

## Church Government in French Churches in the 17th Century

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### [초록]

본 논문은 17세기 프랑스 개혁교회에서 교회정치가 어떻게 형성되었는가를 고찰한 논문이다. 칼빈의 교회 정치 개념으로부터 영향을 받은 프랑스 개혁교회는 1559년에 제정된 ‘라 로셸 고백문’(La Rochelle Confession)과 함께 채택되었던 38개 항목의 ‘교회권징 조례’(La discipline ecclésiastique)를 1659년까지 252개의 항목으로 발전시켰다. 교회의 조직 구조는 장로-총회식 제도(le régime presbytéro-synodal)로 불리는데 지역적 다양성의 원리와 통합적 일치성의 원리 사이에 상보성에 주목하면서 교회의 권위가 회중에게 놓여 있음이 강조되었다. 그러나 이러한 회중성의 강조가 곧 회중주의(cogreatationalism)를 의미하는 것은 아니었다. 프랑스 개혁교회의 정치형태는 오히려 반계급적이면서도 권위를 인정하는 일종의 피라미드식 구조를 지니게 되었다. 교회의 권위는 지역교회에서 장로회 또는 당회로, 그리고 장로회 또는 당회에서 지역 총회로, 그리고 지역 총회에서 전국 총회 또는 대회의 구조로 발전되었다. 이는

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프랑스 개혁교회가 발전시킨 독특한 형태의 장로교주의로서 칼빈의 교회 정치 개념을 프랑스 개혁교회의 필요성에 맞게 수정시킨 것이었다. 이 구조는 당회와 총회의 지속적 모임을 정당화했으며 이를 통해서 정규적 사역과 권징의 실천적 시행이 프랑스 개혁교회에서 가능해졌다고 볼 수 있다.

프랑스 개혁교회 총회에서 주로 다루어졌던 주제들은 크게 두 가지로 윤리적 문제들과 신학적 논쟁에서 비롯된 문제들이었다. 첫째, 윤리적 문제와 관련해서 장로회, 즉 목사와 장로로 구성된 당회는 모든 교회 멤버들에게 주어진 권위로부터 위임받아 권징을 시행했는데 이는 주로 행정적인 것으로 해석되었다. 장로회는 또한 교회에 의해서 파견된 대표자들로서 정당성을 지니고 총회에 참석했다. 총회의 권위는 상대적 권위 이상의 것이 아니었으며 성경에 복종하는 한, 교회들의 뜻을 정당하게 대변할 수 있는 것으로 해석되었다. 총회가 인간적 제도이므로 사실상 새로운 교리와 의식을 제정하는 권한이 주어지지 않았던 것이다. 둘째, 신학적 논쟁과 관련해서 로마 가톨릭, 알미니우스주의, 소무르 지역에서 출발한 아미로주의의 주장들에 대한 신학적 독단성을 교회 법정에서 처되어야 한다는 결정을 내렸다. 17세기 프랑스 교회의 주요 논쟁 주제는 알미니우스주의와 논쟁에서 파생된 신학적 문제들이었다. 일반적으로 총회는 이들에 대해서 단호한 입장을 취했지만 자신들의 신학적 주장을 과격하게 내세우려 하지 않는 자들에게는 어느 정도의 관용을 베풀고 건전한 교리로 이들을 설득해야 한다는 태도를 취하였다.

주제어: 프랑스 개혁교회, 17세기, 교회정치, 장로교주의, 총회, 알미니우스주의

The period of the 17th century in France begins with the accession of Henri of Navarre to the throne upon his conversion to Catholicism in 1589. This event heralded the end of the bloody wars of religion in France with the promulgation of an edict of tolerance for the French Huguenots (1598), the edict of Nantes that was repealed by Louis XIV almost a century later in 1685. During that time, Protestants enjoyed restricted but diminishing liberties, followed by growing civil oppression. The relative tolerance provided the necessary conditions for establishment of church government and growth in the Reformed churches.

During this period they were submissive to royal authority in such a way that the French king avoided active opposition against them, which occasioned the Catholic dictum of the time: “soumis comme un Huguenot”, meaning submissive like a Huguenot.

