
The Mystical Dove

“These Apostles of the red Dragon, spoken of in Scripture, were the principal Missionaries for the advancement of the Roman Religion. No one could possibly express all the evils that these criminals made us suffer in diverse regions of the Realm.”¹

“Mystical Babylon is now near the end of her Reign. That is why she makes the greatest final efforts to destroy us.”²

Claude Brousson’s ascetic lifestyle, allegorical interpretation of scripture, and strong anti-Catholic bias put him at odds with most exiled Huguenot pastors. His allegiance to the Zealots, his practice of civil disobedience, and his occasional use of force further alienated him from most of the *émigré* leaders, some of whom, like Merlat, openly opposed him. In this “Age of Reason,” when most Calvinist pastors accommodated their sermon length, style, and focus to please the ears of their increasingly affluent congregations, Brousson stood out for his **lengthy, hard-hitting sermons**. As they increasingly adopted rationalistic viewpoints, he attacked Cartesianism as “liberal theology,” a threat to the pure faith.³ Consequently, his style differed from those of his Reformed colleagues, particularly in Holland.

As Bernard Cottret recently observed, after 1629, Catholics and Calvinists “replaced their dagger and arquebus fights for combat with *coups d’in-folio* (a war of words) with citations from the Church Fathers or from the Bible.”⁴ “France alone enjoys a happy peace,” the *Mercure François* bragged in 1605. “We make war only on paper.”⁵ As pen and paper replaced sword and musket, gallons of ink – rather than blood – were shed defending the cause of orthodoxy. Able Catholic proponents like Bishop Bossuet, Louis Maimbourg, and Bishop Fénelon faced off against Reformed opponents like Agrippa D’Aubigné, Jean Claude, and Pierre Jurieu. Where did Brousson fit into this context?

Surprising as it may seem, Brousson’s classical education and legal training perfectly prepared him for the professional ministry. Based on her study of 121 late-16th century pastors, Janine Garrison concluded

that 30 of them had legal training as magistrates, lawyers, or advocates, while another 7 had been notaries or procurers. Thus, nearly a third of these pastors had the same legal background as Brousson. Also like Brousson, a further 23 ministers came from noble backgrounds or married descendants of the nobility (Brousson's mother, Jeanne de Paradès, came from an aristocratic family). At least 14 had been regents of universities or physicians and, like Brousson, had achieved a minimum of the Master of Arts degree. Ten pastors came from the middle bourgeoisie in trade or farming, exactly the same background as Jean Brousson, Claude's father. In fact, only 19 of the 121 French Protestant pastors had grown up in ministerial families; only 7 of them had come from artisan or working class families.⁶ If these late 16th-century statistics hold good for the 17th century, Claude Brousson, in social origins, family upbringing, and professional education, perfectly mirrored the traits of most Huguenot pastors.

Yet when he began preaching full time in 1689, it soon became obvious that the content, style, and emphases of his messages differed from other Huguenot preachers. Whatever their social class backgrounds, education, or professional paths into the ministry, Reformed pastors to a man "found their spiritual nourishment in the Bible." Ignoring (for the most part) the Greek and Roman Classical literature they had studied at the university, they focused instead on the Bible, especially Robert Estienne's 1546 translation, which in 50 years went through 40 editions. Direct access to God's Word steeped them in a biblical culture that fortified them to endure decades of persecution under Louis XIV. Contrary to the expectation of Church and State officials during the Revocation that without temples, pastors, or schools, Protestantism would soon die out, it grew stronger wherever the *religionnaires* read their Bibles and met for worship in secret assemblies.⁷

Huguenot preaching abounded with biblical references. From a detailed analysis of 12,263 citations in hundreds of 17th-century Reformed sermons, Françoise Chevalier (1994) concluded that at least 12,008 (98%) of them came directly from the Bible. Only 255 references (about 2%) were drawn from the Church Fathers and Classical authors. On average, a typical sermon offered the faithful at least 46 Bible verses to be read, explained, and applied to their lives. While 4818 (40%) of these came from the Old Testament (principally the Psalms, Isaiah, and Genesis), about 7190 (60%) were taken from the New Testament (mainly John, Matthew, and Romans). Calvinist ministers milked these texts for every possible meaning, parsing them word by word and phrase by phrase, focusing on word definitions, grammatical format, historical examples, and moral applications. A typical service began with the reading of the text, then a complete exegesis of the text, followed by its application and ending with an emotional appeal to the hearts, minds,



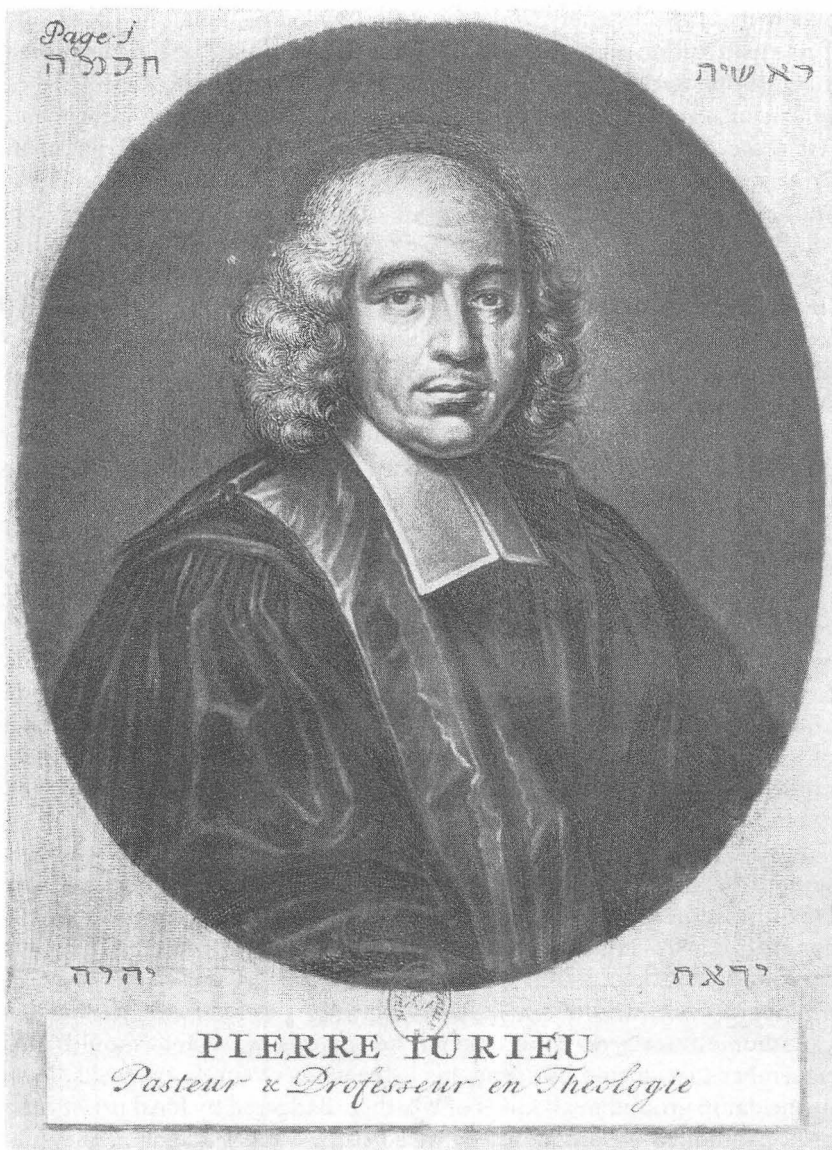
and wills of the listeners.⁸ Like his colleagues, Brousson cited the New Testament more than the Old Testament; yet unlike them, he placed more emphasis on the prophecies in the Apocalypse. Only 14 of Brousson's 39 known sermons (35%) came from the Old Testament, while the other 25 (65%) drew inspiration from the New Testament. Brousson based most of his sermons on the Gospels, the Pauline epistles, and the prophetic portions of the Book of Revelation. His preaching was totally Bible-based. While his colleagues quoted Classical authors and the Church Fathers 2% of the time, not once in Brousson's 21 sermons (over 800 pages) printed in *Mystical Manna* does he refer to any Classical author (including Cicero, Pliny, or Virgil) or to any of the Early Church Fathers (including the oft-quoted Augustine). This makes Brousson truly unique.⁹

