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Jonathan M. Yeager. *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life and Thought of John Erskine.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 336 pp. $74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-977255-1.

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Evangelicalism, Orthodoxy, and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Scotland

John Erskine (1721-1803) was a leading minister in the Church of Scotland during an age when the established church's monopolistic control of the nation's religious and intellectual life was being challenged both by secessionist movements and by the corrosive ideological forces of Enlightenment and evangelicalism. These last two constitute the seemingly incongruous pairing in the title of Jonathan Yeager's new intellectual biography of Scotland's most influential and respected evangelical-minded establishment minister. And established he was, born into one of Scotland's most powerful landed families and eventually becoming a laird himself with church livings in his pocket, though unlike the better-known Moderates of his generation he elected to join the Popular Party, which vehemently opposed the exercise of landed patronage in church appointments. Unlike the famous evangelicals of his age, John Wesley and George Whitefield, Erskine never challenged the privileges of the established clergy. And unlike William Robertson, his opposite number as unofficial leader of the Moderate Party, Erskine lacked the cunning of a natural politician, unable to match his friendly antagonist's ability to organize friends and persuade enemies to support his policies. In recent years, we have seen excellent studies of Robertson and the Moderates, most notably Richard Sher's groundbreaking *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (1985), but little of comparable scholarly weight on the so-called Evangelical or Popular Party in Scotland. John McIntosh's *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland* (1998) has come closest to redressing this imbalance, but is not easy to find and makes challenging reading for someone new to the field of eighteenth-century religious thought. Yeager's more accessible study of a single figure, published by a major academic press, is thus a welcome addition to this growing area of scholarly interest.

Yeager's monograph, a revised version of a Stirling dissertation prepared under the supervision of David Bebbington, is a well-researched and nicely documented study of an evangelical who anchored an extensive literary network that reached across the Atlantic and even onto the Continent. Like Bebbington's excellent *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), Yeager finds more affinities than differences between the rising evangelical movement (beginning in Scotland with the 1740s Cambuslang revival) and the burgeoning critical and cultural movement of the Enlightenment, noting the high regard of both for experience as a foundation of rational belief. Yeager is right to note that, since Peter Gay's classic interpretation of the 1960s, Enlightenment scholars have discovered a broad spectrum of enlightenments, though his claim that the evangelical Erskine "operated within the Early-to-High, Moderate, and Metaphysical Enlightenment" (p. 19) may be more confusing than helpful to the uninitiated. Yeager's Lockean "Early Enlightenment" bears scant resemblance to the radical, corrosive movements described by Ira Wade in the 1930s and by Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel more recently.

This may be because Yeager is more concerned than Bebbington to keep his evangelicals within the bounds of conventional Calvinist orthodoxy. He provides detailed coverage of Erskine's sermons and theological discourses, noting Erskine's defensiveness concerning the doctrines of a limited atonement–the Reformed belief that Christ died only for the elect–and the limited agency of man (pp. 101-102). Erskine deeply mistrusted the Arminian John Wesley, which highlights an important source of discord amongst eighteenth-century evangelicals (chapter 6). Yeager labors to keep Erskine consistently enlightened in his evangelicalism, stressing his notion "that belief is formed by sensory data, but that saving faith only comes by supernatural enlightenment" (p. 80). This suggests that Yeager wants Erskine to have it all, to be "both a progressive and conservative preacher" (p. 41),

and "a forward-looking, optimistic, evangelical Calvinist" (p. 87) without the tarnish of seventeenth-century gloom. His Erskine is at once orthodoxly Calvinist, progressively enlightened, and humanely evangelical, which is perhaps more than any one eighteenth-century figure can coherently bear. Yet Yeager seems convinced that Erskine successfully reconciled these three strands into a single, sturdy cord.

