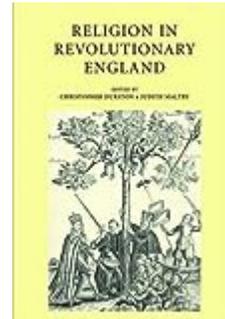




Christopher Duston, Judith Maltby, eds. *Religion in Revolutionary England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007. 224 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-6404-3.



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Published on H-Albion (October, 2008)

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Writing about the English Revolution

This is a generally very good, well-focused collection of essays, conceived as a way of bridging the historiographical gap between existing volumes of essays dealing with aspects of religion in England in the pre-1640 and post-1660 periods. Sadly one of the editors, Christopher Durston, died unexpectedly in August 2005 and the collection is rightly prefaced with an appreciation of his important work.

Divided into three sections—“Theology in Revolutionary England,” “Inside and Outside the Revolutionary National Church,” and “Local Impacts of Religious Revolution”—the essays address what the editors consider to be “many of the most crucial religious questions that exercised and divided the men and women of revolutionary England” (p. 15). Although aimed primarily at both undergraduate and postgraduate students, the editors acknowledge that while some contributions such as those by John Coffey, Elliot Vernon, William Sheils, and Judith Maltby offer nuanced if wide-ranging surveys of their theme, others—notably those by J. C. Davis and Ann Hughes—are more suited to scholars familiar with

the sources. It is an admittedly difficult balancing act, but on the whole the editors have succeeded admirably in making this a cohesive volume that I would recommend putting on the reading lists of relevant university courses.

The first essay by J. C. Davis examines the place of so-called radical religion within the English Revolution. Focusing on interpretations of divine providence during the period as well as the millenarian expectations of Samuel Hartlib, a well-known Polish émigré resident in London, and his circle, Davis emphasizes the “importance of the living God in shaping early modern thinking about the affairs of the nation, the world and individual experience” (p. 35). Next is a chapter by John Coffey on the toleration controversy during the English Revolution, which provides a very good introduction to the topic even if, to my mind, it is a little too sympathetic to the Presbyterian viewpoint. Chapter 3 by Elizabeth Clarke on women’s theological writing from 1640–60 draws on some familiar examples of this genre (notably Katherine Chidley, Elizabeth Warren, Mary Pope, and Ann Collins)

to argue that by and large even during the liberating years of the English Revolution a woman's commitment to religion was judged more by her obedience to orthodoxy, than by her personal engagement with theology (p. 86). Ann Hughes's contribution discusses the national Church in Interregnum England. She takes an optimistic view, arguing that despite serious disagreements over the limits of liberty of conscience which were compounded by the inability of Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists to reach a consensus on the "fundamentals" of Christian faith, the Interregnum Church was nonetheless a qualified success because of its commitment to godly rule (p. 109). Elliot Vernon adopts a similar position in his essay on the Presbyterians during the English Revolution. Dissenting from the long-standing negative verdict of historiographical orthodoxy yet still acknowledging "Presbyterianism's impotence ... in the political sphere," he sees English Presbyterians as laboring—often heroically—to further the reformation of the English people through the parochial Church structure (pp. 131, 132). William Sheils then considers the fate of English Catholics, a community that had been developing strategies for survival since 1559. Having outlined the consequences for the laity of military defeat, sequestration and exile, Sheils persuasively suggests that to characterize the trajectory of Catholicism as one moving from belligerent royalism in 1642 to contemplative devotion in 1658 would be to ignore a variety of religious experiences (pp. 147, 151). After that Judith Maltby examines the formation of "Anglicanism"—a set of religious attitudes, practices and beliefs rooted in the Church of England which weathered the storm of parliamentary reform directed at the Prayer Book, its festive calendar, and episcopal polity (pp. 159, 160). This is a lively, sensitive, and informative essay, written from the perspective of its subject. Passing quickly over the omission of what would have been a welcome chapter on the Independents, there follows a rather poor piece on the development of Baptist movements during the English Revolution by Mark Bell. Simplistic and under-researched, it adds little to scholarly research in this field.

The third section of this collection on "Local Impacts of Religious Revolution" is disappointingly disjointed and despite its title covers only Kent and Hertford. Jacqueline Eales provides an illuminating survey of religious diversity in Revolutionary Kent from the anti-Catholic concerns of petitioners to the nonconformity of the Independents, Baptists, suspected "Ranters," Muggletonians, and Quakers. This heterodox picture is balanced with the caveat that there is also strong evidence of a continuing attachment to traditionalism in the county throughout the revolutionary period (p. 242). Finally Beverly Adams briefly discusses suffering, identity, and the politics of obedience among Hertford Quakers from 1655 to 1665. Constructing her argument upon notions of private conscience, civic duty, and disobedience, Adams presents an account that gives insufficient attention to theological subtleties. Even so, her emphasis on local context enables her to outline interesting narrative details in the trials and discontents of Hertford Quakers. This leaves Christopher Durston's essay on the Lord's Day during the English Revolution. While there was never a month of Sundays, he notes that just over one thousand Sabbaths were observed during this period. Drawing on a rich vein of evidence Durston brings out the major points of tension—Charles I's reissue of his father's Book of Sports (which permitted Morris dancing, May-games, violent sports, and church-ales) and the puritan view that the fourth commandment remained morally binding (the original laws for the Massachusetts Bay Colony had made Sabbath profanation a capital offense)—as well as highlighting breaches of Sabbath regulations and giving examples of Baptists who observed the Sabbath on Saturday (the forerunners of Seventh-day Adventists). He concludes that the short-term success of the godly campaign to impose the puritan Sunday upon the English people was achieved only at the high cost of alienating people from their rulers and promoting a widespread desire for a return to the less stringent religious culture of the pre-war period (p. 222). Doubtless some historians will see in miniature here the failures of the English Revolution writ large.

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Citation: Ariel Hessayon. Review of Duston, Christopher; Maltby, Judith, eds., *Religion in Revolutionary England*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. October, 2008.

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