Likewise, recognizing that the minds of their parishioners could absorb only as much as their seats could endure, fashionable pastors cut their sermons short. By the mid-17th century, the average length of Calvinist discourses had shrunk to 80 minutes. At the prestigious Temple of Charenton near Paris, pastors preached for only 60 minutes – with a clock ticking nearby to remind them of the passing of time. Occasionally, of course, a Communion, Christmas, Easter, or fast day service would last 105 minutes. But rare indeed was the pastor with the courage or fortitude to equal Charles Drelincourt's performance at a fast day service in May 1645. Taking Isaiah 64:6 as his text ("We are unfit to worship you; each of our good deeds is merely a filthy rag. We dry up like leaves; our sins are storm winds sweeping us away"¹⁰), Drelincourt waxed eloquent for two hours and forty-five minutes!¹¹

But 165 minutes would have been a short sermon by Claude Brousson's standards. If he preached the same messages at his parish church in The Hague that he presented in his assemblies in Languedoc, then for his congregations, every worship service became a time of fasting. One of his regular (non-Communion) sermons, as printed in the book *Mystical Manna* in 1695, would take at least three hours to read aloud, while his Communion services could stretch to five hours. One should also remember that during this time, his listeners were sitting on rocks, logs, or the damp ground in all kinds of weather. Badgered by local priests and bishops, hunted by dragoons, deprived of pastoral leadership, they did not rank personal comfort as their first consideration. Hungry for Bible-based preaching, seeking affirmation amidst their persecution, they eagerly came by the hundreds to hear Brousson speak.¹²

What influences shaped his revivalist style of public discourse? Untrained both in Calvinist theology and in public speaking (except for presenting legal briefs in court), Brousson borrowed ideas from his predecessors and contemporaries. From the famous 16th-century pastor, historian, and poet Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, he took many of the





Pierre Jurieu, Huguenot pastor and theologian. A prominent leader among the Calvinist exiles in Holland, Jurieu was an important influence on Claude Brousson.

themes, arguments, and even citations for his sermons. His appeal to listeners' imagination, his frequent use of apostrophes to address or rebuke specific groups, and even his choice of descriptive terminology ("misérables," "malheureux," "insensés," "méchant") show definite parallels to D'Aubigné's manner of writing.¹³ Also like D'Aubigné before him (in his *Les Tragiques* of 1616), Brousson chose the phrase "Au Désert" as the secret place of publication for several of his works actually published in Switzerland or Holland.¹⁴ For both D'Aubigné and Brousson, "the desert" symbolized the clandestine nature of Calvinist worship during times of persecution. On the negative side it signified their chastisement under the Revocation (dragoon violence, imprisonment, galley slavery, and death); on the positive side, it meant a place of retreat for worship and meditation. Repeatedly in *Mystical Manna*, Brousson employed this phrase both positively and negatively, believing that after decades of persecution, the "Desert" could revive and regenerate the "Church in the Wilderness." Faithful endurance amidst suffering could bring redemption.¹⁵

The young Brousson sat at the feet of Jean Claude who was both his pastor and his religion teacher at the College of Nîmes. For years in his adolescence and youth, Brousson had listened to Claude preach bold sermons contrasting "Protestant purity" with the "idolatrous abominations" of Catholicism. He had heard his pastor compare the priests to Jewish rabbis whom Christ had called "white-washed sepulchers." He had listened as Claude castigated the Eucharist, prayers for the dead, images, the worship of Mary and the saints as "superstitions and idolatry." He had heard his mentor attack such "Babylonian horrors" as genuflecting, penitential processions, flagellation, and kissing cadavers. He had imbibed Claude's hatred for the "odious" Company of Jesus and shared his desire to strengthen the Reformation in order to restore doctrinal purity and religious freedom in France. All of these themes are amply reflected in Brousson's sermons and books. In later life, both men would follow the same path "from the wilderness (France) to the refuge (exile in Holland)." Both also preached about salvation, the need for inner faith, and how to transcend suffering. Emphasizing in their writings the urgent need for justice, both actively sought the aid of the League of Augsburg powers in overthrowing Louis XIV and rescuing the Huguenots. In numerous ways, Brousson was the disciple of Jean Claude.¹⁶

