

Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 274 pp., ISBN 9780199533367

Stephen Hampton's *Anti-Arminianism* is a timely book which illuminates a critical period in the Protestant history of the English-speaking world (the Restoration period). The latter has not so much been neglected as encrusted with interpretations which have unwittingly hindered our ability to understand what followed it in due course. Evangelical Protestantism has justifiably made heroes out of the 2,000 Anglican ministers who, in conscience, left their pulpits and pastoral charges on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1662 rather than conform to state-imposed expectations about ministerial garb and strict adherence to the forms of the *Book of Common Prayer*. With these Nonconformists (so we have been led to believe) lay the all-important 'succession' of evangelical Protestantism through Matthew Henry and his kin. But this version of Protestant history – whether retailed by the Victorian bishop (an evangelical) J.C. Ryle, or by Nonconformist historians of the same age – created problems for loyal Protestants. On this understanding, we were left at a loss to explain why, after 1730, the spiritual resurgence we have come to call the Great Awakening / Evangelical Revival first and foremost affected the spiritual fortunes of the Church of England – the persecuting body which drove the Nonconformists out – rather than the new churches which these Dissenters had established after the Ejection. It was an unlikely scenario, inasmuch as the stalwart preachers who might have called for such a national spiritual change, were supposed to have left the ranks of the Church of England for other scenes. The spiritual movement of the early eighteenth century led to a resurgence of the evangelical Reformed theological position within this national church.

As writers in recent decades have wrestled with this anomaly, they have theorized that perhaps there was a hidden "succession" of stalwart Anglican pastors and theologians in the intervening half-century which has gone un-recognized. This was the hypothesis of the late Gordon Rupp in 1986, who sought to dismiss the earlier conjecture of John Walsh (1966) that while Reformed theology may have nourished the Evangelical Revival *once* it was underway, it was not present as a steady influence to help engender the spiritual upsurge. Some have pointed to the claimed 'solitary' writing ministry of the aged John Edwards (1637-1716), a Cambridge Reformed theologian who seems to have functioned as a kind of a theological dinosaur and had outlived his time, - as constituting such a link. But no one seemed to be able to make a solid case for the hypothesis Rupp floated – that is, until Stephen Hampton.

Hampton, now Dean of Peterhouse, Cambridge shows convincingly in *Anti-Arminians* that following the ejection of Puritan ministers in 1662 there were not lacking either Anglican bishops or theological writers sharing a determination to stem the flow of advanced Remonstrant (Arminian) theology catching the attention of English ministers and theological students in the half-century after the Ejection. On his accounting, John Edwards (above) is simply the solitary name to have maintained any ongoing association for evangelical Protestantism inasmuch as his writings were taken up approvingly by George Whitefield and all his successors in the eighteenth century; but in fact, Edwards was but one of a host of distinguished Reformed writers in this period

Yet the story is not what we might expect – chiefly a late seventeenth vindication of Calvinist soteriology – but instead an intriguing tale of how a circle of Reformed Anglican theological writers (like Edwards) linked arms to oppose the embrace, in England, of the inadequate Trinitarianism, low Christology, and weak doctrine of God championed in Europe by such writers as Simon Episcopus, Jean Leclerc, and Konrad Vorstius. Concentrated far more in

Oxford than in the former Puritan stronghold of Cambridge University, these writers wrote in defense of the orthodox and Reformed doctrines in solidarity both with their European Reformed contemporaries and (notably) the Catholic theological tradition traceable to Thomas Aquinas. Hampton can show that Oxford was still prepared to name a Reformed theologian, William Delaune (1659-1728) to its Lady Margaret Chair as late as 1715.

The implications of this ground-breaking book are very broad for Reformed Protestant readers. Hampton, who has plainly analyzed his material with the help of insights taken from Richard Muller's *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, has provided us with a glimpse of late seventeenth century English Reformed theology which is intriguing and extremely helpful in its explanatory power. Let me list several of its implications.

We will now have to stop our too-easy assumptions that *only* the Nonconformist and Puritan theologians of that age were trusty guides to its theological controversies. To the extent that that has been our outlook, it shows how much we have been on the receiving end of blindered notions of theological successionism. The massive Puritan reprinting projects which took flight in the 1860's, in addition to keeping us familiar with classic writers of Puritan divinity, have left us with the unfounded impression that these were the solitary trusty voices of their era. As well, Hampton has shown us that many modern theological questions about the Trinity, the prescience of God, and the relation of God to time were well aired then, and in a way that has surprising contemporary relevance. Again, the spiritual resurgence of the eighteenth century can now more easily be seen as a fresh expression of a never totally-submerged Reformed articulation of the Gospel message; Whitefield, Romaine, Toplady and their kind were (on this understanding) preaching an understanding of the Gospel that had never lacked responsible spokesmen.

Finally, the book should raise hard questions for current writers such as Roger Olson, who in his recent work, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (2006) has asked his readers to accept the notion that followers of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition are heirs to a tradition which (in truth) leapfrogged over a half-century of degenerate Remonstrant theology and was rooted, decidedly, in the purer teaching of Arminius himself. This proposal is also, in its way, an example of the idea of selective theological successionism; he wants his readers to embrace the Arminian tradition – but only the parts he identifies as “good”; by this device he attempts to dispense with the late Remonstrants of the era under Hampton's review. But candid Wesleyan readers will find in Hampton's exposition of the Reformed Anglican response to late Remonstrant theology an exposure of the inadequacy of ideas which they still embrace (as common to Wesleyan theology as a whole) such as their readiness to make human conceptions of what constitutes goodness, justice, and mercy a fit measure of what can be deemed acceptable in God. All this to say that Hampton's *Anti-Arminianism*, though a non-polemical work of very technical scholarship abounds with implications for the Protestant tradition well beyond its terminus, the reign of King George I.

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