## I . A Tragic Fate

The Huguenots were most faithful supporters of the Bourbon monarchy. At the end of this period Jean Claude in his *Les plaintes des Protestants, cruellement opprimez dans le Royaume de France*<sup>1)</sup> (1686) was the great defender of the persecuted Huguenots, but his biblical defence was somewhat

1) *The grievances of Protestants cruelly oppressed in the kingdom of France.*

blunted because he was drawn into the waters of moderation and tolerance by his collaboration with Richard Simon and Pierre Bayle (*De la Tolérance*, 1686), who were among the first luminaries of free thinking.

This period was a critical time for the French Reformed, one from which they never really recovered. In spite of the limited toleration permitted by the Edict of Nantes, from that point on, it was a case of the progressive strangulation of Reformed church life in France. It is estimated that by the time of the Revocation not only tens of thousands of Huguenots had left France by emigration, but also some 600 pastors. Others recanted publicly, either really or superficially. In the following century, the free-thinking of the Enlightenment did its work on the remnant, the result being that just before the Revolution in 1789 there were only 472 churches left (by comparison with over 1,200 churches estimated to have been planted by 1570) with diminished congregations in restricted Protestant enclaves and a mere 180 pastors, a good number of whom had by then followed the philosophers and espoused deism.

Calvinism had been lost to France: it has never been restored in an ecclesiastical sense and even today is restricted to the witness of isolated individuals.

The Reformed synods during the time of limited tolerance were marked the reception of the Synod of Dort, the struggle over the teaching of Moïse Amyraut from the school of Saumur, and the increasing hardship of church life under the rigour implemented by Louis XIV. It needs underlining that between the

assassination of Henri IV at the hands of a Catholic extremist in 1610 and the Revolution in 1789, a mere four Bourbon kings reigned, and their power became ever greater, until it began slipping away prior to 1789. Theirs was a durable continuity of sapping and repressive policies that undermined the Huguenots<sup>2)</sup>. This fact is often not sufficiently appreciated, both with regard to the politics of exclusion the Protestants suffered and the ways in which they reacted to them. What was happening at the time in England and Holland did not help either, and Louis XIV must have trembled at the thought of the fate of Charles I or the federalism developing in Holland.

## II . Synodical and Church Controversies

Following the Edict of Nantes in 1598, synods met every three years until 1628 and after that there were only four synods because their activity was increasingly restricted; Charente in 1631 and 1644, Alençon in 1637 and finally the synode at Loudon in 1659. After that there were no more synods before the Revolution as the churches were increasingly persecuted. In the 17th century there could be no synod without royal authorisation and a royal commissioner was present.

The main Protestant figures of the period were the Scot John Cameron, Moïse Amyraut, Pierre du Moulin, Jean Daillé, André Rivet, Charles Drelincourt, Claude Pajon, Jean Claude, and

Pierre Jurieu. The influence of the Genevan school with the Turretini, the uncle Bénédict (1588 – 1631) and his more well-known nephew François (1623 – 1687) and Jean Diodati (1576 – 1649), who translated the Bible into Italian and Bénédict Pictet, who wrote a three volume theology (1696) and an influential two volume work on Christian ethics (1692).

The main theological issue at the time in the life of the synods was obviously the condemnation of Arminianism and the fear on the part of du Moulin, Rivet and their ilk that Amyraldianism, developed from the “universalism” of Cameron, who had enormous influence on his students, was a half-way house to synergism. Du Moulin wrote pointedly about the Arminians (“apes of the Pelagians”), and his *Anatomy of Arminianism* (1619) reveals his qualities as a theologian and polemicist. The opponents of Amyraut feared that his two stage view of the divine decree of salvation, with Christ dying hypothetically for all and subsequently being received through faith by those who believed the gospel, would inevitably collapse into Arminian prescience and the limitation of divine sovereignty in salvation. They considered that this was ploughing a different furrow from that of Dort, particularly its third canon, which had been accepted by the Synod of Alès, with Pierre du Moulin as moderator, in 1620. However, the theology taught at Saumur by Amyraut, La Place, and Capel, in the line of Cameron, retained its attraction throughout this period, and was never formally condemned by a synod of the church as heresy. Unfortunately, Amyraut, no mean theologian, is generally only remembered

2) Janine Garrison, *L'Edit de Nantes et sa révocation* (Paris: Seuil), 1985.

in this context<sup>3)</sup>.