But he was also the disciple of Pierre Jurieu, the internationally famous theologian, polemicist, visionary, and pastor of a Reformed church at Rotterdam. In the summer of 1686, during Brousson's first exile, the two had met in Holland and almost immediately became friends. Brousson, convinced that Jurieu's interpretation of the beasts and prophecies of Revelation applied to 17th-century France, propagated these views in his



own works (most clearly in his *Letters to Roman Catholics*). Also like Jurieu – but to a far greater extent – Brousson popularized the term “mystical” in his writings. Both men believed in religious pluralism, religious liberty, and the right of resistance to tyrannical rulers. His study of Jurieu’s book *Accomplishments of the Prophets* convinced Brousson that England would deliver the Huguenots in 1689 – the Bible predicted it. When William of Orange became William III of England, both Jurieu and Brousson felt absolutely certain that the “glorious deliverance” of the “Church in the Desert” – like the “glorious return” of the Vaudois to their Piedmont valleys that year – was inevitable and imminent.¹⁷

In the meantime, however, Brousson, like his colleagues Claude and Jurieu, labored with all his might to prepare the faithful for this prophetic event. He did this primarily through preaching, for the sermon was the jewel in the crown of every Calvinist worship service. Unlike the “cerebralism” of most 17th-century Dutch and English Reformed sermons, Brousson’s discourses closely resembled a pentecostal exhortation or a Methodist revival service.¹⁸ His pastoral colleagues built their sermons on a foundation of biblical theology hammered together with Cartesian logic and decorated with pleasant metaphors, tropes, and other imagery. Brousson’s unvarnished discourses, on the other hand, featured diatribes against Roman Catholicism and emotional calls for repentance. If his early-17th century predecessors had chosen controversial themes for their sermons – four-fifths of them directed against the papacy, the Eucharist, purgatory, salvation by works, false doctrines, saints’ worship, and the seven sacraments – Brousson followed this path to an even greater extent.¹⁹

Although his assemblies have been described in previous chapters, a closer analysis of their content will help the reader understand Brousson’s order of service, manner of speaking, sources and themes for sermons, his allegorical style, and his virulent anti-Catholicism. In his pamphlet “Instructions for Pious Exercises of the French Reformed Churches Which Are Under the Cross,”²⁰ he provided the order of service for an outdoor assembly. It began with a corporate confession of sins and the singing of a psalm “to console the faithful and strengthen piety.” After the pastoral prayer, the congregation recited the Lord’s Prayer. Then the Bible texts for the service were read, more psalms sung (ä cäppellä), and a three-hour sermon read. The service closed with the singing of another psalm.²¹ Brousson also outlined the essential components for morning and evening worship at home. Family worship began with a study of the Reformed catechism suitable to the experience of the listeners, followed by the recitation of the Ten Commandments. One or two psalms were sung and a chapter or two from the Book of Acts read. Lengthy personal prayers (the examples fill eight and nine pages) and shorter family prayers (only two or three pages each) closed the service.²²

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Convinced that Calvinist youth needed even more edification than their parents, Brousson planned Bible reading services for them. One “Service for the Youth” held sometime during the 1690s lists no fewer than 39 separate parts. It begins with a public confession of sins, includes the singing or reading of 24 psalms (7 of them recited while kneeling), and the reading of 14 other lengthy passages of scripture (comprising at least 33 chapters in the Bible). This worship service includes only two prayers and has no sermon. “By this means,” Brousson wrote, “persons least enlightened can demonstrate their piety, provided that one of them is able to read.” Since completing the entire litany probably required three or four hours of reading and singing, those who remained to the end would also demonstrate exceptional endurance.²³

Yet in addition to preaching, psalm singing, and Bible study, the faithful believer must be active in prayer. As previously indicated, Brousson himself prayed three hours a day – one hour in the morning, one hour at noon, and another hour before retiring to bed. He expected his followers to do the same. None of the models for prayer given in his “Instructions” are of the short “Now I lay me down to sleep” variety. Instead, these printed epistles to God fill from three single-spaced pages (for youth) to nine single-spaced pages (for adults). One morning prayer asks God for protection, blessing, and nourishment during the day; seeks pardon and cleansing for sins and unity, love and zeal among believers; begs for deliverance from “our enemies visible and invisible”; promises to glorify God and be faithful to Him; and closes with the Lord’s Prayer. An evening prayer asks God for His blessing, mercy, and grace; begs for protection during the night; seeks a “holy disposition” and pardon for sins; and pleads with God to “have pity on your poor, desolate Church and rebuild the walls of your poor Jerusalem.” After expressing the wish that “we may one day celebrate with you in celestial felicity,” it, too, closes with the Lord’s Prayer.²⁴

Yet another prayer just before the sermon is preached includes requests for God’s mercy, grace, forgiveness, and cleansing; expresses the need for sanctification, minds open to the Truth, and Spirit-filled hearts; and ends with the desire that all will show love for their neighbors.²⁵ To close the service, Brousson includes a nine-page prayer asking God for mercy, grace, and humility as well as divine protection for the faithful (“in caves and in foreign nations”). It also includes references to Catholicism (“keep us out of Babylon, Lord”); the League of Augsburg powers (“Bless the Powers of Earth, & particularly those whom you have enlightened with the light of Truth”); and peace in Europe (“Bring peace to Europe & convert all the Peoples of the Earth”).²⁶

In the eyes of those who knew him, Brousson’s daily study of the Bible, his lengthy private and public prayers, and his frequent fasts (including complete fasting on Sunday) gave him a charismatic power that was



reflected both in his personal life and in his public preaching.²⁷ One anonymous witness testified that

he spoke well, & without flattering him, we would add eloquently: yet his eloquence showed less brilliance than force, & so to speak, less superficial ornaments than substance & form. His style was simple, & this likewise without art, but clear & intelligible; & above all it was touching & affectionate, with a certain naivete, which often produced a greater effect & impression than more magnificent figures.²⁸

One of the unique elements of his preaching style was the use of exclamations to emphasize a point. He might begin a rhetorical question with “Hé bien!” (Oh, well!) to encourage listeners to ponder its deeper meanings. The expression “Hé!” or “Ha!” (I Say!) introduced an element of irony, as in “Hé! Now can you see better what the Great Powers have done for you?” (They had done almost nothing for the Huguenots in the 1697 Peace of Ryswick). But Brousson could also turn this exclamation against his fellow believers. “Ha! Miserable sinners, return from your wandering, return to your Savior, to this Divine Spouse of your soul, who still deigns to hold out His arms to you. . . . Ha! The day of affliction and of tribulation has indeed now come.”²⁹

Yet another way in which Brousson differed from his preaching brethren was in his southern accent. Although highly educated and intelligent, he never lost the *accent méridionale* of his childhood. For example, he said “assent” for “accent,” “santifié” and “santification” instead of “sanctify” and “sanctification,” and pronounced “Pictet” as “Pittet.” For his lisping speech patterns, his odd use of exclamations, his emotional enthusiasm, bluntness, and allegorical style, many Dutch émigrés made fun of Brousson. But in Languedoc, adoring worshipers flocked to his assemblies and hung on his every word. They hand copied his sermons and books, spreading them all over the Midi.³⁰

