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Summers, Kirk M. *Morality After Calvin: Theodore Beza's Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics*

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[See table of contents](#)

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a barrier to less experienced readers. I have commented above that this edition is a wonderfully accessible resource—and it is. What I find especially appealing is how effectively the primary and critical resources reflect the critical introduction, which makes the play “teacher friendly” for graduate student instructors interested in providing their students with relevant, new perspectives that may prompt reflection and close readings of the playtext.

Grace Ioppolo has anticipated and facilitated learning opportunities for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. She succeeds at compiling a critical edition that is both accessible and relevant to instructors and students in contemporary learning environments, which is indeed worthy of commendation.

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Summers, Kirk M.

Morality After Calvin: Theodore Beza’s Christian Censor and Reformed Ethics.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. ix, 412. ISBN 978-0-19-028007-9 (hardcover) US\$99.

Theodore Beza is not the household name that John Calvin is, even among non-Christians. Beza, however, consolidated, united, and shaped the Reformed movement. Kirk Summers superbly sets Beza’s ethical thought in its literary, social, and theological contexts, providing sympathetic treatment of Beza’s moral thought while not glazing over Beza’s faults.

Literarily, Beza echoes the ancient *Disticha Catonis*. Protestants and Roman Catholics alike used the classic tome to learn Latin grammar. Beza’s expatiations are more complex linguistically and explicit morally as he reimagined the ancient text in Christian terms. His *Cato* echoes the tongue-lashings sinners received upon judgment by Consistory members. No random assortment of vices, the *Cato* mirrors and advances the Calvinists’ ethical program, seeking the establishment of an Augustinian amillennialist semblance of God’s Kingdom on Earth. Beza blended insights from both secular (e.g., Aristotle and Stoicism) and Christian ancients, emphasizing the “golden mean” and admonishing those not sinning to continue a holy life. Development of an

“ethos of learning” reflects the Erasmian-humanist notion that knowledge of truth emerges in community.

The social understanding of sin is central to Summers’s interpretation of Beza. Once one recovers from the twenty-first-century reader’s understandable recoil from sixteenth-century Geneva’s use of capital punishment to suppress blasphemy, the coherent and consistent logic of Beza’s system becomes clear. Ethics were ineluctably communal for the pre-Enlightenment Beza. Humans are created for peaceful community; sin creates disorder. Excommunication thus became the sinner’s own choice not to continue belonging to the community, parallel to the original Fall. Beza wrote as the Consistory’s disciplinary power was declining, its power shifting to secular leaders.

Sins increasingly surveilled by the Consistory concerned disorderly conduct, enforcing visible social holiness for its own sake and in contrast to Roman Catholic jurisdictions. Understanding symbiotic relationships between particular sins, the Consistory attacked anything undermining “tidy, regimented lives” that reflect God’s orderly plans. A godly society, a New Jerusalem free of social chaos and a beacon to the world, was this experiment’s lofty goal. Sixteen stereotypes of sinners set the standards. Pride disrupts both horizontal and vertical relationships, and is thus foundational to all other sin. Usury breaks bonds of Christian community, meriting excommunication (with minor exceptions for merchants). Disruption caused by sexual sin entails social as well as individual deviation. Even pagans, unaware of God’s command, respect marriage; clear genetic lines of descent are essential for numerous social purposes. Drunkenness interferes with life’s normal flow. Lying invites chaos. All sin contributes to decay: individual, social, ecclesiastical. Age, although not inherently sinful, merits a poem in a tome castigating sin, reminding readers that age’s pains often mirror youthful sins. Pain should draw the holy closer to God.

Theological concerns, rather than political, were foremost in Beza’s formulations. Summers’s frequent citations of Beza’s contemporaries, notably Lambert Daneau, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and Thomas Beard, set Beza in his contemporary Reformed theological context. Reformers believed they were reversing Rome’s abandonment of God’s Word. Concerns for social order and doctrinal conformity overlapped in the disciplining of Jean Morély, a Huguenot whose questioning of the Consistory’s scriptural basis led him to espouse

congregationalist governance: empowerment of the laity in ways unacceptable to Genevan leadership.

The concept “Natural Law” figures highly in *Cato*. Nature plays an accusatory role despite humans’ ability to discern Natural Law being diminished by the Fall. Genesis is an “alphabet” for biblical interpretation, thus linking ethics to Creation. The Ten Commandments’ first table is opaque to Gentiles. Gentiles know the second table through Natural Law but often ignore it as they lack the facility to fulfill it. Thus, natural and divine punishments were linked, sinners naturally reaping punishment befitting individual sins: tailor-made foretastes of Hell’s torments. Law’s new role under Christ “orients believers within the created order,” directing Christians to holiness and thus reward. This reflects the Reformed emphasis on imperfection’s persistent taint even within redeemed persons. Beza aimed to minimize that taint’s impact through detailed expositions of sins’ personal and social ramifications.

Beza expanded existing theological norms by developing a robust theology of work, distinct from Ciceronian and medieval models. The notion of “calling” for all, not merely clerics, garnered significant attention. Vocation was key for re-establishing God’s intended order, the creation mandate. Work was to be embraced as a positive good, fulfilling the command against theft, not merely endured. Idleness both invited satanic temptation and reduced productivity, violating the Eighth Commandment. Nature modelled incessant effort, accusing the idle and encouraging the faithful. God directs folk to where they will be most useful to society.

The volume has flawed indices. The Cappadocians are not indexed; only two of the three have individual entries. “Nature” is also absent. Other examples abound. Given Scripture’s centrality to Beza’s theological ethics, it seems bizarre that Scripture citations are not indexed. This lacuna should be remedied in later editions. Oddly, Monter’s statistics from Geneva are provided without citation (285). The tome is also marred by a number of typographical errors (e.g., 55, 156, 207, 211, 227, 300, 318).

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