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## Listening to the “Voix Prescheresse” in Marie Dentièrre’s Epistre tres utile

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## LISTENING TO THE “VOIX PRESCHERESSE” IN MARIE DENTIÈRE'S *EPISTRE TRES UTILE* (1539)

Merry E. Low

### Introduction

The gendered expression of reformist thought takes on a notably strident tone in the short yet poignant works of Marie Dentièrre (1495-1561), whose polemical declaration of Protestantism, as well as of women's right to participate fully as co-ministers of the newly formed faith, resounded throughout the streets of sixteenth-century Strasbourg and Geneva. Dentièrre's *Epistre tres utile* (1539) offers modern scholars interested in the gendered experience of the Reformation a rare insight into an ex-nun's zealous proclamation of her conversion to those still bound by the confines of the Catholic faith and the struggle to minister alongside her male contemporary reformers.<sup>1</sup> Dentièrre composed the *Epistre* in response to Marguerite, Queen of Navarre (1492-1549), who communicated her growing concern for and desire to know details behind the expulsion of John Calvin and Guillaume Farel (1489-1565), a French evangelist who helped to establish the Reformed Church in Switzerland, from the Church of Geneva.<sup>2</sup> Dentièrre's words, however, convey much more than a simple explanation of an ecclesiastical conflict.

Seizing the opportunity to influence Marguerite, one of the most powerful and learned women in early modern Europe, Dentièrre articulates an apology for the reformed faith as well as a justification for women's public involvement in the Church. Dentièrre's prophetic voice amplifies her message and emphasizes the divine truth embedded in the Reformed faith, which invites women to fully participate in its public dissemination. These proclamations culminate in Dentièrre's textual embodiment of the *prescheresse*—a designation that undoubtedly contributes to *le bruit des femmes* in sixteenth-century Europe. Throughout the *Epistre*'s three divisions—the Dedication to Marguerite de Navarre, A Defense of Women, and the Epistle proper—one has the impression that Dentièrre is shouting, with her use of invective and repetition, as Mary McKinley has noted. In fact, McKinley hints at a link between Dentièrre's *Epistre* and the sermon tradition, specifically, the style of her male contemporary, Guillaume Farel (“Introduction” 28, 37). McKinley suggests that Dentièrre's use of the words *prescher* and *prescheresse* conveys “her conviction that women should not simply teach doctrine to other women in private but should preach to both men and women” (“The Absent Ellipsis” 92). Moreover, while the intended audience of the *Epistre* suggests a female readership, namely Marguerite de Navarre, Jane Douglass claims that Dentièrre also anticipates a

male audience: “Ostensibly writing as a woman to women could be a device to make her work more socially acceptable. But it is obvious that she intends the conversation to be overheard by men” (241). Such an observation bears weight on my analysis of the *Epistre* as a piece that was meant to be both read and heard. As such, Dentièrre’s *Epistre* stands out for the brashness of delivery involving ecclesiastical and theological polemic,<sup>3</sup> as well as a radical Christian feminism,<sup>4</sup> written and spoken by a woman. This article thus explores the mimetic function of orality in Dentièrre’s *Epistre*: by emphasizing the spoken word of God as both *prescheresse* and prophetess, Dentièrre hopes to not only engender true conversion, but to encourage women like herself to join in the public declaration of the Gospel.

### The Dilated Word

It is important to remember that cultural discourse in Dentièrre’s context intertwined the spoken and written word. Thomas Cohen and Lesley Twomey claim that early modern orality, while rooted in the mouth (*os, oris*), attaches itself “to the whole person and, in important ways, to the hearers and to the setting in which communication happens” (7). This ‘liberated’ understanding of orality, which dissolves the binary of the spoken and written word, exemplifies early modern discourse. Likewise, this all-encompassing orality inflected early modern preaching (*ars praedicandi*). Arnold Hunt suggests that Protestant preaching emphasized verbal communication: “Protestant writers [...] regarded the written word as a latent force, which had to be activated or ‘applied’ by the living voice of the preacher in order to strike home to the heart of the listener” (27). Hunt also argues that the Protestant theory of preaching demonstrates an inextricable link between preaching, hearing, and faith, foregrounding the principle of *fides ex auditu* (“faith comes from hearing”) (2). This principle is founded upon a central verse taken from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (*Revised Standard Bible*, Romans 10.17). That true faith comes from hearing the word of God is an essential angle in my reading of Dentièrre’s *Epistre* in which *fides ex auditu* infuses the tone and themes of the *Epistre*, as we will see.