The words Brousson spoke not only sounded different but contained deeper meanings than the pleasant imagery used by polished Dutch preachers. He once declared that, unlike them, he

did not use the barbarous terminology of the Scholar, which is the language of Babel, neither did he employ the vain ornaments of a secular History, nor the worldly Philosophies, nor the rhetoric of the Century, nor the citations from the Ancient Doctors [Church Fathers], who were the Fathers of Tradition, through whom the Christian Religion was finally corrupted, but in his [sermons] he spoke only the Words of God, as God gave him the grace to preach to them the Celestial Verities with simplicity, purity, & evidence, which has brought great edification to all the People.³¹

Yet simplicity in preaching style masked a deeper knowledge of biblical



languages that Brousson often used with telling effect but never flaunted. Marginal references and footnotes in his writings reveal that he was conversant with Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. At least six marginal comments explained Hebrew roots and meanings.³² In Sermon 12 (“The Ruin of Mystical Jerusalem & Idolatry”), he asserted that “God will mark the letter *Thau*, which is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, on the front of those who weep & sigh because of all the abominations committed in mystical Jerusalem.”³³ In his detailed, scholarly analysis of Denis Amelote’s translation of the New Testament in 1697 one finds no fewer than 77 marginal references to Greek terms³⁴ and 58 references to Latin terms.³⁵ Doubtless his Classical grammar school education grounded him in Latin and Greek, while his legal training further honed his skills in Latin, but where he acquired a knowledge of Hebrew is a mystery. Perhaps sitting in Jean Claude’s classes in theology at Nîmes, he learned the Hebrew alphabet and picked up some basic Hebrew grammar; perhaps, like others, he simply borrowed phrases from theologians who did know Hebrew.

Several themes dominated Brousson’s sermons. Many of them focused on issues related to practical godliness: how to achieve salvation, instruction in pious living, encouragement amidst persecution, and reprimands for unfaithfulness. Even more dealt with the cardinal doctrines and teachings of Calvinism: the Trinity, the Bible as the only source of Truth, Jesus as the only way to salvation, the sinner’s need of repentance, prophecies of the end time, and the meaning of the Communion service. In nearly every sermon – including Communion sermons – Brousson attacked the evils, idolatry, and superstitions he saw in Catholicism (the Mass, transubstantiation, worship of Mary and the saints, confession to a priest, etc.). His epithets for the papal system are uncompromisingly negative and blunt (“Babylon,” “wolves,” “demonic,” etc.) whereas his imagery for the Reformed is always positive (“Body of Christ,” “God’s People,” “Israel,” “sheep,” etc.). Finally, most of his sermons end with a call to repentance and spiritual renewal, urging listeners to forsake materialism, Catholic superstitions, hypocrisy and other sins and to faithfully attend assemblies. In fact, the message of every sermon could be summed up thus: Obedience can only be demonstrated by public confession (“confession de la bouche”).³⁶

As “the Christian conscience” of the age, Brousson portrayed in clear black-and-white terms the key issues he saw in the great controversy between Gospel Truth and Catholic error. For the most part, his prayers and sermons picture God as loving, pitying, comforting, and merciful, sustaining the afflicted and saving the faithful. But He also judges, rebukes, condemns, and destroys those who abjure the Truth and forsake Him. In describing the struggle between good and evil and the proponents on each side, Brousson’s prose is vivid and emotional, frequently evoking



sobs, sighs, and tears from his audience, most of whom knew all too well what suffering and torment felt like here on earth. In his descriptions of “Mystical Babylon” (Catholicism) and “Mystical Jerusalem” (Calvinism), Brousson’s prose reflects honesty and sincerity combined with eloquence and naivete. Like the forthright messages preached in the wilderness by John the Baptist (with whom Brousson was often compared), the style, themes and content of Brousson’s sermons reflect a simplicity, bluntness, and passion for truth.³⁷

But they also reveal his unique, almost obsessive, fascination with apocalyptic imagery and the story of the persecution of God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments, something rarely heard outside the prophets of the Cévennes. Intrigued by the Apocalypse, Brousson borrowed its word pictures, prose, and prophetic timelines and projected them onto the landscape of 17th-century Europe. His references to “Babylon,” “the temple of idols,” “the woman of the apocalypse,” and the “Dragon” are taken directly from the biblical book of Revelation. So deeply steeped was he in biblical history that it was natural for him to see current events reflected in biblical texts. The persecution of God’s people by King Ahab, Queen Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal in the Old Testament mirrored the Huguenots’ suffering under Louis XIV, Madame de Maintenon, and the Jesuits. As the prophet Elijah had defeated the worshippers of Baal on Mount Carmel, Brousson expected that God, working through William III and his Allies, would soon overthrow Catholicism – Revelation’s “Great Whore” – in France. To this end, he urged believers to pray that the Allies would be victorious.³⁸

Yet Claude Brousson had not always manifested this “mystical mindset.” Until his rejection of the use of force following Vivent’s death in 1692, this pragmatic man trained in the intricacies of French law had dealt primarily with the practical problems of raising a family, leading a resistance movement, and writing books and letters. After the failure of the second Schomberg Plot in 1692, however, Brousson appears to have turned his focus inward to biblical exegesis, prayer and fasting, and reviving the “Church in the Desert.” Psychologically, perhaps, these early disappointments in diplomacy, civil disobedience, and the use of violence represented a turning point for him. His early failures at rescuing the Huguenots through legal, military, and diplomatic channels probably convinced him to focus on their spiritual renewal instead. Leaving behind “the things of the world,” he resolved to use only “the sword of the Spirit” by immersing himself in the Word of God.

