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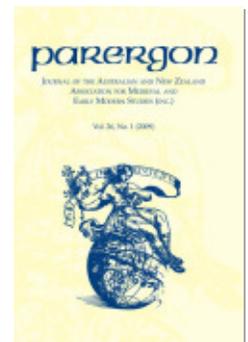
Adaptations of Calvinism in Reformation Europe: Essays in Honour of Brian G. Armstrong (review)

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A useful introduction by the editor David Carlson sets the narrative of the events in 1399 in their full context, starting with the political crises of 1386 when a ‘Commission of Government’ imposed parliamentary supervision on King Richard. While narrating the events over fifteen years – from Richard’s conflict with the Commission to his forced abdication – Carlson also points to those events where ‘causality and chronology become murky’ (p. 2). By this he means especially the chronology of Richard’s negotiations with royal justices over the possibility of charging members of the Commission *tanquam proditores* (as if they had committed treason).

The events of Richard’s reign were narrated and received commentary in contemporary and later chronicles, including those of Adam Usk and Henry Knighton. But as Carlson points out, the document of 1399, while having a title that implies its contents is a narrative or a chronicle, should more properly be considered a record of ‘parliamentary process-enactment’ (p. 6).

This distinction is important to understanding the content and style of the work. As a record of contemporary parliamentary process rather than a monastic chronicle, the work could have been intended for oral delivery, albeit from a written source. Carlson’s rigorous and detailed orthographic study makes clear the rhythmic pattern to the text. Carlson’s commentary also demonstrates the literary qualities of a text that emerged from a literary milieu which included both Chaucer and Gower.

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Holt, Mack P., ed., *Adaptations of Calvinism in Reformation Europe: Essays in Honour of Brian G. Armstrong* (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007; hardback; pp. 266; 1 b/w illustration; R.R.P. £60.00; ISBN 9780754651499.

This is a wide-ranging study of the spread of Calvinist ecclesiology and doctrine throughout northern Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Attention is given to the adaptations of Calvinism to the religious and constitutional circumstances in Geneva, France, the Netherlands and the British Isles. It comprises thirteen articles discussing Calvinism in these different centres of reformed practice.

This is not the first study to interpret the wide-ranging understandings of Calvinism throughout Europe and Britain and like others, it too follows the earlier survey edited by Menna Prestwich.

Overall the essays are intellectually united by their attempts to push against the earlier views of John T. McNeill, who viewed the spread of Calvinism from Zurich and Geneva as its ‘fragmentation’. Instead these chapters promote and endorse more positive visions of the spread of Calvinism. They argue for confessional diversity and meaningful adaptation to local circumstances, repudiating earlier scholarly arguments for the inherent inferiority of Calvinism outside of the cities of its origins.

To this end, the different chapters chart the emergence of distinctive patterns of Calvinism, whether taken up at the magisterial or monarchical level. For example, Daniel J. Steere’s chapter on the life of Bishop Joseph Hall offers fresh insights to the intersection of Calvinism and episcopacy, finding Calvinism in an unexpected location, at the court of Charles I.

In keeping with the major intentions of this collection, Steere declines to view a Calvinist bishop as adhering to a debased form of episcopacy and instead locates in Hall an adaptation of Calvinism to Erastian, episcopal and monarchical circumstances.

Other chapters in this collection indicate the scholarly complexity of viewing any particular manifestation of Calvinism as authoritative or definitive. Robert M. Kingdom’s essay on the Jacques Royer affair, a French religious controversy of the early seventeenth century, makes clear that Calvinists could all draw on Calvin’s writings or his actual practices, and still arrive at different conclusions regarding ecclesiology from this evidence.

As a tribute to the American scholar Brian G. Armstrong, this collection succeeds in illuminating the richness of Calvinist belief and practice in a Europe which scholars increasingly recognise as confessionalised.

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