Against the backdrop of women’s silence in both Catholic and Protestant churches of sixteenth-century Europe, we can also consider the sermon-like qualities of Dentièrre’s *Epistre* as an iteration of *dilatatio* (or *amplificatio*)—a rhetorical term inspired by the Old Testament prostitute, Rahab, which underscores a sense of opening, as well as the expansion and propagation of speech.<sup>5</sup> According to the biblical story, Rahab (in Hebrew: “broad” or “wide”) opened up her home to hide a group of Hebrew spies as part of their plot to overtake the city of Jericho. When the king of Jericho asked her about these spies, Rahab admitted that men came to her home, but that she did not understand their identity nor where they went; however, Rahab knew both their identity and their whereabouts. Rahab’s actions and words—the opening of her home and her bold speech act—thus led to her own inclusion in the Hebrew people as well as God’s preservation of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

Although Dentièrre does not specifically mention Rahab in her list of illustrious women at the beginning of her “Defense of Women,” she does reference Ruth, Rahab’s daughter-in-law, as being listed in the genealogy of Christ (a4v).<sup>6</sup> Rahab thus plays a procreative role—a literal opening up of the female body—in the messianic line. In her analysis of rhetorical abundance of speech in early modern English literature, Patricia Parker ties this sense of opening to the generative dynamics of *dilatatio* (*amplificatio*) in the following way: “the amplifying and prolonging of discourse – involves both an expansion and an opening up, the creation of more copious speech through the explication, or unfolding, of a brief or closed, hermetic ‘sentence’” (“Dilation and Delay” 520).<sup>7</sup> In the female body, the acts of consummation and delivery mirror this fecundity of speech; and with the opening and expanding of the Word of God, the Church, “the bride of Christ,” comes to fruition.<sup>8</sup> *Dilatatio*, then, is a female phenomenon that emerges as a gendered discursive strategy. Parker connects *dilatatio* to the two symbolic “orifices” in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which evoke “expansion to take in a multiplicity of members [...] and the propagation, through the mouth, of the Word” (*Literary Fat Ladies* 9). Parker’s interlacing the expansion of speech with the feminine body, its opening and closing through orifices, provides a lens through which to conceive Dentièrre’s *Epistre*.

In her Dedication to Marguerite de Navarre, Dentièrre sets the stage for the dilated utterance of the Reformed faith and women’s duty to actively declare its message. In the following passage, Dentièrre clarifies that her letter is not only written with Marguerite herself in mind, but for all women:

Non seuleme[n]t pour vois, ma dame, ay voulu escrire ceste Epistre: mais aussi pour donner courage auz aultres femmes detenues en captivité: affin q[ue]lles ne craignent point d’estre deschassées de leurs pays, para[n]ts & amys, come moy, pour la parole de Dieu. Et principalement pour les paouvres femmelletes, desirans sçavoir et entendre la verité. (a3)

Dentièrre evokes the image of women in captivity (“detenues en captivité”), constrained by false doctrine and religious male authorities that inhibit their quest for truth and freedom. As a victim of such oppression herself (“come moy”), driven out of France for her conversion, Dentièrre elevates the freedom that is found in true faith by being exposed to God’s true word in Scripture. This liberating quality of Dentièrre’s *Epistre* evokes the female body in its opening (*dilatatio*) to receive truth, but to also propagate the message by word of mouth.

