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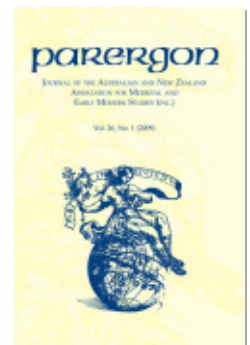
*A Protestant Purgatory: Theological Origins of the  
Penitentiary Act, 1779 (review)*

Marcus Harmes

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most interesting sections on iconography and iconology the authors have used many contemporary works of art as comparative material.

This book combines meticulous research with convincing argument and fascinating discussion. It is lavishly illustrated with numerous illustrations, most of which are in colour. These display the mosaics with many details of their beautiful materials, as well as early depictions of them, and comparable works of art mostly from the sixth or seventh centuries. Printed in two volumes, the abundant illustrations are well organized and easily accessible, while reading the text.

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**Throness**, Laurie, *A Protestant Purgatory: Theological Origins of the Penitentiary Act, 1779*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008; hardback; pp. ix, 379; R.R.P. £65.00; ISBN 9780754663928.

Laurie Throness' new survey of the late eighteenth-century Penitentiary Act stands apart from much of the existing literature on English criminal justice history by virtue of its focus on the religious underpinnings to legislation and penal practice. The work makes several claims to originality. Firstly, Throness has adduced his arguments from a wide body of under-examined sources, including poetry and music. From this evidence he has drawn conclusions as to the religious origins of the Penitentiary Act, a point he argues is overlooked in much existing scholarly literature on eighteenth-century English legal history.

To substantiate these claims, Throness' text ranges far beyond legal history, reconstructing a religious and mystical context in eighteenth-century England in order to make sense of the religious influences on the Act. He explains the cultural parameters in Georgian England that placed God as supreme in Church and State. Throness pays particular attention to the coronation of King George III in 1761, inferring from the words and rituals of that ceremony the King's status as God's vicegerent (p. 18). Some of these points of course have already been widely acknowledged in existing surveys. However, other points, including the concurrences between Protestant conceptions of cells and hermitages and imprisonment, cover new ground (p. 234).

Based on this reading of the Act's cultural context, Throness reconstructs what he asserts are strongly religious resonances not only in the Penitentiary

Act but also in English penal practice in general. One task of this book is to explain the origin of the idea of a Penitentiary. Throness reads into solitary confinement the notion of the eye of God being placed on the prisoner (p. 295). He further stresses that the idea of a Penitentiary Act allowed for reflection and prayer, even while undertaking hard labour.

Throness' text takes this reading further, stressing not simply the religious context of the Act, but its explicitly Protestant context. In the absence of any Protestant conceptions of Purgatory, Throness argues that penitentiaries were intended to enforce redemptive practices through labour as much as prayer and sorrowful reflection (p. 296). Again these ideas are placed in a theological context that justified incarceration and lengthy penitence. Throness shows that a major subject for theological explanation was Christ's promise to the crucified prisoner that 'Today shalt thou be with me in paradise', and the necessity for divines to show this swift redemption as a one-off miracle (p. 262).

The emphasis on Protestantism in Throness' title indicates a theme which informs this argument in general and especially his reading of Anglican doctrine in this period. According to Throness, the origins and purpose of the English Penitentiaries can be meaningfully interpreted within these cultural parameters. He reads contemporary thought as viewing notions of purgatory as harmful in the salvific sense and reconstructs Protestant opinions that the idea of purgatory could actively endanger souls through adherence to a doctrinal error. Thus, the English penitentiaries were intended to take the place of purgatory, allowing the penitent an earthly venue for reflection and moral repair.

This text's major claim to originality lies in its interpretation of the religious underpinnings of the Act. In particular, Throness stresses the novelty of his argument that God permeated multiple aspects of eighteenth-century thought and conduct and that the Church of England, rather than dissenting congregations and ministers, was largely responsible for the spiritual underpinnings of the Penitentiary Act and associated activities, such as the promotion of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners (p. 206).

In both these cases his claims to originality can stretch a little thin. Earlier studies, such as that of Jeremy Gregory, have for some time now pushed against the received wisdom of the eighteenth-century Church of England as somnambulant and pastorally insipid. Likewise, extensive studies of the Long Reformation, including its manifestations into the eighteenth century, make it seem all the less surprising to finding a preoccupation with divine justice

as infusing the terms of eighteenth-century political activity. Nonetheless, in other points Throness offers original arguments for the spiritual prominence of the Church of England in this time, pointing out for example that Methodist preachers such as George Whitefield were not yet widely known at the time the Act was prepared.

Exacting standards of scholarship underpin this work and this is an important new contribution to an act of Parliament but more generally to explaining a political and religious *milieu* set upon the saving of souls on Protestant terms. The work is richly detailed with resources from print and manuscript collections. It comfortably and cogently surveys a range of themes relating to criminal justice and ecclesiastical history.

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**Tutino, S.**, *Law and Conscience: Catholicism in Early Modern England, 1570-1625* (Catholic Christendom, 1300-1700), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007; hardback; pp. xiii, 256; R.R.P. £55.00; ISBN 9780754657712.

A burgeoning area of study for the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries for the British Isles has been the re-examination of the historical trope of early modern Protestantism being an automatic response to the abuses and excess of Roman Catholicism. Recent historical enquiry has charted a less clear-cut division between Catholicism and Protestantism, and questioned whether the Reformation can really be understood as a break that signified a Catholic past and heralded a Protestant future. Gradually the narrative of polar opposition has been challenged and replaced by more subtle and sophisticated critiques of contemporary discourses concerning power, religion (both Protestantism and Catholicism), and politics. Complex and conflicting polemical debates flourished in the religious upheaval of post-Reformation society.

Stefania Tutino's study 'aims to analyse and interpret the relationship between religion and politics in English Catholic thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (p. 1), from the decade after the Elizabethan Church Settlement until the death of James VI & I. This 'temporal arc', as Tutino calls it, 'allows us to discern and isolate a parenthesis in English religious history that is necessary for grasping the outcomes, uncertainties, and gains