Another synodical controversy, later than that surrounding the Saumur theology but not unrelated to it, concerned the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and centered round the ideas of Claude Pajon. Pajon published little, but his ideas circulated widely and were much discussed, generating two rounds of controversy from 1665–1667 and 1676–1685, which did not reach as synod as none were authorised by the King. He went further than Amyraut, who proposed that if the Spirit works immediately on the intellect in conversion, he operates only mediately on the will, since his work passes through the intellect. Pajon seems to have denied an immediate operation of the Spirit on both the intellect and the will. His opponents, who included such influential figures as Jean Claude and Pierre Jurieu, deemed that Pajon's teaching implied difficulties not only with relation to man's natural sinfulness but also with regard to providential concursus in conversion. Pajon was never condemned of heresy and avoided charges by directing his energies latterly toward replying to the able Jansenist Pierre Nicole's work *Legitimate Arguments against the Calvinists* (1671).

The various synodical polemics, that rumbled on throughout the period, weakened the Protestant churches' witness and took them away from the concrete political problems facing

3) Richard A. Muller, 'Beyond Hypothetical Universalism: Moïse Amyraut on Faith, Reason and Ethics' in Martin I. Klauber, (ed.), *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (Grand Rapids, Reformed Heritage Books, 2014), 198.

them in France, which were double—the continued opposition from renascent Romanism and its eloquent defenders on the one hand, and the authoritarianism of the King on the other.

Why did the French churches develop no form of resistance other than a passive respect for the monarchy before the disastrous Camisard uprisings in the Cévennes in the early 18th century? Why was no oppositional theory developed in France as was the case of Samuel Rutherford in Scotland in his *Lex Rex*, or Louis Althusius of Holland in his *Politica*, advocating that a tyrant can be dethroned and even put to death? This was not new, and there were also French precedents. The “Monarchomaques” had contested the absolute power of monarchy, referring to the final section of Calvin's *Institutes* and Beza's *Right of Magistrates* for their ideas about a just and active opposition to tyranny. Were the synods of the French Reformed church too much in the slipstream of the Protestant nobility, and were its theologians too tied to what seemed acceptable and desirable to their noble leaders and protectors?

### III . the Origins of the Synodical System

It has been said that French church polity is vital for the development of presbyterianism since it was adopted and adapted by all other national Reformed churches in Western Europe and beyond<sup>4)</sup>. Three factors went into making for this particularity.

4) Cf. Theodore G. van Raalte, 'The French Reformed Synods of the Seventeenth Century', in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, ch.3

Firstly, Calvin's view of government, secondly his view of church order and thirdly the ecclesiastical discipline [*La discipline ecclésiastique*] adopted by the French churches along with the La Rochelle Confession [*Gallicana*] in 1559. This discipline was added to the 38 original articles of the confession and had increased to 252 articles by the synod of Loudon in 1659<sup>5)</sup>.

In contrast with Martin Luther whose view of church organisation was more circumstantial, Calvin held that the organisation of the church has a double character. It is immediately placed under the Lordship of Christ, not under any human hierarchy, and there is a definite pattern of church government prescribed in Scripture. In this Calvin applied Luther's two kingdom theology, the rule of Christ in society and in the church, with greater consistency than the German reformer. On the level of civil government Calvin, as the final chapter of his *Institutes* shows, Calvin argues for public representatives to resist a king's tyranny, when necessary:

For when popular magistrates have been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings... So far am I from forbidding these officially to check the undue license of kings, that if they connive at kings when they tyrannise and insult over the humbler of the people, I affirm that their dissimulation is not free from nefarious perfidy, because they fraudu-

5) The text of this discipline is now lost but parts have been reconstructed. See Patrick Cabanel, *Histoire des Protestants en France: XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard), 2012, ch. V.

lently betray the liberty of the people, while knowing that, by the ordinance of God, they are its appointed guardians<sup>6)</sup>.