It is also significant that Dentièrre employs the diminutive term, *femmelette*, to describe the distinctly female audience of the *Epistre* (Head). This term possesses a filial connotation, as Dentièrre takes on a maternal role, nurturing these “paouvres femmelletes” in their pursuit of truth. Kemp and Desrosiers-Bonin have also brought to light the longer dedication in a second copy of the *Epistre*, where Dentièrre states the following additional purposes of her letter:

pour donner courage à ma petite fille vostre fillole de donner aux Imprimeurs une petite gram[m]aire hebraïque qu’elle a faict en fra[n]çoys à l’utilité &

proffit dés aultres petites filles. Et principaleme[n]t pour ma Dame la Princesses vostre fille. (Kemp and Desrosiers-Bonin 120)

Dentière mentions a short Hebrew grammar book that her own daughter had intentionally prepared for Marguerite's daughter, Jeanne d'Albret.<sup>9</sup> From these supplementary lines, it appears that Marguerite de Navarre was the godmother of Dentière's daughter, and that Dentière played a similar role to Jeanne d'Albret. With the generation of women to come in mind, Dentière concludes her Dedication by restating the principal means of her writing Marguerite: "Qui est la cause principale, ma Dame, qu[i] m[']a esmeu à vous escrire, espera[n]t en Dieu, que doresnavant les femmes ne sero[n]t plus tant mesprisées comme par le passé" (a3). Dentière strives for a paradigm shift regarding women's place in the Church: Dentière promotes women's voices, including her own, in the unfolding formation of the Protestant faith. It is upon this basis that I consider Dentière's *Epistre* to be an example of *dilatatio* as a feminized widening of speech that foreshadows the Kingdom of God, in which women have equal standing with men and are free to proclaim the Gospel without restraint.

### Dentière in Strasbourg and Geneva

While her later years were spent in various regions of what is known today as Switzerland, Dentière's noble origins can be traced to Tournai, France, where she entered an Augustinian convent whose order was open to religious reform.<sup>10</sup> Although the exact time of her conversion is unknown, we are certain that Dentière fully embraced Protestantism when she left for Strasbourg and married her first husband, Simon Robert in 1520, whose death in 1533 left Dentière a widow and mother of five children (Wengler 147-48). Dentière soon married another reformer, Antoine Froment,<sup>11</sup> who was working for the reformist cause in Geneva at the time. In Geneva, Dentière sought to convert the sisters still 'confined' in the cloisters to the Protestant faith. Her loudest campaign was in the convent of Saint Clare, where Jeanne de Jussie (1503-1561), the order's eventual abbess, recorded the tumultuous nature of the Protestant Reformation in her *Petite chronique* (1611).<sup>12</sup> At one point, Jussie directly criticizes Dentière: "En celle compagnie avoit une moienne, abbess, faulce, ridé, et langue diabolique, ayant mary et enfant, nommée marie d'entiere de picardie, qui se mesloit de prescher et pervertir les gens de devotion" (238). Jussie's staggering portrayal of such "langue diabolique" emphasizes Dentière's preaching as a profane intrusion into the sacred walls of Saint Clare.

Dentière was also met with criticism from her fellow reformers, such as Calvin, who, in a letter to Farel in 1546, writes the following: "I'm going to tell you a funny story. Froment's wife [Dentière] came here recently; in all the taverns, at almost all the street corners, she began to harangue against long garments."<sup>13</sup> Calvin's denigrating tone towards Dentière targets her speech, both the content and public context of her "harangue." Calvin was particularly offended by Dentière's derisive comment that mockingly equated Calvin and Farel with Catholic ministers, who wore long garments. In the early years of her career, Dentière's explicit criticisms of church leaders, combined with an overt

call for women to preach in the *Epistre*, led to city officials' seizure of copies of the *Epistre* and imprisonment of its printer (Douglass 240). The negative repercussions associated with the dissemination of Dentièr's *Epistre* lend credence to its status as an integral artifact of *le bruit des femmes* in the early modern context.

