

Theodore Beza's Classical Library and Christian Humanism*

By Kirk M. Summers

In 1548 when Theodore Beza was only twenty-nine he published through Conrad Badius a collection of poetry known now simply by the title *Iuvenilia*.¹ This collection was made up of about 100 pages of Latin poems modeled on the style of Catullus and Ovid; its intention was simply to exercise Beza's restless genius.² One year later, in 1549, after a serious illness nearly took his life, Beza espoused the Reformation cause with an intense vigor that eventually led him into the circle of John Calvin at Geneva and later fame as his successor. Within the collection of poems is one "Ad Bibliothecam" in which Beza provides an abbreviated list of the contents of his personal library. The authors he does have space to list are, from the general tenor of the poem, to be taken as his favorites in a loosely arranged order of preference.³ The list is valuable because it gives us a clue to the sentiments of one of the key reformers of the Sixteenth Century toward certain authors and genres.

Undoubtedly some will object with Meyer Reinhold that in biographical

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1. A complete listing of the various editions of Beza's poetry can be found in Frederic Gardy: *Bibliographie des Oeuvres Théologiques, littéraires, historiques et juridiques de Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva, 1960), 1-17. See also Paul F. Geisendorf: *Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva, 1949), 16-22, for a brief description and criticism of the poems; also Johann W. Baum: *Theodor Beza, nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt*, 1 (Leipzig, 1843):67-81. For a full length study of the poems see Louis Maignon: *De Theodori Bezae poematis* (Lyon, 1898). Unless otherwise noted I will be quoting poems from *Poemata Theodori Bezae Vezellii: quibus continentur sylvae, elegiae, epitaphia, icones, epigrammata* (London, 1713; repr. of Lutetia, 1548). Hereafter cited *Poemata*.

2. In the prefatory letter of the 1548 edition of his poems Beza writes: "Etsi totum hoc scribendi genus a multis et gravibus et eruditis hominibus reprehendi solet, nunquam tamen hoc a me potui impetrare, ut in eo excolendo operam aliquam non ponerem, sive ita cogente animi impetu quodam, sive quod hanc exercendi styli speciem nunquam vel ineptam vel inutilem esse putavi." This letter is reprinted in Hippolyte Aubert, Henri Meylan, Alain Dufour, eds.: *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, 1 (Geneva, 1960-):47. Hereafter cited as *Corr.*

3. Maignon, *De T. B. poematis*, agrees (95 f.): "Bibliothecam suam salutata poeta recognoscitque omnes scriptoresque quos carissimos habet." And: "Attamen notandum est in omni illa enumeratione non inesse certum lucidumque ordinem, immo quandam inesse confusionem."