

members of both houses as an inconvenient truth, or opposed adamantly by slave interests, or met with indifference and delaying tactics.

As a popular biography, Tomkins's study adds little to Wilberforce scholarship. At times, the writing suffers from abrupt transitions as the author's chronological account of Wilberforce's life mixes with his circling back to the slavery issue. All in all, however, this is a satisfying account, constant in its historical attentiveness and sensitive in its judgments.

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Beyond Religious Discourse: Sermons, Preaching and Evangelical Protestants in Nineteenth-Century Irish Society. By **J. N. Ian Dickson**. Studies in Evangelical History and Thought. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007. xx + 306 pp. £19.99 paper.

Part of an impressive series which, over the course of the past decade, has been both stimulating and has disseminated detailed research into various aspects of evangelical history and thought, the subject matter of *Beyond Religious Discourse* would seem at first glance unlikely to appeal to more than a narrow and specialized readership. However, in his opening paragraph, Ian Dickson argues that “sermons and their method of delivery, in an age and climate fascinated by both, have a story to tell us about the past” (1), and this publication confirms his hypothesis, shedding light on the aspirations, anxieties, and perceptions of Protestant preachers as they attempted to influence their congregations in nineteenth-century Ulster (to which the study is largely confined) and revealing the sermon as not just a vehicle for theological ideas, but also as a social event heavily influenced by the contemporary cultural and political context.

The book is logically and quite tightly structured; following an explanation of the author's historical approach, chapter 2 considers the role of denominational training in influencing the style of preachers and the content of their sermons. The third chapter focuses more directly on the construction and delivery of this “earnest discourse of pious men” (96), while chapter 4 utilizes an impressive database of over six hundred manuscript and printed sermons for its discussion of the most prominent texts, themes, and patterns. The following chapters broaden the perspective, exploring the worldview of Ulster's evangelical Protestants, which is firmly situated in the local context, before introducing “other voices, influences and turning points” (183–211) and, finally, pondering

the difficult task of how to assess the impact of these religious discourses on contemporary listeners.

Throughout this detailed and comprehensive study of evangelical preaching, Dickson combines analysis of primary documents with reference to a broad range of scholarship, and his discussions of the historiographical treatment of both major and secondary themes will be of considerable benefit to students of social and cultural as well as religious history in this period. While one might wish for a more extensive treatment of topics of particular interest, his brief survey of the impact of evangelicalism on women, for example, provides a useful introduction to a fast-growing area of study, identifying both the constraints and the opportunities generated by the evangelical approach.

One of the key points Dickson makes is that, despite competing theories of ministerial function, evangelical preaching served to narrow the gap between established and nonconformist religions. And indeed, despite the efforts of religious leaders to maintain and strengthen structural and doctrinal distinctions, the pervading influence of evangelicalism was evident in the heightened significance of the sermon with the key themes of “personal salvation, the church, duty and consolation” (112)—which persisted throughout the century and across denominational divisions—and in the ways in which the gospel message was delivered.

Just as passionate exhortations by flamboyant individuals captured the imagination, if not always the souls, of nineteenth-century listeners, it is the descriptions of the personalities involved and the devices they employed that come closest to conveying the drama and emotion—“the elements of pure theatre” (90)—that characterized much of the evangelical preaching of the period. Whether local orators like roaring Hugh Hanna or eccentric Tommy Toye, international visitors such as the exotic Lorenzo Dow, or professional orators like Henry Grattan Guinness or Dwight L. Moody, evangelical preachers, operating in both traditional and non-traditional settings, significantly raised the profile of religious discourse. Undoubtedly influential, and frequently inspiring, opinions nonetheless varied on their performances; thus, for example, one listener commented that listeners to the renowned Henry Cooke were more often “astounded at the man, than benefited by the sermon he preached” (36). Popularity and public enthusiasm, some feared, detracted from the respectability and authority due to all aspects of religious life, and to the professionalism promoted by church leaders. Dickson’s analysis draws attention to the contradictions and tensions thus generated and demonstrates how these were reinforced by the revival that swept through Ulster in 1859.

In their efforts to cajole and persuade, preachers were inevitably influenced by, and themselves had an impact on, their immediate cultural and political environment, and in questioning the extent to which Irish evangelicalism was a product of local conditions, Dickson examines three key areas of change

identified in contemporary sermons as significant threats: urbanization and industrialization, the rise of a secular state, and the decline of Protestantism. Unsurprisingly, personal salvation rather than social reform was seen as the answer to the threats to religion and morality posed by the first two categories, while the reduction in Protestant power, perceived to be inherent in several decades of legislation dealing with education, politics, and religious establishments, was increasingly met with militant anti-Catholic rhetoric. Teasing out some of the paradoxes and inconsistencies of the evangelical mindset, Dickson concludes that “there lay behind this religion of confidence deep insecurities, brought to the fore by the challenge of new forces in society that tested the capability of evangelicalism to adapt and survive” (181).

The penultimate chapter, focusing on the impact of this religious discourse on its listeners, while potentially the most interesting and significant, is also clearly the most difficult and inconclusive. The author rightly refuses to reduce his analysis to neat certainties, pointing to the subjective nature and complex dynamics of speaking and listening, the diverse motivations and expectations of preacher and audience, and the deficiency of helpful source material in this regard. He considers instead the “speculative soil” of, for example, social gatherings and the status conferred on preachers, and makes use of the concept of the sermon as an important mode of communication, influencing other public discourse and playing a significant part in shaping public opinion about important aspects of everyday life.

Overall, while this reader found the second half of the book most interesting and informative, the work as a whole makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the pervasive influence of evangelicalism on life in the northeast of Ireland. Comprehensive in its coverage, and written in an accessible and engaging style, the author has succeeded in persuading this reader at least that his study of the unlikely topic of the evangelical sermon is a worthy and productive scholarly endeavor, and one that could be usefully adapted to other regions.

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Friends of the Unrighteous Mammon: Northern Christians and Market Capitalism, 1815–1860. By **Stewart Davenport**. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. x + 269 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

This significant, informative study focuses on a question that historians of antebellum American religion have not examined systematically: “What did