### Dentièr's Prophetic Voice

It is clear from the *Epistre* that Dentièr considered herself a prophetess. For Sujin Pak, Dentièr's use of language and tone imitates the Old Testament prophets; and Dentièr's placing "her ministry and her language within a biblical prophetic pattern of rebuke, call to repentance and hope of restoration" reinforces her prophetic self-identification (107, 110). The movement embedded in this prophetic progression (rebuke-repentance-restoration) provides a further contour to the notion of *dilatatio*, as the prophetic voice exposes and expands divine truth through the discursive act of rebuke.

Dentièr opens her Dedication to Marguerite de Navarre by including Marguerite in a collective comprised of women who are in earnest pursuit of divine truth. Dentièr writes, in the opening line:

Tout ainsi ma treshonnorée Dame, que les vrayz amateurs de verité desirant  
sçavoir et entendre comment ilz doibvent vivre à ce temps si dangereux: aussi  
nous femmes, debvons sçavoir fuyr et eviter toutes erreurs, heresies, et faulces  
doctrines. (a2)

Dentièr aligns herself and Marguerite de Navarre, as well as all women ("nous femmes"), with those who are true lovers of truth—"les vrayz amateurs de verité"—a phrase whose very structure reinforces the wedded task of truth and love, by literally enveloping the lover ("amateur") with truth through the bookends of "vrai" and "vérité." However, as a result of proclaiming these truths, the prophet is often shunned. Dentièr considers this rejection later, in the Epistle proper, when she aligns herself with marginalized women: "Ilz sont tant de docteurs, tant de sages, tant de grans clers, tant d'universitez contre nous paovres femmes, que sommes reiectées et mesprisées de tout le mode" (b2). Dentièr numbers herself among the poor women who have experienced rejection at the hands of men in powerful positions.

Moreover, Dentièr perceives her own context of religious conflict as similar to biblical paradigms where dissension and corruption reign. In the Epistle proper, Dentièr adopts the imperative tone and even adopts the voice of Christ (*prosopopoeia*) to speak more directly to Marguerite: "Soyes doncques veilla[n]tz et prestz en tribulation [...] Car pour les esleuz les iours seront abbregez. [J]e le vous ay predict, s'ilz m'ont persecute, aussi vous persecuteront ilz" (a5v). Dentièr borrows verbatim the words of Christ from passages throughout the New Testament. For example, in the Gospel of Luke, Christ warns his disciples the following: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you [...] and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony" (Luke 21.11-13). In

her concluding thoughts to Marguerite, Dentièrre adopts an apocalyptic tone as she conveys, emphatically, the dire circumstances of both Catholic and Protestant church leaders in Geneva. Dentièrre's final words give the impression that the apocalypse is at hand, as Dentièrre exclaims

La fin certes est venue sus mon peuple [...] Et les marchas d'icelle ploureront  
et larmoyerot sus la gra[n]de Babylone disans, malheur, malheur à icelle, elle  
est cheute la grande Babylone, et est faicte habitation des Diables. (d8)

Referring to the Church of Rome as the "Great Babylon," Dentièrre paraphrases the following verse from Revelation, "They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, 'Alas! Alas! Thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come'" (Revelation 18.10). The interlacement between prophetic and apocalyptic language suits Dentièrre's mission, which is to proclaim truth and point to God in the midst of what she perceives to be the end of days.

Throughout the *Epistre*, Dentièrre's prophetic voice also reveals truths that are difficult to understand. We can consider this revealing movement as an act of opening, which enriches our understanding of *dilatatio* as a feminine discursive strategy. For Dentièrre, everyone, especially women, to whom God has conveyed his truth, should declare it. In the Dedication, Dentièrre challenges women's silence in light of divine revelation: "Si Dieu do[n]cqs a faict graces à aulcunes bones femmes, leur revela[n]t par ses sai[n]ctes scriptures, quelque chose faicte et bon[n]e: ne posero[n]t elles escrire, dire, ou declairer les unes aux aultres?" (a5). Dentièrre responds to this question in the conclusion to the Defense of Women, where she alludes to the dynamic between hiding and revealing the talents that God has given to certain people to publicly proclaim the Gospel: "A, ce seroit trop hardiement fait les vouloir epescher: et à nous faict trop follement de cacher le talent que dieu nous a don[n]é: que nous doit grace de persévérer jusqu'à la fin" (a5). In essence, Dentièrre argues that it is foolish to hide the talent that God generously gives ("et à nous faict trop follement de cacher le talent que dieu nous a don[n]é"). For Dentièrre, women are under obligation to utilize the talents, including preaching, teaching, and writing, which God has given to them.

