precedes the decree of the fall, was christocentric, grounding assurance in the contemplation of faith in Christ rather than leading, as some critics suggest, to a "practical syllogism" where assurance must be rooted in good works.²⁷ As in other points of Beza's doctrine of predestination, such as the causes of reprobation, his intention was not to go against his master Calvin but to further define terms while maintaining the original pastoral intent. Defending the supremacy of God's decrees, he insisted that God does not elect whom he loves but loves those whom he has elected.²⁸ According to Beza, election is essentially a pastoral doctrine, a source of comfort for those struggling with various temptations whether through the plague, persecution, or other challenges of life. Predestination was intended to be a fountain of consolation for the downcast, who must look beyond

²⁵ Michael G. Thomas, "Constructing and Clarifying the Doctrine of Predestination: Theodore Beza's Letters During, and in the Wake of, the Bolsec Controversy 1551–1555," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 4 (2000): 10; Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin, Beza, and Perkins on Predestination," *Unio cum Christo* 3.2 (October 2017): 71–88, doi:10.35285/ucc3.2.2017.art4.

²⁶ Michel Delval, "Orthodoxie et prédication: Théodore de Bèze," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 134 (October 1988): 694.

²⁷ Shane Rosenthal, *Faith and Assurance in the Theology of Theodore Beza* (Crawfordsville: Reformation Ink, 2001), 2.

²⁸ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Tome 13, 1572* (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 404.

their circumstances to find their identity as saved, chosen before the foundations of the world. Beza wanted his parishioners to find in God's sovereignty their ultimate source of joy, assurance, and salvation amid the battles raging around them. This had a huge impact on the ethics and lifestyle of people who lived under such preaching, as well as many of the French Reformed who were facing persecution, helping them to persevere in the trials they had to endure. He passed on to his people the advice once received from his master Calvin in one of his letters: "The reward of your labours is more certain with God, in proportion as you shall see these labours detested by the Devil."²⁹ Although tossed to and fro, the persecuted Huguenots need to rest in God's wisdom despite the evils coming from the Catholic enemies.³⁰ The doctrine of predestination, therefore, is essential to Christian comfort. It is the nerve center of Beza's theology and of priceless value in seeking peace in times of war.³¹

III. A Pastor's Duty

Lastly, Beza's call to duty and personal commitment to true discipleship are crucial for understanding him as a pastoral theologian. Commenting on the right use of afflictions, Beza reminds the Christian of the call to deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ in order to be a true disciple. One must bear the afflictions and miseries of this life for the cup of bitterness to become a spiritual medicine to "purge the leaven of sin."³² Beza himself was a French noble who upon leaving Catholicism was banished from France under threat of being burnt at the stake. He left behind his titles and fortune for the Reformed faith. He saw this earthly life as a pilgrimage marked by spiritual conflict in which one must carry the cross, following the Son, and cheerfully submit to God's providence. His life story emerges in the poetical work *Abraham Sacrifiant*. Through the depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac he recalls how he had to abandon his country where he was persecuted, finding his only comfort in the Word of God:

²⁹ Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of John Calvin* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1858), 3:379.

³⁰ Shawn D. Wright, "The Pastoral Use of the Doctrine of God's Sovereignty in the Theology of Theodore Beza" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 54.

³¹ See John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975), 70; Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 187.

³² Théodore de Bèze, *Household Prayers* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1607), 77.

after the time that you called me out of the country where you are not worshiped [France], leaving my goods, my parents and their gods. There [in Geneva] I lived seventy-five years following the path of the predestined. ... And between a thousand dangers among strangers every day we were in great need.³³

The parallel here between Abraham and many Huguenots is further evident as Beza amplifies the biblical story of trial and faith under tragic testing, a well-suited theme to the political situation of his time.³⁴ Similarly, Beza wrote his sermons on the Passion to encourage his Genevan compatriots against the Catholic threat of the Dukes of Savoy. Geneva in the most critical period of its history stood alone against the Savoyard armies, and Beza encouraged the city to persevere in this necessary warfare by looking at the struggle through the light of faith, understanding that God in his providence sends trials to bring about their conversion.³⁵ Beza draws a parallel between the context of persecution under the Catholic powers and the biblical story of Exodus:

My people, what did I do to you and how did I torment you? Answer me. From what slavery have we been set free? Which Moses and Aaron have been sent to us by God? From which immorality of Egypt have we escaped? What Red Sea of persecutions have we gone through? ... Oh God of hosts, come back, I pray thee, look down from heaven and see and visit this vineyard.³⁶

Beza saw himself and the church during the Reformation as paralleling biblical Israel, freed from the idols of Egypt with deliverance from the popish bondage, or as the Babylonian captivity of Israel, with the church now expatriated far from the French motherland. There is such a thing as a just war, says Beza in effect, and if God demands our lives in sacrifice for his glory, in such a defense of the Lord and our country, so be it.

However, the greatest pastoral test for Beza came during the spread of the Black Death. Ministers who visited the sick often died. It was a dangerous job with almost certain death, so none of the members of the company of pastors was eager for the position, and the majority left the area. Beza himself was not immune from the disease, as he was struck once by it in 1551 while his wife Claudine and his brother Nicholas were dying of it. All this involves

³³ Théodore de Bèze, *Abraham Sacrifiant: Tragedie Française* (Geneva: A. Julien, 1920), 16.

³⁴ Irena Backus, ed., *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): Actes du Colloque du Genève* (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 415.

³⁵ Michel Delval, "La prédication d'un Réformateur au XVI Siècle: L'activité homilétique de Théodore de Bèze," *Mélanges des sciences religieuses* 41.2 (1984): 70.

³⁶ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons sur l'histoire de la passion et Sepulture de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Geneva: Iean le Preux, 1592), 17.

weighty spiritual questions: Why did God allow this? What is the appropriate Christian response to the plague? Beza did not question the goodness of God. Instead, commenting on Psalm 23, Beza writes that even while he is going through the darkest and dreadful valley of death, the Lord is “my shepherd, I need not fear any famine.”³⁷ Commenting on Psalm 6, he writes that when overwhelmed with evils, “I suffer ... [the] death of this miserable body,” but one must look to heaven and pray, “O Creator of man, behold Thy creature quite disfigured.”³⁸ The Genevan Reformer with pastoral wisdom answers the questions in his *Treatise on the Plague*, seeing behind the plague God’s punishment while acknowledging its natural causes. In a Christian response to the plague, Beza emphasized the conscience’s call to duty to the neighbor more than fear of death or the preservation of life.³⁹

According to Beza, one must examine one’s calling before God, considering that it is almost always better to stay than flee. Does not leaving imply a failure to love those God calls us to care for? Since eternity is near, duty calls to remain and make sure the afflicted receive the right care. Pastors, in particular, should not leave when the plague strikes but care for the afflicted until the end.⁴⁰ He declared at the end of his treatise, “I do not flee; and for faithful pastors to forsake but one poor Sheep at that time when he most of all needeth Heavenly comfort, it were too shameful, nay too wicked a part.”⁴¹ The theological and exegetical rationale of John 10:11–18 is brought to bear on concrete ethical cases in the practice of Pastor Beza, even in the worst of situations. In light of this, he defines good shepherds as those pastors who possess piety, exemplary lives, and humility; at the same time, from the Scriptures, he discovers and applies the doctrines of the text for the consolation and reproof of the flock. Pastors are to be heavenly minded. Their way of life must not hinder the spread of the gospel. He earnestly prayed, approaching his death (1598), this way: “O Christ, give me to represent in your church the true image of a pastor in the same degree as the ‘anonymous painter’ has deteriorated my face and all my appearance.”⁴² His sermons on the resurrection reveal his ability to preach to human experience as he

³⁷ Théodore de Bèze, *Psalmes of David Truly Opened and Explained* (London: Richard Yardley, 1590), 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁹ Shawn D. Wright, *Theodore Beza: The Man and the Myth* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2015), 170.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴¹ Théodore de Bèze, *A Learned Treatise of the Plague* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1665), 18.