In doing so, however, he, like Christian mystics through the ages, developed a fascination with biblical imagery, allegories, and allusions.³⁹ In the third of his *Letters from the Protestants of France* (1686), he defined what he meant by “mystical”:



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We see then, our very dear brothers, that it is the manner of Scripture to speak to us of spiritual Mysteries under the name & by means of material things which agree with them. All the Parables & all the other means of speaking allegorically, of which both the Old & New Testaments are replete, justify this truth. It is in this sense that Jesus Christ is referred to sometimes as a lamb, other times as a lion, yet again as a Shepherd, again as a door, again as the way, again as a vine, again as our Passover, again as an altar, again as the Sun and Moon & other symbols.⁴⁰

Then in *Mystical Manna* (1695), he underlined the crucial importance of understanding biblical mysteries:

God wills, my dear brethren, that we give a clear intelligence of these mysteries, that by this means being powerfully fortified in the faith, we would be able to resist all the efforts of the World and the Devil and obtain the crown of glory which is prepared in Heaven for all those who will conquer.⁴¹

To help the faithful understand biblical allegories, Brousson explained dozens of “mystical terms” in his 21 discourses.⁴² To modern readers, it seems that Brousson was communicating in some bizarre code, and indeed he was. This **penchant for biblical symbolism**, however, embarrassed even his contemporaries, who felt that he stretched the Bible’s imagery to the point of irrationality. For example, waxing eloquent in one sermon dealing with the mystical applications of ancient Jewish dietary laws, he saw in the prohibition to eat animals with split hooves the importance of separating good from evil. God’s followers must withdraw from any corrupting communion with Catholicism in order to avoid participating in its sins and final punishment. The divided hoof of the ruminant (cattle) also signified meditation and rumination on God’s Word.⁴³ In another example, he likened God’s true followers to sheep for their peaceable nature and Satan’s followers to cruel beasts because they “tear” (persecute) the sheep. Again, while the worldly and powerful (bulls) occasionally fed in the pasture of God’s Word, His sheep descended to deserts or climbed mountains to avoid being attacked by wolves (persecuting priests).⁴⁴

Yet all biblical mysteries were not created equal, and Brousson had his favorites. Based on his deep love for the imagery in the Song of Solomon, his most frequently used symbol is that of the dove in the garden. To him, the dove represented all that was pure, clean, kind, peaceful and faithful. He applied this symbol both to Christ and to God’s persecuted church in France, for both, like the dove, had sought hiding places among the rocks and caves of the wilderness. Also like the dove, true believers did not soil themselves with the filth of worldly ideas and possessions; they were humble and peaceful; and they remained loyal to Christ (their mystical



spouse) for life.⁴⁵ Another symbol in Solomon's Canticles – that of the roe – also intrigued him. Like these deer, the Reformed retreated into the mountains during the harsh winter months (Church and State persecution) to await the coming of spring (God's deliverance).⁴⁶

To the modern mind, it seems paradoxical that Brousson, the austere, legalistic preacher scandalized by the least hint of sexual misconduct, should revel in the erotic imagery of the Song of Solomon. But that is because *we*, who understand its literal meaning, see it as erotic; *he*, on the other hand, interpreted Solomon's Song – and indeed the entire Bible – allegorically (as Medieval mystics for centuries had done), so practically every proper noun in scripture had a hidden meaning. Only those “in the know,” true believers with access to “the code,” could decipher these deeper meanings. And for mystically minded Calvinists – as for Ashkenazim Jews interpreting the mysteries of the Cabala – it was a game, lots of fun to be sure, but in dead earnest.

Another one of Brousson's favorite symbols, found both in the Old and New Testaments, was Jerusalem. Earlier, in his statement, “God built Jerusalem in the midst of Babylon,” Bishop Bossuet had employed “Jerusalem” to refer to God's Church (Roman Catholicism) and “Babylon” to describe the secular world. But Reformed pastors turned this metaphor on its head, using “Babylon” as synonymous with Catholicism and “Jerusalem” to mean Calvinism, God's true church.⁴⁷ In his “Christian Considerations on the Reestablishment of Mystical Jerusalem,”⁴⁸ Brousson gave the term a double meaning. It refers to the “City of God” (see Psalm 87), a place where God dwells and where souls find rest, peace, joy, love, beauty, justice, and protection, but also to God's true church, now undergoing persecution, but soon to be delivered. For him, the antithesis of “Jerusalem” is Jericho, Babylon, Egypt, and Philistia, all of which represent the Roman Catholic Church whose leaders persecute the Reformed.⁴⁹

Therefore, he urged believers to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” and for “the deliverance of this poor People, who sigh, groan, and weep day & night in the Prisons, in the Galleys, in the Caverns, in the Deserts . . . for their conscience's sake.”⁵⁰ Brousson surely agreed with Calvinist pastor Jean Delangle that as the Jews returning from Persian exile to rebuild ancient Jerusalem kept one hand on the sword and one hand on the trowel, so Calvinist pastors must be ready to build up God's church and combat the errors and deceit of Catholicism.⁵¹

And no 17th-century Huguenot preacher enjoyed lambasting Catholicism more than Claude Brousson. In this personal vendetta against “Mystical Babylon,” he stood virtually alone, both for the frequency of his attacks and for their virulence. Only 53% of 17th-century Reformed pastors' sermons analyzed by Françoise Chevalier (1994) devoted even one or two paragraphs to attacking Catholic doctrines or practices,



usually referring only to the Mass, transubstantiation, purgatory, or worship of the saints. Even then, most preachers used relatively neutral phrases such as “the Church of Rome,” “Children of Rome,” or “Christians of other communions” to refer to the papal system. The strongest epithets most Calvinist pastors could conjure up were “Anti-Christ” and “Son of Perdition” – and even these referred to the pope himself, not to the entire Catholic system.⁵²

But Brousson, who blamed the Catholic Church entirely for the Revocation, drew up a far more extensive list of “enemies” within the Church or manipulated by it. For their “oppression and wickedness” against the Reformed, he condemned the bishops and priests, *parlements* and *intendants* as well as the judges and magistrates of the presidial courts, the tax collectors, town officials who took away their cemeteries and the dragoons who brutalized them.⁵³ Seeing the Jesuits as the chief culprits behind the Revocation laws, manipulating the King and bankrolling the bribery of pastors and New Catholics, he reserved his deepest venom for them. In his December 1692 appeal to Louis XIV, he called them “Sodom,” “the New Egypt,” “the impure city,” “the tyrannical Empire,” and “the great oppressor of God’s people.” The Jesuits, he declared, “would much prefer to see all your Subjects perish than to consider appeasing God.”⁵⁴

If most Huguenot preachers refrained from **deploying such venomous epithets against Roman Catholicism**, Brousson manifested a special talent for doing so. Interpreting his Bible with allegorical glasses firmly in place, he incorporated into his sermons a wide variety of vivid anti-Catholic imagery. Not content with predictable metaphors such as the “Great Red Dragon,” the “Great Prostitute,” or the “Man of Sin,” he denounced the Church of Rome and its servants as “Children of Babel,” “Doctors of Darkness,” “Communion of the Devil,” “New Gentiles,” “Ravering Wolves,” and “Blind Pharisees,” among many other polemical labels. Based on his own bitter experience, Roman Catholicism was a “False Mother,” the “Great usurper of Laws,” deserving to be seen as the present-day inheritor of Sodom.⁵⁵

