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Alec Ryrie. *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xix + 306 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-82343-2.

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Religion in the reign of Henry VIII is a much studied, indeed some might argue over-studied, field. It remains the case, however, that every now and then a book comes along which offers substantial and fresh perspectives, and brings to light new material as well as collating known material in a novel and useful way. Alec Ryrie's book, which is an extension of his doctoral thesis, is such a volume.

Ryrie's work forms part of the growing response to the "revisionist" push of the past several decades, where the emphasis in historiography has tended toward highlighting continuities with England's Catholic past and downplaying the relative importance of the Protestant minority. Diarmaid MacCulloch, with his work on Thomas Cranmer and more recently the reign of Edward VI, has reasserted the critical importance–and ultimate triumph–of evangelicals, both at the center of policy and throughout the land. Ryrie's book addresses this issue for the reign of Henry VIII, paying particular attention to the rather neglected period from the fall of Thomas Cromwell (1539) to Henry's death (1547).

This book has all the advantages of being a converted doctoral thesis with comparatively few of the pitfalls. The seven chapters are extensively detailed, but that detail is set within such a well-structured and readable framework that the reader is never left floundering.

The introduction provides a brief narrative of a "nobody" evangelical from Suffolk whose case is a random survival in the State Papers. A more general introduction then outlines the nature of the problem to be addressed and places the study within its historiographical context. In brief, the challenge of the revisionists necessitates a reassessment of our understanding of English evangelicals. In particular the eight neglected years from Cromwell's fall until Henry's death were a critical formative period for the generation that would shape the Reformations of Edward and Elizabeth. Ryrie sets out to address this lacuna.

The seven chapters are divided into two parts: "The Regime and the Reformers" and "The Faces of Reform." One of the most important sections of the first chapter deals with the Act of Six Articles, denying the rhetoric of John Foxe (that the Act was a triumph of conservative reaction), and instead arguing than it was "a signal to observers at home and (especially) abroad that some areas [i.e. Sacramentarianism] were going to remain off-limits for Henry's Reformation" (p. 39). Chapter 2 is concerned with obedience; a much-underrated factor in Tudor religion. Ryrie deftly navigates a wealth of material to argue that the tendency for Henrician evangelicals to recant and dissemble in their views was the result not of a lack of steadfast faith, but of a view that obedience to

the King was always to be taken into account, even in matters of religion.

Part 2 is much longer (five chapters) and takes us through the various locations in and from which evangelicals delivered their message. Chapter 3 brings together much hitherto disparate material on Henrician evangelical exiles, noting their detachment from many of the realities of life at home. Chapter 4 examines sermons and evangelical printed works, once again highlighting the differences between exiles and those continuing to work under the royal authority.

The next two chapters examine two key locations of evangelical presence and agitation–the universities and the royal court. In chapter 5, the disillusion of educated evangelicals over the failure to use the wealth confiscated from the monasteries to fund a substantial increase in education, combined with a growing fear toward the end of Henry's reign that the universities themselves might be about to go the way of the religious houses, illustrates what Ryrie calls the "evangelicals' commitment to the reform of the commonwealth" (p. 169). The later part of this chapter also provides substantial evidence confirming the commonplace notion that Cambridge was far more a hot-bed of evangelical opinion than Oxford. Chapter 6, on the court, highlights the importance of court scholars and the patronage networks of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell for the emergence of a small but influential group of dedicated evangelicals with access to the king.

The final chapter briefly examines a question which sits perhaps rather unsteadily alongside the rest of the book–what was going on "in the underground": the old strongholds of Lollardy. Heresy trials from the period are examined here to reveal "the unacceptable face of reformism" (p. 223). This is perhaps the least satisfactory of the seven chapters, and gives the impression of having been included for the sake of completeness rather than because it advanced the general argument. This is not to suggest that it is not a strong piece, but perhaps it might have been better as a separate article rather than part of the present volume.

This last criticism of one chapter is, however, minor in comparison to the achievement of the whole. Ryrie's book will find its place easily within the canon of English Reformation scholarship. It already does much to illuminate a rather dark decade in English Reformation studies.

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