

James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists 1675-1705*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008. (xxiii + 207pp.). [ISBN 978-1-84227-251-0]

This is a close study of the self-understanding of the Particular Baptists in the crucial period of the generation of leaders who framed and led subscription to the *Second London Confession* (first published in 1677). The Particular Baptists developed later than the General Baptists, seeking a ‘self-consciously reformed’ (Calvinistic) type of Church. In keeping with this, the *Second London Confession* was largely an adaptation of the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) which was itself dependent on the *Westminster Confession* of 1647.

The bulk of the book is a clause by clause examination of the *Confession* on (in turn) the nature of the church, authority, officers, public worship (including ordinances) and association. A strength of the work is that, in addition to the detailed consideration of the confessional theology at stake, attention is given to the application of the principles involved. This insistence on the ‘practical ecclesiology’ signaled in the title enables a number of case studies of the interaction of belief and practice in these formative decades. Dr Renihan in this way attempts to answer the call of B.R. White for ‘microscopic’ studies of Baptist history. On these terms the monograph largely succeeds. A picture of Baptist life as lived in specific congregations linked through the *Confession* emerges. This narrow focus is also however the source of its principal weaknesses.

Although the architecture of much of later Stuart Particular Baptist life is sketched and ecclesiologically defined in this work, the wider religious and social landscape is not revealed. The three decades under examination contained periods of fluctuating persecution, political revolution, the Act of Toleration and attempts by nonconformist bodies to find unity. These have ecclesiological roots and implications but such major developments feature hardly at all in this volume.

It is of course relatively easy and potentially unfair to note what is left out of any study, particularly one such as this with a technical focus. However the very narrowness of the analysis possibly generated a second problem with the monograph as published. *Edification and Beauty* is based on a 1997 PhD Dissertation. Dr Renihan admits he has been ‘unable to update its contents in any significant sense’ (xix). This is a pity, as useful studies have appeared in the intervening decade and the richness of later Stuart

historiography continues to impress. In a narrow study one might with some justification feel it to be possible to get away without revision. (It is unlikely that much will be found which reworks the same evidence.) Yet the outcome for a published monograph is less satisfying. The problem is the lack of historical, intellectual and ecclesiological context. What may have been appropriate for a thesis leaves too many gaps in a published work. That the book lacks a summative conclusion exacerbates the problem.

Nevertheless, by its own lights this is good study and one which adds to the growing Paternoster series. There appears to be a problem with the index, at least in its references to the front material, but otherwise it is presented well and allows a glimpse into an important period.

Martin Sutherland