The following paragraph from *Mystical Manna* illustrates Brousson’s use of anti-Catholic rhetoric:

How are they able to confound the Great Prostitute, the Mother of Harlots, and the abominations of the earth, with the Spouse of Jesus Christ, who being a chaste and faithful spouse, does not soil herself in idolatry, which is spiritual adultery? How can they confound the cruel Babylon, which is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus, with the true Church of God, which is the mystic Jerusalem, that is to say, a vision of peace, because it does no evil to anyone? How are they able to confound the ferocious beast of the Apocalypse, that is to say, the antichrist, and all the ministers of his fury, who are as cruel and bloody as wild beasts, with



the faithful of Jesus Christ who the Scriptures compare with a dove, a flock, with a lamb, to indicate their gentleness and their good nature?⁵⁶

Brousson's visceral rejection of Catholicism penetrated deep into his soul. He not only accused the Church of propagating theological error but also blamed "the *monseigneurs*" (the bishops) for bringing about the Revocation. In a particularly heated discussion of "the motives of the *monseigneurs*" in his *Apology*, he accused Catholic leaders (and especially the Jesuits) of bribing, threatening, imprisoning, abducting, and forcibly converting Reformed families. They had used disguises, chicanery, illusions, force, false testimonies, corrupt judges, and dragons in their campaign to eradicate Calvinism in France.⁵⁷

But the French bishops' role in Louis XIV's Revocation was only the tip of the iceberg, the visible manifestation of a deeper conspiracy. Across Europe in the 1680s and 1690s, Brousson saw in the Counter-Reformation a "Jesuit plot" utterly to destroy Protestantism itself. By distorting historical accounts to portray Protestants as violent rebels; by persuading kings to abolish edicts of toleration; by censoring Protestant works and publishing "pious frauds" against them; and by hauling them into court over peccadilloes, the Society of Jesus sought to extinguish the Protestant Reformation. Their efforts were already succeeding in Bohemia, Hungary, Silesia, Moravia, Austria, Poland, and France. Soon, he predicted, they would infiltrate England, Scotland, Holland, and Switzerland, the refuges of *émigré* Huguenots, and root out Protestantism there.⁵⁸ To Brousson, the Jesuits and bishops were "truly the enemy of Kings & entirely opposed to the sweet spirit of Christianity."⁵⁹ Catholic crusades during the Middle Ages had created a schism in the church and killed millions of people; canon laws had "oppressed the innocent" and led to the burning of thousands of heretics.⁶⁰ Therefore, he concluded, the power manifested by popes, cardinals, bishops, and the Jesuits "is not legitimate & is entirely opposed to the sincere humility that the Gospels recommend for all pastors."⁶¹

Disseminating the truth about this Catholic conspiracy, Brousson felt, was the only way to stop it in its tracks. To that end, he had mailed 7000 copies of his *Letters to Roman Catholics* (1688) to ministers of state, leading Catholic clergy, and top magistrates in France. For that purpose, he also had sent copies of his *Confession of Reasonable Faith* (1694) – a theological brief defending the doctrines of the RPR – to Louis XIV and several bishops. Now, to clarify this plot and highlight the issues in the "great controversy" between truth and error for Calvinists everywhere, Brousson published his favorite sermons in *Mystical Manna* (1695).⁶²

Despite the differences in preaching style, allegorical interpretation of scripture, and strong anti-Catholic bias between Brousson and other Calvinist preachers, these 21 discourses,⁶³ published in Amsterdam by



The Mystical Dove

Henry Desbordes, appeared with the full approbation of Dutch Reformed leaders. In the front of the book, they expressed their unequivocal approval:

We the undersigned Deputies of the Churches to examine these items named by the Synod of Tergoes, declare that we have read & examined twenty-one sermons that our very dear brother Mr. Brousson, Refugee Minister, has presented us, in which we have found nothing contrary to our Confession of Faith & to our Discipline. Printed at Haarlem during the tenure of the Synod on the 30 April 1695.⁶⁴

Given the level of opposition Brousson faced from many *émigré* pastors, this **unqualified endorsement from the highest Dutch Reformed synod** is truly remarkable. It not only affirmed the value of his preaching ministry, but also opened many doors for him across Europe.

While the first fourteen sermons (Parts 1 and 2) are exhortations on various topics, the last seven (#15–21) from Part 3 are Communion sermons, and for discussion purposes, may be taken together. They are longer (35–45 pages), more formal, more alike in imagery, and more focused on the meaning of the bread and wine than his other discourses. Furthermore, the right of participating in the Lord's Supper separated true believers "in good and regular standing" from all others (backsliders, New Catholics, "unfaithful brethren") who could not "approach the table" and partake of the emblems of Christ's body. If they attended the service at all, they could only watch from a distance.

Collectively, Brousson preached these seven sermons at least 38 times between 1689 and 1693. They contain some of his favorite biblical symbols: the blood on the doorpost in Egypt, Israel's deliverance from slavery, the manna in the wilderness, the New Testament Covenant, and God's amazing grace. They are rich with the imagery of Jesus Christ as the Bread of Life, the Living Word, the Heavenly Manna, the Lamb of God, as well as the Mediator, Intercessor, Patron and Advocate of the faithful. Yet here where one might least expect it, Brousson's anti-Catholicism intrudes. In every one of the seven Communion homilies, he boldly attacks the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation as "error," "idolatry," "abominable sacrilege," "Satan's Altar," "blasphemy and impiety." Most often, his attack on this one dogma leads him to condemn a host of other Catholic practices – worship of saints, indulgences, the Mass, candles, incense, processions, altars, purgatory, salvation by works, and the whole penitential system. You are not saved by confessing to a priest, he reminds his listeners, but by faith in the grace and cleansing blood of Christ. Likewise, he occasionally uses these Communion discourses to condemn "sin in the camp of Israel," attacking those who have abjured their faith or betrayed fellow believers as "Judases," "Laodiceans," and "wicked, unfaithful souls" deserving of eternal



damnation. Then at the close of each service, he typically appeals to those who have wandered (like sheep) away from God to humble themselves, examine their hearts, repent, reject worldliness and Catholic errors, and return to Christ and His Truth. Then, following his lengthy prayer (one to three pages) over the elements, those truly worthy are invited forward to receive both the wafer and the wine.⁶⁵