While the word "talent" conjures up Christ's Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25,<sup>14</sup> Carol Thysell has noted that the early modern usage of the word "talent" conveyed a sense of "natural ability or a mental endowment," as opposed to the biblical use of the term *talanton*, which originally connoted a monetary value (11). From the patristic period through the medieval eras, however, as Thysell also reminds us, *talanton* was interpreted allegorically to mean the office of the preacher who had been entrusted with communicating the Gospel (11). As such, "talent" eventually came to be understood as shorthand for the Gospel itself, which necessarily incorporated the responsibility to communicate it through evangelistic efforts. With such an understanding of the term, Dentièrre's use of "talent" justifies her burden to share the Gospel, which she views as "la pure parolle de Dieu"—a phrase that appears throughout the

*Epistre*, but most predominantly in the Epistle proper, the heart of the text (b2-3). Dentièrre's act of revealing divine truth, however, does not serve private devotional purposes; rather, Dentièrre's words are laden with communal implications. In Thysell's words, "Dentièrre's argument was that, when the talents of women are hidden, the community's well-being is threatened because the word of God goes unheard" (14). While Dentièrre's assertion of her individual giftedness in revealing the word of God no doubt undergirds her defense, her emphasis on the corporate aspect of hearing the Gospel bolsters her right to declare what God has made comprehensible to her through Scripture.

Dentièrre's revelation of divine truth aims to edify believers and evince true faith, which comes through the hearing of Scripture (*fides ex auditu*). In the following passage, Dentièrre emphasizes the unseen and hidden aspect of faith, instructed by the "parole de Dieu":

La foy donc et l'esperit de Dieu habita[n]t en nous, nous enseigne[n]t cecy par la parole de Dieu [...] et le baptesme pris en foy est appellé renouvellement de vie en la mort de Iesus Christ, p[a]rce qu'il signifie la regeneratio[n] et renovatio[n] interieure et spirituelle. (b3)

Dentièrre repeatedly gestures towards an internalized faith that must first be brought under the purifying water of Christ's death, which is illustrated through the image of baptism ("baptesme pris en foy"), before it can be wholly actualized in outward actions. Through the sonorous string of expressions, "renouvellement de vie," and "la regeneratio[n] et renovatio[n] interieure et spirituelle," Dentièrre celebrates the revitalizing force that Christ gives to those who believe. As a zealous proponent of reformed doctrine, Dentièrre magnifies the crucial role of faith (*Sola Fide*) in the working out of one's salvation. Dentièrre's words become instrumental in revealing and opening (*dilatatio*) the work of God within one's soul to others as a means to reproduce living faith.

### Embodying the 'Prescheresse'

Dentièrre's proclamation of the Gospel culminates in her explicit defense of female preaching. Dentièrre's *Epistre* summons the energetic interchange between a preacher and the congregation or audience, as many sermons were not only preached in churches, but also other public spaces (i.e. street corners, taverns, and other public forums). We must also keep in mind the centrality of the Word, the "verbe, *sermo*, and *loquela Dei*," in early modern discourse. According to Gérard Defaux, "S'ouvrir à cette Parole, l'accueillir et la loger en soi, l'assimiler, s'imprégner d'elle et la faire sienne, se faire enfin disciple de la 'Philosophie du Christ'" (14). Even in Defaux's description, the use of feminine bodily imagery ("s'imprégner") to describe the dissemination of the *Parole de Dieu* lends itself to reading the *Epistre* through the lens of *dilatatio*. Furthermore, Cynthia Skenazi describes Dentièrre's preaching as exemplary of the symbiosis between the divine word of God (*Verbe*) and the rest of the community, as the sermon was not aimed towards private devotional reader, but for a large gathering of people.<sup>15</sup> As such, Dentièrre's task of preaching becomes integral in



the formation and consolidation of the female spiritual community through the abundance of the spoken word (*sermo*) throughout the *Epistre*.