For Calvin, there is no direct human ruler in the church as in the civil government, because Christ reigns directly as king of his people. However under Christ, as under a human king in the nation, there are those who exercise authority – the church is neither communistic or anarchistic, but its order is assured by appointed officers. Calvin believed that this view of church order was indicated by Scripture, and existed in the primitive church before the abuses of the Papacy<sup>7)</sup>. Calvin recognised three offices: that of pastor (bishop, *episcopoi were presbyteroi*) or elder, of teacher, and of deacon<sup>8)</sup>. In regard to the matter of whether one person or instance should appoint a minister for a particular church, Calvin stated that to take away from the church or from the college of pastors the right of judging, would profane the power of the church, the *jus divinum*. An elder or deacon is recognised by the qualifications of Scripture, approved by the church. This view is elaborated in article 29 of the La Rochelle Confession that states:

“We believe that this true Church should be governed according to the order established by our Lord Jesus Christ. That

6) John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr, Henry Beveridge (Peabody, Ma: Hendricks 2008), 4.20,31

7) Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.2.3–4.4.1.

8) Calvin's attempt to harmonise the functions did not go very far, as pointed out by Alistair McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Blackwell), 171.

there should be pastors, overseers, and deacons so that true doctrine may have its course...”

The question of special offices implies that of hierarchy in organisation, particularly against the backdrop of the Roman-istic pyramid structure of authority and its fundamental division of society in clergy and laity. It has often been stated that an elaborate system of hierarchies existed in the French Reformed system<sup>9)</sup>. However if some form of hierarchical order exists, the fundamental principle of the Confession, and the Discipline following it, is anti-hierarchical, as expressed in article 30: “We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one head... Jesus Christ; and that consequently no church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other.” Article 31 continues by stating that no person may aspire to office in the church in and of himself, but that election is the means to aspiring to responsibility in the church.

Three affirmations are made in these articles: no minister occupies a position that is superior to another; no church or church institution has authority or power over another; and those serving the church must be elected because their calling is recognised as coming from the Lord of the church. Each of these affirmations raises the anti-hierarchical principle to the level of *status confessionis*. Bernard Roussel states that article

9) Cf. van Raalte, art cit, 57–61.

1 of the 1559 Discipline rejects all organisational hierarchy: there are no officers or assemblies over each other and no higher and lower levels of authority other than that of the consistory over the congregation<sup>10)</sup>, which is a biblical order.

In French this organisational structure is called *le régime presbytéro-synodal*<sup>11)</sup> to accent the fact that there is a complementarity between the principle of local diversity and collective unity. A delicate balance of power exists under the authority of Christ between the congregation and the church, between the consistory and the synod. Power exists first of all in the local congregation. Pierre Courthial comments:

“According to the New Testament each local church is the fulness of the body of Christ in that place. There can therefore be no inequality, since each church is really the body of Christ in that place and the church in that place. If there were supremacy of one church over another, it would be like saying that one church was more the body of Christ than the other. So I believe it is correct to say that all churches are equal<sup>12)</sup>.”

To express the unity of the church as one body, singular and plural, the Reformed church of France was originally not named by a noun in the singular, but by the plural, the Re-

10) Ibid, 59 quoting Bernard Roussel, ‘La Discipline en 1559’.

11) The presbyterian-synodical system.

12) Pierre Courthial, *La Confession de Foi de La Rochelle. Commentaire*, Aix-en-Provence, Kerygma, 1979, 100.

formed churches in (not of!) France, *les Eglises réformées en France*, a name that was only abandoned in the 19th century. The elaboration of the synodical system at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th was special in France, as Geneva itself had no synod; if the Genevan model was followed to a certain point, the French adapted it to the needs of a fast growing church spread throughout a hostile nation<sup>13</sup>.