Among the remaining 14 sermons, Brousson's favorite (given 15 times between 1690 and 1693) was the first one – "The Mystical Dove in the Clefts of the Rocks." Here the dove symbolizes both Christ and the true church, for both share the same traits: humility, purity, kindness, holiness, peacefulness, sweetness, faithfulness, and loyalty. By contrast with the Mystical Dove, the Mystical Beast is soiled, corrupt, barbarous, cruel, adulterous, and idolatrous. In the form of Pagan Rome it had persecuted Christ; presently, in the form of Roman Catholicism, it persecutes His true church, forcing its members to flee "to the clefts of the rocks" in the wilderness. But those who endure to the end will soon "dwell in the Palace of the King of Kings."⁶⁶

Sermons 2, 3, 7, 13, and 14 (preached 31 times from 1690 to 1693) may also be grouped together as representing a genre of discourses designed to bring comfort to the suffering saints. These discourses employ imagery of Christ as the Bread of Life, the Way to salvation, the Good Shepherd, the Rescuer from persecution, and the Liberator of the oppressed. In each one, Jesus, the only Savior from sin, is portrayed as loving, inviting, forgiving, guiding, protecting, restoring, cleansing, healing, and finally saving His faithful ones from earthly suffering. Again, however, Brousson takes the opportunity in each presentation to contrast Roman Catholicism with Calvinism. In the former are "false shepherds," "ravenous wolves," and "false pastors" who live immoral lives and whose false teachings include worship of Mary, angels and the saints, transubstantiation, relics, and idols. To be saved in eternal glory, individuals must repudiate this system of error. Likewise, to escape the "cruel war" (the War of the League of Augsburg), pestilence, and other "terrible afflictions" which God will send on the kingdom, the leaders of "Babylon" (French Church and State officials) must corporately repent and restore the Protestant Reformation.⁶⁷

A few of Brousson's discourses – like Sermons 6, 8, and 11 (preached 14 times between 1690 and 1692) – focus on spiritual problems inside God's true church and the need for judgment, punishment, or repentance. The God portrayed in these speeches is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who tears His sinful people, the Lover who chastises his beloved for being unfaithful, and the Judge who condemns the wicked at the end of the world. In these sermons, Brousson emphasizes the sins of a Laodicean church (Revelation 3:14–22) that has broken the covenant with Him through idolatry, corruption, immorality, worldliness, and a general lack



of piety, zeal, and holiness. No doubt hard-hitting discourses like these brought sighs, tears, and vows to repent, but one wonders if they did not also induce considerable guilt in the minds of an already suffering congregation. Perhaps to obviate that guilt, each sermon ends with a call to renew the covenant, to return to Bible reading and prayer, and to prepare for the heavenly Canaan.⁶⁸

But the speeches in which Brousson pulled out all the rhetorical stops were those primarily directed against the Catholic Church. Sermons 4, 5, 9, 10, and 12 (preached a total of 30 times between 1690 and 1692) are some of the best examples of his vitriolic prose. The God pictured here chastises, judges, rejects, punishes, and destroys; He is a being with a “two-edged sword,” a deity without love, mercy, or grace for those who have offended Him. The primary object of His punishments, of course, is the papal system, whose idolatry, demon worship, superstitions, blasphemy, deceit, hypocrisy, and apostasy Brousson loves to condemn. Once again, as in all his other sermons, he excoriates the same litany of practices – transubstantiation, relics, worship of saints, Mary, and angels – which undermine the saving power of Christ’s blood. Such “pious frauds, which are Satan’s frauds for the simple-minded & idiots,” will in the end bring God’s wrath upon the Catholic Church. In light of that fact, he calls upon those who “carry God’s mark” to “Come out of Babylon and Return to the Eternal God!”⁶⁹

This same theme – coming out of Mystical Babylon – appears in many of Brousson’s letters as well, especially those written for general circulation among the Reformed. Drawing on the same biblical imagery he used in his sermons, he refers to Roman Catholicism as “Babylon,” “Mystical Babylon,” and the “Antichrist.” Its officials – priests, bishops, the Jesuits – are “wolves” tearing God’s “sheep,” “Philistines” attacking His people “Israel,” “angels from Hell” bringing demonic persecution upon the Huguenots.⁷⁰ Yet just as in his discourses, letters written to Calvinist pastors and elders also contain words of encouragement. Typically, he urges them to endure affliction with “good cheer” in the Lord, knowing they will soon see God’s glory in heaven. He reminds them of their duty to assemble the people for public worship and if arrested, to face death with courage.⁷¹

Brousson wrote his books, according to his own testimony, for the same purposes: to edify the general public, advance God’s reign on earth, encourage the persecuted Huguenots, and solicit foreign aid in their behalf. Employing the same black-and-white imagery as in his sermons and letters, he highlighted the goodness, truth, and innocence in Calvinism and contrasted that with the evil, errors, and corruption in Catholicism.⁷² Throughout his writings, Brousson consistently laid the blame for the *religionnaires*’ persecution squarely at the feet of the Catholic bishops and the Jesuits. Unlike the Dutch press and the *émigré* pastors in the United



Provinces, Switzerland, and England, Brousson never blamed Louis XIV for the Revocation; he always directed his acerbic wit and hatred at Catholicism. A contemporary broadside, anonymously written in Latin, accusing Louis XIV of being a “Tyrant over France” and describing him in poetic verse as a “bloody Gaul,” a Nero, a Judas, and a Turk could never have come from the pen of Claude Brousson. Charging the Sun King with perjury, simony, injustice, and contempt for law, this diatribe further accuses him of corrupting the State, ravaging his subjects, and being “the universal pest” that “contaminates” wherever he goes. Therefore, “God holds him in contempt” for “killing liberty” in France.⁷³

Although Brousson frequently penned vitriolic words like that in his attacks on Roman Catholicism, to the end of his life, he professed himself loyal to the monarchy. Indeed, in his final book, *Remarks on the Translation of the New Testament . . . by Denis Amelote* (1697),⁷⁴ his address “To the King” is written with a tone of great respect. With typical naivete, he urges Louis XIV to read this book which “places the Truth in such great evidence that little children can understand it.” Brousson’s marketing plan includes sending copies to nobles, magistrates, lawyers, clerics, and enlightened laypersons, although some of these, he fears, may be “too preconceived & passionate on these matters” to be objective.⁷⁵