Dentière begins to build her argument in favor of female preachers in the “Defense of Women,” where, after listing several biblical exemplary women (*exempla*), Dentière praises the Samaritan woman for her public proclamation of Christ:

Quelle prescheresse a esté faicte plus grande que la Samaritaine: laquelle n’a point eu d’honte de prescher Iesus et sa parolle, le confessant ouuerteme[n]t devant tout le monde, incontinent qu’elle a entendu de Iesus qu’il faut adorer Dieu en esperit et verité? (a4)

Dentière confers an elevated status to the example of the Samaritan woman whose encounter with Christ, as recounted in John 4, results in her returning to her city and declaring the following to her people: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4.29). While her sermon was simple, the Samaritan woman preached after having heard the “parole” of Christ. The present participial form of “confessant” also expands the Samaritan woman’s confession as an ongoing act that applies to Dentière’s contemporary context. In his analysis of the *Paraphrases on the New Testament* (1517-1524), Reinier Leushuis notes how Erasmus emphasizes the “spoken word of the living Jesus,” as containing the power to affect hearts. Leushuis claims that the gospel text for Erasmus, and many others, possessed “the capacity to transform our inner self by the presence of God as incarnated in the text (or ‘inverbation’)” (93). Likewise, the passage from the *Epistre* orients our attention to the Samaritan woman’s simple sermon, replete with oral and aural communicative qualities, which elaborates this affective power.

Dentière goes on to remind Marguerite of Mary Magdalene, who witnessed the resurrection of Christ, and then proceeded to tell the other disciples: “Ou est celuy qui se peut vanter d’avoir eu la premiere manifestation de ce grad mystere de la resurrection de Iesus, sinon Marie Magdaleine?” (a4). Mary Magdalene’s vocal proclamation of the resurrection ushered her into a pivotal role in the unfolding story of Christianity, which also links her to Rahab, in our conception of *dilatatio*. Dentière views herself, accordingly, as a member of this female line of prophetesses and *prescheresses*—mouthpieces for God who boldly proclaim the truth to others. Dentière proceeds to dilate on how God revealed himself to other women: “Et les aultres femmes auxq[ue]lles plustost s’est decliré par son Ange, que non pas aux hom[m]es, et comment de le, dire, prescher, et declairer aux aultres?” (a4). As a response to God’s revelation, these women are commanded to tell, preach, and declare divine truths to others. The grouping of three speaking verbs (“dire,” “prescher,” “declairer”) reinforces Dentière’s message: as an act of obedience to God, women have been and will continue to be called upon to publicly proclaim the Gospel.

Dentière’s preaching comes to a climax towards the end of the Epistle proper where she finally responds to Marguerite’s initial request concerning the dismissal of Calvin and Farel in Geneva. Due to their banishment, Dentière

assumes the responsibility of preaching: “Car [j]e prescheray, [j]e endoctrineray, [j]e baillayeray bon exemple, [j]’en feray des biens, retirant les paovres frères persecutez” (c8). The repetitive use of the future tense adds a palpable weightiness to Dentièrè’s words. To add to her authoritative tone, Dentièrè’s choice of verbs intensifies the oral and public nature of her message to come. “Prescheray” clearly defines Dentièrè’s mode of oration and communication, which puts her on par with male preachers in the Protestant faith. “Endoctrineray” alludes to the theological and doctrinal discourse embedded within the *Epistre*, which is directed towards a specific public, the Church at large, including women. Bearing in mind my discussion of *dilatatio* and women’s theological and religious speech, these verbs shed light on Dentièrè’s commitment to set a good example for others of how to boldly proclaim the Gospel by word of mouth.