Yeager's book will certainly become required reading for a number of scholarly audiences. Students of the transatlantic and American evangelical movements will find a wealth of welcome information here, especially in chapter 7. Yeager does an excellent job of showing the workings of the transatlantic correspondence networks and particularly the profound debts owed to Erskine by British North Americans such as Jonathan Edwards for supplies of books unavailable or unaffordable in the colonies (many of which helped establish colonial college libraries), for connections to sympathetic audiences in the old world, and for publishing help with their own writings, notably Edwards's posthumous works, many edited and seen through the Scottish presses by Erskine himself. Erskine was also an outspoken defender of the Americans' political aspirations during and after the Revolutionary War. Students of the newly fashionable field of publishing history will also find a great deal of interesting material. Chapter 8, "The Disseminator," is one of Yeager's best, detailing Erskine's close associations with the Scottish publishing industry, which he used to disseminate his particular version of orthodox evangelicalism.

Yeager's book may face a tougher sell in the broader field of eighteenth-century Scottish studies, particularly among those working in the Scottish Enlightenment. We have long needed scholarly rigor applied to the group of ministers variously called "evangelicals," "high-flyers," or even "orthodox" (to distinguish them from the church's "moderate" or "enlightened" wing), and to no figure more than Erskine. But is Yeager entirely convincing that Erskine was as fully "enlightened" as better-known contemporaries such as David Hume and Robertson? That Erskine assimilated the empirical psychology of John Locke is clear, but that he fully absorbed the Enlightenment's commitment to toleration and dialogue is less so. During the "No-Popery" scare of 1778-80, he followed the majority of his church in stridently opposing relief for Roman Catholics from repressive laws in force since the Glorious Revolution, though Scottish Catholics were neither numerous nor politically significant. Yeager recognizes this as an anomaly in Erskine's enlightened stance and defends him on the grounds that Locke likewise opposed toleration of Catholics for security reasons. But toleration arguments had moved on since the late seventeenth century and there were a few courageous Scottish ministers, notably George Campbell, who risked their safety and standing by defending relief proposals against the chauvinism of the Scottish majority. Nor is it entirely convincing that Erskine's scholarly interests made him an enlightened "polymath" (p. 110); perhaps if he had taken a keener interest in such enlightened topics as botany, taxonomy, the origin of languages, or educational reform, Yeager's case would be more convincing. Most of Erskine's interests were well within the parameters of study required of any Scottish minister to pass his licensing exams.

Nor is it clear that Yeager has thrown a great deal of additional light on the problem of how eighteenth-century Scottish evangelicals reconciled their newfound revivalist fervor to preach the gospel to everyone with the lingering Calvinist hostility to the possibility of universal salvation. Most enlightened Christians in Scotland (the "moderates") took a more generous view of human nature and of man's capacity to realize the Christian life through his own efforts, a view at least implicitly shared by many English evangelicals. But the adherents of the Popular Party had to juggle more disparate goals, some standing for the defense of creedal orthodoxy (with no particular commitment to popular revivalism), some for social egalitarianism (in their opposition to church patronage or in their sympathy for America), and some for evangelical missions (which could dispense with an established church altogether). Evangelical-minded chroniclers of the Scottish church have long disparaged the Moderates for being loose in doctrine and unconcerned for the spiritual life of their congregations. But it was perhaps not until after the Disruption of 1843 that so-called evangelicals began to believe they could have it all, old-fashioned orthodoxy together with new-fangled populist outreach. With regard to the eighteenth century, it is less clear that the elite aspirations of the Enlightenment could be so easily aligned with popular evangelicalism, or even that evangelical outreach could be reconciled with traditional Calvinist orthodoxy or the preference of some Scots to remain a covenanted people. Historians of the eighteenth century need better to disentangle the competing and perhaps incompatible aspirations found between and even within the Scottish church parties. There is little doubt that Erskine had a "passion for orthodoxy" (p. 72) and that he sympathized as Moderates did not with revivalism, but it is questionable whether he successfully fused these two ambitions together, never mind with the Enlightenment.

Jonathan Yeager is to be highly commended for beginning to address these problems (see pp. 74-77) and for setting a new standard for scholarly discussion of neglected evangelicals such as Erskine, who is of interest both to historians of the eighteenth century and to modern evangelicals trying to find the roots of their movement. Yeager's writing style and choice of topics suggests that he is deliberately engaging the latter group. Those who study the Scottish Enlightenment are by now used to the idea that many of its leading practitioners were sincere Christians and devoted servants of the established church, though they may be less convinced that Erskine had much more than a foot inside the Enlightenment, whatever it may have been.

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