⁴² Jeltine Lambertha Regina Ledegang-Keegstra, “La présence de Théodore de Bèze dans les ‘Albums Amicorum’ (1559–1605),” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 155 (April 2009): 439.

describes the disciples not wanting to “leave the sepulcher,” wanting like us to know the truth about the coming happiness of eternal rest. He comments, “What beautiful text and full of consolation” for a suffering and dying people under so many challenges.⁴³

As infirmities increased, Beza’s last thoughts were toward his beloved Geneva, as he asked, “Is the city in full safety and quiet?”⁴⁴ Even on his deathbed, the concern of this Reformer was for the welfare of the city where he was exiled from his motherland, praying on its behalf, not only for the church but also the wider community. In one of his last letters before his death written to a believer from Moravia, Beza declares his faith:

Thus, it is high time, when our Lord desires, that as I have worked for others, I may obtain the rest that I await from his mercy The great servants of God must die standing, in order that in turn they may sit in the heavenly places, in the eternal houses and dwellings that are prepared beside their head.... We hope that this great God, who has begun [a work in us] and brought about so many miracles, will not abandon us in the midst of danger, but will complete this great work for his glory.⁴⁵

In his funeral poem, Beza was described as “exiled from his country” in order to freely follow God as a “fugitive.” “It pleased Christ to let him die there” as a pilgrim in the land where Calvin began a work now brought to further completion.⁴⁶ The pastoral legacy of Beza is indeed that of a shepherd who out of duty gave his all for the sheep chosen and preserved by God in the midst of warfare. He stood on the shoulders of Calvin and was able to reach even new heights. To label Beza a rationalist systematizer is to detach him from his historical background and its challenges, as well as from the crucial personal factors that influenced his theological production.

Many lessons can be drawn from Beza’s model of reform, not least how behind the relation between church and state Beza saw the enactment of a serious struggle. The context of the civil wars in France among his fellow Huguenots reminded him of that constant parallel between the earthly and the heavenly conflicts. Beza saw at first the advent of a Huguenot king in France as the advent of a new David, and throughout his life, he acted

⁴³ Théodore de Bèze, *Sermons sur l’histoire de la resurrection de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Geneva: Iean Le Preux, 1609), 34.

⁴⁴ Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519–1605* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 350.

⁴⁵ Théodore de Bèze, “A un seigneur de Moravie [Geneva, October 18, 1603],” in “Les derniers jours d’un réformateur: Quatre lettres de Théodore de Bèze, 1599–1604,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 19/20.4 (1870/1871): 162.

⁴⁶ Alain Dufour et al., eds., *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Tome 41, 1600* (Geneva: Droz, 2017), 167.

like Nathan to provide spiritual guidance to Henry. In this sense, he was not oblivious to Henry's moral and political failures to fulfill that task, but grieved and rebuked the French king when necessary. Beza not only showed great tact at Poissy but also expressed profound lament on the occasion of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. As I have emphasized, Beza was an experiential preacher. He stresses God's sovereignty and predestination at the heart of his theology, pastorally to comfort and strengthen a troubled people.

Ultimately, Beza's pastoral call to duty is chiefly expressed in his sacrificial example of discipleship and experience of the plague. In this crisis, he rebuked pastors who fled from their duties and, despite his high position, stayed in the midst of it to comfort the sick, so giving an example of a good shepherd. The struggle, lament, comfort, and hope that emerges from his writings and sermons are clearly connected with his life experiences. Further, Beza compared biblical stories with his and his people's practical experiences. Out of his pastoral concerns, Beza brought what Calvin had started into completion through his many writings and actions. Beza's dedication and sacrifice left a legacy that is often neglected in Reformed circles. This exemplary consecration was for the good of a church that had received many blows but which, in the end, in Beza's own words, stood as an "anvil that has worn out many hammers." The Reformation must continue from Calvin to Beza and from Beza to our days.