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Dewey D. Wallace Jr. *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 368 pp. $74.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-974483-1.

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The Evolution of English Calvinism after the Restoration

Few historians would deny that Reformed or Calvinist theology dominated English Christianity from the reign of Elizabeth I until the end of the Commonwealth. Conversely, it has often been suggested that Calvinism went into steep decline in the period after the Restoration, a decline from which it was not rescued until the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. This view has recently been questioned, at least with regard to the established church in England. Now, Dewey D. Wallace Jr. has broadened and enriched that rebuttal with a compelling study of seven significant post-Restoration theologians: *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714.* What makes Wallace's study particularly worthwhile is that he has looked not simply for points of continuity between the Calvinism of the Restoration period and its earlier manifestations, but also for areas of theology where the Calvinist tradition evolved and developed in response to the particular intellectual and cultural environment of the later Stuart period. As a result, in Wallace's handling of it, English Calvinism is shown to be an open and fruitful intellectual tradition.

Wallace opens his work with an extended presentation of the early Enlightenment intellectual environment and the particular problems that it raised for Calvinist theology. Wallace notes the growing respect for reason in theological discussion and the rise of experimental science as a tool for understanding the material world. He then touches on the particular challenges presented for Calvinists–and indeed for all orthodox Christians–by publicly expressed Deism, atheism, and Socinianism. Wallace also underlines the growing problem for Calvinist writers of those who scoffed at the religious attitudes of devout Christians, or accused dissenters of enthusiasm. Having flagged up these aspects of contemporary culture at the outset, Wallace later uses them to analyze what, in each of the authors he examines, can be considered a response to the particular pressures of the post-Restoration environment.

Wallace's choice of subjects has been motivated by the wish to demonstrate the diversity of these responses. His book is not, therefore, and is not intended to be, a synthetic study of later Stuart Calvinism, but rather a series of essays, each of which introduces one or more authors who exemplify one of the trajectories that English Calvinism followed during this period. Taken together, the essays demonstrate both the diversity and flexibility of Calvinist thought, and its vitality at a time when it has often been presented as outmoded or moribund.

Wallace begins with Peter Sterry (1613-72). Building on studies that have pointed out the mystical element within early Puritan divinity, Wallace presents Sterry as a mystical theologian in the fullest sense of the term: a writer for whom the ultimate end of human existence lies in a contemplative union with God. He underlines the passionate flavor of Sterry's writing and his use of sensuous and even erotic imagery to describe the believer's relationship with Christ. At the same time, Wallace stresses the distinctively Calvinist elements within his thought. For Wallace, Sterry found an antidote to the rationalism and atheism of his day in the joyous rapture of mystical experience.

The next subject is Theophilus Gale (1628-79). Wallace shows him to have been unusual among Calvinists for his interest in "ancient theology." This was the search

for echoes of revealed truth in early pagan writing. Such study could be deployed to diminish the unique significance of biblical revelation, but Gale used it instead to argue that all echoes of this sort were ultimately derived from the Hebrew scriptures. In other words, his version of "ancient theology" was shaped by the orthodox Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, and intended to enhance rather than reduce the authority of the Bible.

With Joseph Alleine (1634-68), Wallace sees the emergence of an expression of Calvinism that anticipates the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. He notes Alleine's emphasis on the need for a felt conversion to the Christian faith, and sees this preoccupation with the reception of the gospel message, as opposed to the detailed contents of that message, as a transition between Puritanism and Evangelicalism. With Alleine, Calvinism moved away, Wallace contends, from anxieties about church government, and disputes about predestination or eschatology, to the focus on practical piety and religious experience which would mark the later Evangelical tradition.

Wallace then moves on to three authors–Richard Baxter (1615-91), William Bates (1625-99), and John Howe (1630-1705)–who responded to the contemporary rise of natural science and used the resources it provided to develop a Calvinist version of natural theology. Wallace relates their work to the growing prominence of natural theology among conforming English theologians, and sees, in their moderate and self-consciously rational expressions of Calvinism, a parallel to the Latitudinarian writers of the established church. At the same time, Wallace argues that they retained a distinctively Calvinist emphasis on the inner work of the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion, an emphasis he suggests was lacking among the Latitudinarians.

Finally Wallace turns his attention to John Edwards (1637-1716). Edwards is the only conformist who appears in the study, and is also the only writer who defiantly and repeatedly associated his work with the name of John Calvin. Wallace underlines that his voluminous writing was all directed to one end: namely, to demonstrate that Calvinism was the proper and historic theology of the established church, at a time when many conformists had abandoned it. Wallace notes how Edwards's polemical stance shaped his approach to theology, inclining him to denounce enthusiasm with particular fervor and encouraging him to make greater use of patristic authority than his dissenting contemporaries generally did.

This book makes a very welcome contribution to the study of post-Restoration theology. Wallace has demonstrated that English Calvinism remained an intellectual force to be reckoned with after 1662, and that its proponents were responding creatively to the intellectual environment of their day. He has also shown how dissent and conformity remained inextricably linked, both personally and theologically, long after the Great Ejection. Wallace's handling of each of the authors he studies is sympathetic, approachable, and engaging, and should provide encouragement for further research into their work. He is, perhaps, a little less sure-footed in his approach to the established church, engaging in one or two questionable generalizations about conformist attitudes and theology. However, since the majority of his subjects are dissenters, and the one conformist was a rather eccentric one, this does not undermine the work as a whole. Anyone interested in the fate of Calvinism between the Commonwealth and the Evangelical revival will want to read this book.

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