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Book Review of Schubert, Täufertum und Kabbalah. Augustin Bader und die Grenzen der Radikalen Reformation

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Too often Guillaume Farel (1478–1565) has been depicted as ‘just the older colleague of John Calvin and as a man with a not too easy character. The authors of this book adjust this picture of this important first-generation French-speaking Reformer and add the evidence for this by supplying translations of a number of Farel’s key texts. The book is divided into two parts. The first describes Farel’s life and his early thought in four chapters: ‘Guillaume Farel in early French reform’; ‘Farel’s Summaire: theology in early French reform’; ‘Farel’s upward spirituality: leading in prayer’; and ‘Farel’s upward spirituality: unceasing prayer’ (1543–1568). Educated in Paris, Farel slowly began to question Catholic orthodoxy, and by the 1540s was an active Protestant preacher, resulting in his exile to Switzerland. After having convinced the Genevans that they should side with the Reformation, he in 1559 persuaded John Calvin to stay and put the decision to reform into practice. The second part of the book contains translations of key texts from Farel’s works: The Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed (1547); Summary and brief exposition (1549/7); ‘The reason for which this work was written and had to be revised and why it was lengthened’ (appended to the 1575 edition of the Summaire); and Liturgical practices and forms (1566). This means that Zuidema and Van Raalte’s book brings us some of the first full-length translations of Farel’s work in English. The second part of the book, in particular, is a real contribution to research and teaching, but the volume as a whole contributes to a better understanding of the Reformation in French-speaking Switzerland.

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August Bader has traditionally been considered one of the most bizarre figures of the Radical Reformation, but Schubert argues that his messianic consciousness is an understandable outgrowth of both the apocalyptic thought of his teacher Hans Hut and also Jewish Kabbalistic thought. After experiencing several visions, Bader became convinced that he was a prophet and ultimately, in 1530, the Messiah (p. 14). He had special clothing and regalia of gold made to befit his status, which his accusers took to mean that he was a would-be political rebel as well as a heretic (p. 248). Using the interrogation records from Bader’s trial in 1530, the author provides a reasonably coherent picture of his mental world. Where this book differs from many works on the Radical Reformation, it is in its stress on the importance of Christian Hebraism as a mediator of Jewish thought, and also how the intellectual exchanges between Christians and Jews could have an impact on Christian thought. Bader’s messianic self-understanding grew primarily out of Reuchlin’s De arte cabalistica (1517), but also may have benefited from Paul Ricius’
Portae lucis (1516) and Sebastian Münster’s first printing of *Christiani hominis cum Judaeo ... colloquium* (1529). Bader’s thought may also have been affected by personal contacts with Jews, or the contacts of his follower Oswald Leber. For example, he identified 1530 as the end of the world, apparently following Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi’s reckoning (p. 233). When Bader was brought to trial, his ideas not only made the authorities suspicious that he had judaized, but they also suspected that Swabian Jews were complicit in Bader’s guilt. Josel of Rosheim intervened successfully on their behalf and prevented Bader’s indictment from affecting them as well (pp. 192–3). Schubert’s book will interest scholars of both Reformation and Jewish history.

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