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## REASON, RELIGION AND REVIVAL

Gordon Rupp's last major work, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Clarendon Press 1986, 584pp £45), one of some twenty proposed volumes in *The Oxford History of the Christian Church*, lightly moves over the history of British religious developments following 'the Glorious Revolution', with profound insight and ready wit. This is vintage Rupp: only a Methodist could write so enthusiastically of the eighteenth century, only an ecumenically-committed Methodist so sympathetically of the established Church's difficulties in these troubled years. Ending in 1791, the year of John Wesley's death, it omits the last decade of the century when prayer-backed missionary vision brought new life to Baptist churches.

A suggestive pen-portrait of Baptist life (p.128-138) barely takes their story beyond the Hanoverian succession by which time 'the Baptists had simmered down'. Tantalizingly allusive (with many

allusions not fully worked out), Rupp teasingly raises questions of fundamental importance: we could wish for extended answers and analysis sustained over the whole century. Appreciative of the importance of dissent's own domestic history, he rightly suggests that the importance of the dissenting academies is not principally to be seen in the number of national leaders amongst their alumni, 'profitable by-blows', but in keeping alive 'the tradition of Biblical learning and piety' in the nonconformist pulpit. (p. 178-9)

Fairly dealing with 'Names and Sects and Parties', 'Mystics, Rationalists and Moralists', 'The Increase of Charity' and 'The Establishment', Rupp devotes a third of the book to 'The Evangelical Revival'. The experience of conversion, not quite in the sense of Sankey and Moody or Billy Graham, was central to this, it 'was for the Methodists a complexity in which at least three of what they called 'our doctrines: justification by faith, the new birth, and the witness of the Spirit, were all involved'. (p. 327) The notion that old dissent, declining in mid-century, 'was rescued by a blood transfusion from the Evangelical Revival', is, Rupp suggests, 'but a half truth'. (p. 486) This needs further explanation, and is the subject of doctoral studies by members of this society. The impact of the Revival on Baptist life is given only two pages, though there is space to note the greater impact of Baptist leaders on national life and the recognition of their scholarly gifts by Scottish universities. The beginnings of the New Connexion and the impact of the new missionary theology are very briefly alluded to.

In the postscript, the historian turns theologian, seeing controversy as belonging 'to that dismal undercurrent of church history in which good men strain at gnats and swallow camels, and tithe mint, anise and cummin, oblivious of the more serious needs of a world distraught for lack of charity. Sadder still is the prospect of bodies of Christians, all claiming that their Master's business was their supreme preoccupation, but in effect excommunicating one another to their grievous mutual impoverishment'. (p. 554) Again, 'there were those who were forward-looking, eager to let a brave new world write the Church's agenda. Others thought that from Old Testament times an identification with the spirit of the age was a hallmark of the false prophet'. Whilst Benjamin Hoadly's sermon in March 1717, on the text 'my Kingdom is not of this world', provoked controversy, others 'by the quality of their faith and devotion made authentic that apocalyptic hope sung and proclaimed in the very middle of that century in the music of Handel's Messiah: "the kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ"'. (p. 555) Such reflections are not limited in their relevance to any particular century: they can well be applied to the issues raised in this *Quarterly* and through them to contemporary Baptist church life.

#### E. A. PAYNE MEMORIAL PRIZE

This was awarded to the Revd Keith G. Jones, Secretary of the Yorkshire Baptist Association, for an essay entitled 'The Authority of the Trust Deed: A Yorkshire Perspective'. This will be published in the *Quarterly* in due course.