The first French discipline is close to Calvin's *Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques* for the Genevan Church, just as liturgy in the French Reformed churches is close to Calvin's model of congregational response, in contrast with John Owen's later criticism of liturgy. However, the French had to face a new and novel situation and in particular the question of the relation between the local church and the synod. At the grass roots level the Discipline placed the government of the local church in a Council of elders, called the consistory. The church is congregationally governed, but not in the sense of *congregationalism*; later in 1645 the Synod of Charenton warned against the congregationalism of independents arriving from England, who would not recognise the authority of synods.

The local elders, numbering 5 to 10, in each church, are elected by the community to oversee the preaching of the Word and order in church life. Pastors are elected by the Council of elders but later, after 1571, they were also to be examined by

13) This is amply documented in Glenn S. Sunshine, *Reforming French Protestantism: The Development of Huguenot Ecclesiastical Institutions, 1557–1572* (Kirkville, Truman State Univ. Press), 2003 and Philip Benedict, *Christ's Church Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002).

the provincial synod. In the early years most of the French pastors were formed at the academy in Geneva, before academies were established in several regions of France. The synods assembled representatives of the churches, both pastors and laymen, on the principle of delegation, and acted as temporary organs of liaison between the local churches, with the aim of furthering the common interests of the churches and solving problems. The synod itself elected its *président*, later called moderator, whose duties, according to article 2 of the discipline, were to be limited to the duration of the synod and were to terminate at its end. This measure was a defence against centralisation and episcopacy, as also against the domination of powerful personalities. At the end of each synod an organising congregation was delegated for the following year, although during the century following 1559 only twenty nine synods were able to convene.

The pastoral body, which grew to 800 by the middle of the 17th century was very often, particularly in southern France, composed of a strong representation of the intellectual elite, and during this period more than a third of them were sons of pastors. Originally there were no permanent church commissions or standing agencies. In 1563 at Lyon, France was divided into nine provinces and the consistories of each province were to elect delegates to synod. In 1581 a system of appeal for doctrinal and other questions was instituted.

So within twenty or so years a system of church government emerged in France which was non-hierarchical but charac-

terised by a pyramid system of delegation of authority: the local church → the Council/consistory → the provincial synod → the national or general synod. At a later point colloques or colloquiums [the equivalent of the Dutch *classes*] were added as instances between the local consistories and the regional synods in order to deal with local and secondary issues, although their status was really outside the pyramid structure of presbyterian delegation. This organisational structure has been named “democratic centralism”. It implies a centralised collectivity existing in complementary extension to the local instances of government, and a system of representation based on the election of delegates with equal representatives from the body of pastors and laymen. The influence of this system for the development of representative democracy in France and Western Europe is a subject of hot debate<sup>14</sup>. It can be noted that since the French Revolution the system of elected local councils, regions, departments and parliament with a president is not foreign to the original structure of government in the Reformed church in France.

All this given, it should not be forgotten that church government, though under the authority of Christ as Lord, was not an end in itself, and only existed to further the proclamation of the gospel. The main activity of the church being preaching, the quality of the pastoral body was always a concern, and continually preoccupied the synods. Preaching and

14) Andre Gounelle et al., *Démocratie et fonctionnement des Eglises* (Paris, Van Dieren, 2000).

Protestantism became synonymous. To illustrate: between 1660 and 1680 there were four preaching services each Sunday in the Grand Temple at Nîmes and certain parishioners who attended two or three of these had to be removed to make way for others. Sermons lasted an hour or more, and in the Temple at Charenton near Paris, which was the largest in France [3000 places], there was an hour glass that the pastor turned over to time himself at the start of his sermon. It has been estimated that between 1598 and 1685 more than two million sermons were preached in the 700 churches authorised by the Edict of Nantes. The most famous were published in books by Jean Daille, Charles Drelincourt, Pierre du Moulin, Isaac Sarrau or Jean Claude<sup>15</sup>.

#### IV. Synodical Problems

The main problems faced by the local instances and consistories were ethical issues: offences of moral laxity, feuds, frequenting papist services or dancing, and led to excommunication. The local instances also took steps through diaconal work in assisting the poor or those suffering because of persecution. On the national level the problems were of another order. Provincial and national synods were called to deal with two

15) References from Cabanel, *Historie des Protestants en France*, ch. V. An excellent example of Huguenot preaching is analysed by Michael A. G. Haykin in his article “The Glorious Seal of God”: Jean Claude (1619–1687), Ephesians 4:30 and Huguenot Pneumatology’, in Klauber, *The Thwlogy of the French Reformed Church*, 321–34.

sorts of issue: firstly there were structural politics of church government, and secondly theological polemics.