### Conclusion

In sum, I have sought to elucidate aspects of Dentièrè’s metaphorical voice in her *Epistre* through the rhetorical lens of *dilatatio* as well as in her emphasis of spoken word, which engenders true conversion and the public declaration of the Gospel. Dentièrè’s message, amplified by her prophetic voice, culminates in her self-identification as *prescheresse*, which transforms the *Epistre* from an informative letter into a fully-fledged sermon. We can thus conceive of Dentièrè as the embodiment of *dilatatio* in the fullest sense: as both a woman who fully embraced the Protestant vision for women and a wife and mother who procreated, increased, and multiplied humanity itself, Dentièrè expands the Gospel to not only defend her fellow male reformers, but to also broadcast the Protestant message for all, especially women.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I will alternate between this shortened title and *Epistre*, in lieu of the full title, *Epistre tres utile faite et composée par une femme Chrestienne de Tornay, Envoyée à la Royne de Navarre seur du Roy de France, Contre les Turcz, Iuifz, Infideles, Faulx chrestiens, Anabaptistes, et Lutheriens*.

<sup>2</sup> Kingdon (68-69) provides a detailed account of Farel’s and Calvin’s involvement in the conception of Geneva’s Reformed Church and later expulsion by the Council of Two Hundred.

<sup>3</sup> Denommé provides an extensive analysis on Dentièrè’s “vision théologique” in the *Epistre* (179-97).

<sup>4</sup> Irena Backus argues that the *Epistre* consistently demonstrates “un féminisme nettement plus radical que celui des autres auteurs féminins de l’époque” (182).

<sup>5</sup> See Joshua 2 and 6:17-25 for the story of Rahab.

<sup>6</sup> All quotes from Dentièrè are referenced with the quires and gatherings of the Gérard edition.

<sup>7</sup> *Dilatio*, in this sense, evokes the Renaissance understanding of *copia*, elaborated in Erasmus' *De copia* (1509-1514), which outlines the practice of expanding speech or text without losing control of the subject. As Terence Cave observes, *copia* is "designed to release the movement of discourse rather than to master it" (xiv). When understood as the generation of discourse, *copia* and *dilatio* share a discursive fertility that corresponds with gendered literary analysis.

<sup>8</sup> While the expression, "the bride of Christ," is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, in Ephesians 5:24-27, Paul employs the marriage relationship to describe Christ's relationship to the Church: "As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

<sup>9</sup> Kemp and Desrosiers-Bonin include this passage, taken from a3r-a3v, of the only other surviving copy of the *Epistre* located in the Bibliothèque Mazarine (Rés. 25543) (118-20).

<sup>10</sup> Most biographical information comes from McKinley, "Introduction" and Wengler.

<sup>11</sup> McKinley has noted the likely collaboration between Dentièrre and her husband due to a punning reference to his name, *froment* [wheat], towards the end of the *Epistre* (note 71, 87).

<sup>12</sup> Wengler informs us that the 1611 edition of Jussie's work should not be confused with the later edition in 1865, under the misleading title, *Le Levain du calvinisme*, as this was based on a faulty manuscript (86).

<sup>13</sup> I have taken this portion of Calvin's letter from McKinley ("Introduction" 19, note 37), who has modified Bonnet's translation (Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin*, 2, pp. 70-1). The original letter, written in Latin, can be found in *Ioannis Calvini opera*, vol. 12, no. 824, cols. 377-78.

<sup>14</sup> See Matthew 25.14-30, "The Parable of the Talents."

<sup>16</sup> Skenazi sees early modern culture as "fondée sur le respect du Verbe": "comment en effet séparer l'*homo religiosus* de l'*homo loquens*? [...] La parole reçue et transmise constitue le fondement même d'une telle conception religieuse; c'est elle qui établit le lien avec le divin et réunit la communauté" (9).

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