The *Remarks* constitutes Brousson’s scholarly critique of Denis Amelote’s French translation of the New Testament. In 1686 the Catholic clergy, recognizing the need for a user-friendly edition of the Bible to introduce new converts to Catholic practices, had chosen Amelote, an Oratorian priest with a doctoral degree in theology, to do the job. For six years he worked on it, completing the first edition in 1692. Brousson, busy with other projects, finally devoted his full attention to it when he returned to Holland after his second missionary journey.⁷⁶

For a man who had barely passed his theological examination in Holland three years before, Brousson’s critique demonstrates a broad grasp of scripture, a remarkably detailed knowledge of historical developments, an impressive facility with Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and a deep understanding of both Catholic and Calvinist theology. Despite his naïve belief that a Jesuit plot lay behind this translation, once he began analyzing its contents, he demonstrated a scholarly mastery of biblical theology, exegesis, and source material seldom seen in his previous works. His “Introduction” indicates that he purchased a Vulgate Bible, a Greek New Testament, and several other “necessary [but unnamed] books” at a town in Lower Languedoc before returning “to the wilderness” to write a rough draft of his critique. When he returned to Holland in 1696 after his second missionary journey, he prepared a polished version for publication.⁷⁷

In Part 1, Brousson highlights 17 problems with Amelote’s New Testament. Its language obscures the truth regarding salvation, baptism,



communion, idolatry and the Anti-Christ. It relies too heavily on the Vulgate, a “corrupted” and unreliable version. While biblical Greek is “pure & Divine,” the Greek manuscripts Amelote chose do not support his “false Catholic doctrines.” Thus his edition “accommodates itself to the superstitions” of Catholicism but is “impure & unfaithful” to the original sources. It further obscures passages regarding Christ’s ministry on behalf of believers’ salvation and concerning the Bible prophecies about Mystical Babylon, the Beast of Revelation 13, and other imagery normally applied by Reformed preachers to the Catholic Church. While God’s Word is “clear and understandable,” Amelote has made it obscure in order to keep people “in darkness” regarding Catholic errors. By adding his own opinions and depending too heavily on Church councils and traditions, he has imparted to the text “an oblique & unfaithful meaning.” Consequently, like anything produced by “the ministers of error,” Amelote’s translation badly distorts the true meaning of scripture. One of the most flagrant examples of this, Brousson feels, is when Amelote quotes Jude 3 concerning “The faith once given to the saints,” but after the word “given” adds “by tradition” in his version.⁷⁸

Although a full account of Brousson’s exhaustive (and exhausting) 573-page analysis of Amelote’s New Testament would require many more pages than are warranted here, a few examples will suffice to show how thoroughly he examined the work. In Part 2, he discovered that in 41 places, Amelote substituted “penitence” for “repentance” and “falsified” scriptural passages to support Catholic beliefs in purgatory, righteousness by works, mortal and venial sins, clerical celibacy, the seven sacraments, the Holy Shroud, pieces of the True Cross, and extreme unction. He also relied far too much on the Apocrypha as a doctrinal source, especially in support of sacrifices for the dead. These “human books,” Brousson asserts (following standard Protestant doctrine), were never quoted by Jesus or the Apostles, and the Early Church Fathers excluded them from the canon.⁷⁹ In Part 3, Amelote “twisted” other biblical passages to support transubstantiation and the Mass and to confuse believers regarding Christ’s ministry in heaven.⁸⁰ In Part 4, he “obscured” texts condemning idolatry, prayers to angels and the Virgin Mary, veneration of the saints, relics, and images while glossing over those clearly teaching that Christ is the “only Mediator, Intercessor, Patron, or Advocate” to whom believers should pray.⁸¹ In Part 5, Amelote reworded certain passages to support Peter as the first pope, establish a hierarchy in the Early Church, and buttress his concept of papal infallibility. Cleverly, he also provided entirely different allegorical meanings for such symbols as “Babylon,” the “Beast” of Revelation 13, the “Son of Perdition,” the “Anti-Christ,” the “Image of the Beast,” and the “Mark of the Beast.” This, however, cannot obviate the fact that Rome “is a sewer which receives the filth of the world.”⁸² Amelote also changed 85 passages to



“prove” that Catholic priests, like the Levites in the Old Testament, were “sacrificateurs” (those who offer sacrifices) and 43 other passages to demonstrate that the Bible supported the Bishop of Rome as the “Sovereign Pontiff.”⁸³

From his meticulous examination of Amelote’s New Testament, Brousson reached several conclusions. “One cannot be saved in the Communion of the Roman Church” because it is “the Great Antichrist,” “the Great Enemy of God’s Word,” “the dwelling place of devils and the hold of every foul spirit.” Its “unfaithful pastors” desperately needed “to be instructed in the Truth.” This Truth could be found only in the Reformed Religion, “the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Fourth, those who refused to accept this pure Gospel would in the great Judgment Day be destroyed along with the impenitent, the impure, and demons.⁸⁴ Therefore, at the end of this magnum opus, Brousson pleads with “these wicked Pastors who obscure & falsify in hundreds & hundreds of ways the sacred Word of God” to turn from their “false traditions,” stop being “blind guides,” and “return to the right path.” Only then can they serve their congregations with “purity and obedience to [God’s] Holy Commandments.”⁸⁵

As this chapter shows, Brousson’s own efforts to serve the French Huguenots’ needs and to live in “purity and obedience” before God led him to differ in many ways from his colleagues in the Calvinist clergy. His ascetic lifestyle contrasted sharply with the comfortable lives they enjoyed in exile. His hard-hitting, allegorical interpretations of scripture differed from their calm, rational exegesis of the Bible. His anti-Catholic bias, evident in every sermon, exceeded the limited attention and restrained prose they devoted to papal errors. While he, a Zealot who advocated civil disobedience but deeply respected Louis XIV, had occasionally taken up the sword, they were Moderates who, in spite of writing diatribes against Louis XIV, pursued pacifist lives or let William III fight for them. His sermons, twice as long as theirs, examined the Bible’s symbolism and prophecies and applied them to contemporary settings in a manner which most *émigré* pastors found irrational and offensive. His blunt charismatic delivery, full of biblical allusions and calls to repentance, contrasted with their Cartesian, Baroque style of preaching, full of polished rhetoric, logical arguments, and pleasant metaphors. Yet given the harsh conditions in France after the Revocation, one could argue that Claude Brousson better met the needs of his scattered sheep than his more cosmopolitan *émigré* colleagues could have done or were willing to do. In that sense, despite his many flaws, he truly was the man of his hour.