### 1. The politics of church government

From the first days a classic distinction was observed between *Eglises plantées* [church plants] and *Eglises dressées* [established churches]. In the first, the Word was preached and the sacraments given by a pastor without a church Council having been established. In the second the church is placed under the authority of the Council or consistory. When several established congregations existed in the same area the question of authority of the consistory was raised. As early as 1562, the Synod of Orleans condemned a tract by a Jean-Baptiste Morely defending the idea that the entire congregation is called to elect the elders and pastors and exercise discipline. Morley in fact was advocating that authority lay with all church members to take decisions under the guidance of the Spirit, whereas he limited the power of the consistory to administrative matters. At a subsequent synod in Paris three years later, a decision was taken that it is unbiblical to remit such elections to “la voix du peuple” [the suffrage of the people]. This thesis was defended at length by Antoine de Chandieu at the request of the Paris synod in a major work *Confirmation de la discipline ecclésiastique observée es églises reformées du royaume de France, avec la réponse aux objections proposées alencontre*<sup>16)</sup>. This

16) *Confirmation of the ecclesiastical discipline practiced in the reformed churches in the kingdom of France with a reply to the objections proposed against it.*

decision was confirmed by successive synods at La Rochelle, Nîmes, and Sainte-Foy, and has remained the theoretical position of the Reformed church in France ever since<sup>17)</sup>. Both Calvin and Chandieu saw the reformed consistory as being on the pattern of the Sanhedrin. Both exegeted Matthew 18,16, “tell it to the church” to mean the governing body, the Sanhedrin or the consistory, in line with the eldership pattern of the Old Testament. Thus the government of the church was rooted squarely in the authority of the consistory or Council made up of elders and pastors, from an early time in the history of the French church. Even the much respected general synods of the church had legitimacy not of themselves, but only as meetings of the delegated representatives of the churches. No intrusion of the civil magistrate was permitted in the life of the church, so avoiding any Erastianism.

The only concession made by the church under the Edict of Nantes was to recognise the right of the King to authorise or deny the meeting of a synod. This said, it must be added that the Reformed Churches received the “King’s Bounty”, a sum that increased in time before becoming more and more infrequent. Distribution of this sum was a thorn in the side for the synods, for which the King also paid the bill. This royal grant allowed the King to impose greater strictures on the churches over the years. For instance, no French delegate was permitted to attend the Synod of Dort, no foreigner could be a pastor in

17) François Méjane, *Discipline de l’Eglise Réformée de France* (Paris, Je sers), 1947, 18–20.

France and letters from abroad to the synods had to be opened and read by the royal commissioner.

Reduction of the King's bounty often meant that theological colleges could not be financed. No human system of organisation is free from functional friction; power remains power, even if it is delegated power. The problem that the French church structure had to deal with was that of two complementary authorities: the authority relationship between the local consistory and the congregation was not the same as that between the synod and the colloquies and the local consistories. If the consistory "governs" the local church, it cannot be said that the synod "rules" or "governs" the provincial synods or the local consistories.

The synod derives its authority in an indirect way from the agreement of churches to be in union and on a federal principle, under a common confession. This point was much discussed in the French church.

The famous jurist Pierre Jurieu tackled the problem that had been rumbling on in his 1686 work *Le vray Systeme de l'Eglise*<sup>18)</sup>. Churches, says Jurieu, "assembled some synods in which they made some rules and canons all by the power of their federation... They voluntarily submitted to certain rules which they themselves made... The right that these synods have to censure and chastise those who break the order is founded upon the very will of those who are censured<sup>19)</sup>." This

18) *The true system [or structure] of the Church*

19) Pierre Jurieu, *Le vray systeme*, in Klauber, *The Thwlogy of the French Reformed Churches*, 72.

recognises that although such institutions are not contrary to the will of God, they exist by human voluntary consent and are not specifically instituted by Him.

