

Brief Biographical Sketch

Theodore Beza

1519-1605

Theodore Beza was born in Burgundy, France in 1519. In 1534, {and in accordance with the wish of his father,} he went to Orléans to begin legal studies, and by 1539 was working as a lawyer in Paris. Whilst in Orléans, he met Melchior Wolmar, a Greek tutor, {having instructed John Calvin only a few years' prior,} from whom he gained not only a deeper knowledge of the Greek language, but also an elementary understanding of the Protestant position. Beza spent the next few years in Paris, and in conjunction with his love of the ancient classics, gained a prominent position in literary circles. It was during an illness in the 1540's that the LORD declared unto him a measure of grace and truth, which ultimately brought him to faith in Christ, and an understating of essential Gospel Truth. As a result, he soon severed his connections, and ventured to Geneva, Switzerland, the French City of refuge for adherents of the Reformation Movement, where he arrived in 1548. There he was warmly received by John Calvin, who no doubt, "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly," which was soon followed by his marriage to a girl of modest descent to whom he had been engaged since 1544. Whilst in Geneva, Calvin asked him to complete the French Metrical Translation of the Psalms, begun earlier by Clément Marot, which some have argued {no doubt with exaggeration} were instrumental, more than anything else, in advancing the cause of the Protestant Reformation in France. Thirty-four of his translations were published in the 1551 edition of the Genevan Psalter, and six more were added to later editions. Significantly, Marot's & Beza's translations of the Psalms continued to be sung for centuries by Protestant Congregations worldwide. In 1557, Beza took an interest in the Waldensians of Piedmont, Italy, who were being persecuted by the French government. On their behalf, he took several journeys with William Farel throughout Switzerland and Germany in the hopes of bringing about an intervention by the Protestant Princes of the Empire in favor of the persecuted Waldensians. With Melanchthon and other theologians then assembled at the Colloquy of Worms, Beza proposed some sort of a unification of all Protestant believers, but the proposal was decidedly denied. By 1558, he thought it best to settle in Geneva, and it was here that he was given the Chair of Greek in Calvin's newly established Academy, and later on, also that of Theology. When the death of Calvin occurred in 1564, Beza, by now a New Testament Scholar, Minister, and a Teacher in the Genevan Academy, became his immediate successor. As Calvin's successor, Beza was very effective, not only in carrying on his work of teaching and exhortation, but also in establishing more of a oneness and harmony amongst the Church at Geneva, to which he served as Pastor until his death. Whilst in Geneva, one of his most significant contributions included his groundbreaking edition of the Greek New Testament. Beza's text was largely that of the 1551 Robert Estienne edition, which in itself was based in great measure upon one of the later editions of Erasmus. {Estienne also known as Stephanus was the first to print the Bible divided into standard numbered verses.} It is said that Beza's 1598 Edition of the Greek New Testament had a marked influence on the English Version of

1611, as it was extensively used by the King James Translators. Also the Geneva Bible of 1599, which contained an extensive collection of marginal notes in attempts to more clearly explain the text, had numerous contributions by Beza, along with other Reformers like Calvin, Knox, Coverdale, Whittingham and Gilby. He died peacefully in Geneva on October 13, 1605, and was not buried, like Calvin, in the common cemetery, but at the direction of the magistrates, in the Monastery of St. Pierre. During his long life, Beza managed to produce numerous volumes on theological topics which helped move the theology of the Reformation into its age of Confessional "Orthodoxy." Beza's Latin Work of 1555, entitled SUMMA TOTIUS CHRISTIANISMI, or THE SUM TOTAL OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, came later to be known as TABULA PRAEDESTINATIONIS, or THE TABLE OF PREDESTINATION, because some editions included a diagram presenting the decrees of Election and Reprobation. The first English version, which was translated by William Whittingham, {publisher of the Geneva Bible,} was printed in 1575, as, A BRIEF DECLARATION OF THE CHIEF POINTS OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION; and another version was printed a year later under the title, THE TREASURY OF TRUTH, turned into English by John Stockwood. Although some insist that Beza's high views of God's Predestinating Grace, {going 'beyond' Calvin, as some have suggested, in the area of God's Sovereignty, an expression rather ambiguous, as Calvin himself was only a standard, as far as his writings were in harmony with the perfect analogy of Gospel Truth,} exercised an overly dominant influence upon his interpretation of the Scriptures; there seems, in our mind, little evidence for this, as he simply attempted to create a consciousness within the minds of those consulting his writings, that there indeed existed a unifying principle {the pre-eminent glory of Christ} of predestinating grace in God's one vast eternal pre-creation design to set forth His Infinite Glory, Unlimited Power & Absolute Holiness. Regardless there can be no question but that he added much to a clear understanding of the New Testament; as it would seem to some that he more fully developed the doctrinal distinctions that would characterize that system of theology for which Calvin would later become known.