There is therefore recognised here both a downside of synodical life as well as two positive factors. Synods cannot claim more than a relative authority and can waver in their decisions and deliberations. As such their actions are not above scrutiny and criticism.

Positively, in so far as they are subject to Scripture they can confess the faith of the churches as the bond of unity in witness to the truth, and justly represent the will of the churches. Secondly, because they are human institutions they can never legislate new doctrines or practices in the way that the Councils of the Roman Catholic church might pretend to do.

This has a double consequence: that congregations or individuals that introduce new teaching or practice in the church fall under the sanction of the synod, acting on behalf of all. Furthermore if a synod err humanly in one of its decisions, it is legitimate that a local congregation judge that the federal principle is broken, and separate for reasons of faithfulness to Scripture. It is for these reasons that the synod in 1601 adopted what had always been the practice: reading and swearing on the Confession of faith and the Discipline at the opening of their meetings – "we promise to submit in so far as we judge it to be in accordance with God's Word<sup>20)</sup>." In this context the

20) Jurieu, "Le vray systme", 74.

French expression “d’un commun accord”, meaning that decisions are taken “by mutual consent”, has been capital in expressing the federative principle.

## 2. Theological issues

The second area of synodical activity during this period in the French Protestant churches was that of theological debate and censure. Three main questions that the French synods faced during the 17th century were Roman Catholicism, Arminianism and Amyraldian theology. These were issues of common concern and questions raised in consistories and provincial synods went higher, if they had not been dealt with. During this period the main polemic was obviously against the Roman church. The synod at St. Maxant in 1609 divided the Roman problem into fourteen subjects and assigned topics for study to provincial synods. The synods commissioned writings about the persecutions of the church and also designated authors to write on certain subjects. One pastor, Théophile La Milletière, was condemned by the synod of Charenton in 1644/5 for seeking reconciliation with the Roman church and was excommunicated.

Three successive synods during a period of nine years from 1603–1612 examined the views of Johannes Piscator, a German theologian who denied the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, and became a leading Arminian. The synod of Privas (1612) drew up a form of prescription against his ideas that pastors were required to sign. Synodical debate often po-

larised around the strict calvinistic position of the Sedan academy in the line of Dort, opposed to the Cameronian theology of the Saumur academy. There was ongoing debate about the saumurian Josué de La Place’s (Placeus) rejection of the immediate imputation of Adam’s sin. The same synod of Charenton that condemned Piscator found La Place unsatisfactory, and drew up a formula of subscription for all pastors on the subject. La Place argued that Calvin knew nothing of immediate imputation and replied in his *Disputatione de imputatione primi peccati Adami*, published at Saumur in 1655. Consequently the synod of Loudon in 1659 withdrew the strictures. It was not until the Helvetic Consensus of 1675 that the saumurian theology and “imputation mere and consequent” was condemned. Amyraut himself came under examination at the synod of Alençon in 1637 and later at Charenton, and although the synod cautioned certain theses, the explanations and promises given on the floor of synod were received, and the right hand of fellowship was extended to Amyraut and Testard, in spite of protestations from foreign parts. The major issue of the century was Arminianism and its derivatives, and polemic went on in the synods and out of them throughout the period, often centred around the reception of the canons of Dort. Pierre du Moulin, who was the principal adversary of both Arminians and later Amyraldians, had published his *Anatome Arminianismi* at Leiden in 1619. He was elected moderator of the synod of Alais (Alès) in 1620 and used his position to push through acceptance of the acts of Dort as a confessional standard,

alongside the La Rochelle Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. It appears that du Moulin's influence was overbearing in obtaining this decision, as well as the instruction that all pastors should subscribe to uphold this position. This roused some resentment against du Moulin. The following synod, that met in 1623, upheld the decision regarding the adoption of Dort, but removed the oath of subscription and reference to Dort, under pressure from the King who objected to the subjecting of French pastors to a decision taken in a foreign state. The synod also decided on a policy with regard to Arminians: only "dogmatisers" should be proceeded against in church courts, but for Arminians who were not militant in spreading their opinions, tolerance should be shown in an attempt to win them over to sound doctrine. If they showed no flexibility after three months dialogue, they should be debarred from the Lord's table<sup>21)</sup>.

## V. Conclusion

Reformed church government came to be modelled in an exemplary way in France in the 17th century. The presbyterianism proposed with a church led by a Council of elders places authority, under Christ, in the leadership of the local church. This is close to the New Testament model for the local church,

21) For details see Donald Sinnema, 'The French Reformed Churches, Arminianism, and the Synod of Dort', in Klauber, *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches*, chap. 4.

as described in the Acts and the Epistles. The unity of the church is expressed in the regular meeting of synods, although it may be doubted that the New Testament could justify anything more than occasional and punctual meetings, rather than annual assemblies. This structure has created the stability of Reformed churches, regular ministry, and the exercise of discipline in practice.

In conclusion, regarding the 17th French church two questions remain. Was the church in its government too attached to the Protestant nobility and the intellectual elite? Did this social factor not stem its growth beyond the solid basis laid down by Calvin and then practically by Théodore Beza and Pierre Viret, who were both inspired church planters?

France in this century was largely unchurched in spite of Roman Catholic dominance, practice was weak, and the population generally was illiterate, and in many cases did not even speak the French language, but patois, local dialects that were incomprehensible from one region to the other. The Catholics set about a mission of evangelism in response to this situation. But over this period there was little vision for mission in the Protestant churches. Was this because of the growing oppression and their minority status or was it an effect of their system of government with its increasingly heavy organisational charges and acerbic ongoing internal debates? Did not these churches involve themselves too heavily in internal theological wrangling, while the world around them was slipping away? The stark fact remains that these churches not only registered

negative growth during the century, but also they were poorly armed to stand up against absolute monarchy.

Is not this a question that remains, in many situations, for presbyterian churches? The danger of over-accenting internal affairs and forgetfulness of the world around? The missional challenge is the one that stares us in the face today, particularly in secularised France and pagan Europe.

### [Abstract]

## Church Government in French Churches in the 17th Century

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This article deals with the origin and development of the church government in the reformed churches in the 17th century. French churches, heavily influenced by Calvin's understanding of church government, had further expanded "the Church Discipline"(1559) with its original 38 articles into 252 articles until 1659. The structural system of the church was called the presbyterian-synodal system. This system especially emphasized the fact that ecclesiastical authority lies in the congregation while noting there is a factor of complementarity between the principles of diversity and unity. But this emphasis does

not mean church had adopted congregationalism. In fact, the French church in the 17th century had developed a pyramidal governing system characterized by combining anti-hierarchical attitude and that of submissive to authority. The authority of church, which is originated from local church, is now represented by presbytery or session, from presbytery to local general assembly, from local general assembly to national synod or general assembly. This was a original church government system developed by French Reformed Church. It was modified version of Calvin's understanding of church government suited for the necessity of French Reformed Church. It provided a rationale for the consistent meeting of session and general assembly. As a result, it was possible to conduct regular ministry and practical discipline in the French Reformed Church.

There were two subjects which had been mainly dealt with in the general assemblies of French Reformed Church: ethical problems and problems related to the theological controversies. First, regarding ethical problems, presbytery, which was composed of ministers and elders, practiced church discipline utilizing the power originally given to church members. General assembly had a relative authority. The meaning of relativity was interpreted as representing the will of local churches as long as general assembly was subjected to Scripture. Sec-

ond, regarding problems resulting from theological controversies, general assembly dealt mainly with Roman Catholicism, Arminianism and Amyraldism. The French Reformed Church had decided dogmatism exhibited by these groups should be prohibited by church court. One of the most controversial issues in the French Reformed Church in the 17th century was problems related to the controversies against Arminians. General assembly had maintained very strict attitude towards them in general. Yet some degree of tolerance had been shown to those who were not radically propagating their thoughts along with maintained an attitude of persuading them with sound doctrines.

Key Words: French Reformed Church, 17th Century, Church Government, Presbyterianism, General Assembly, Arminianism

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