

Daniel W. Doerksen. *Picturing Religious Experience: George Herbert, Calvin, and the Scriptures*.

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The culmination of Daniel Doerksen's study of George Herbert's *Temple* (chapters 5–6) is his reading of “spiritual conflicts” (19) and their resolution organized according to five “patterns for the literary depiction of the inner life” (7): “repentance” (141), “inward and outward aspects of mortification” (145), “tension between the earthly and the heavenly” (166), and “the struggle for order” with its attendant “conflicts of prayer” (171). Like the vicissitudes of life addressed through these devotional modes, the resolution of conflict is never complete, but rather recurrent in a process of gradual “tempering” toward “union with God and true self-fulfillment” (201). Doerksen's purpose here and throughout is to delineate a formative connection between Herbert's verse and the (mostly) non-polemical writings of the magisterial reformer, John Calvin, in particular the *Commentaries on Psalms*. Doerksen's point is not merely that there are numerous parallel instances (analyzed in a steady triangulation of passages from the three elements of his subtitle). Rather, *Psalms* provides the precedent for, and Calvin an introduction to, the patterns listed above, as well as the “experiential criteria” (7) through which to comprehend Herbert's devotional art.

Perhaps concerned that the relentless citing of parallels might suggest that Herbert's work merely mimics Reform theology, Doerksen offers instead the claim that Calvin inspired Herbert's attunement to the reflection of personal experience in the scriptures, and allows that other writers — Protestant, Roman Catholic, and patristic — may have contributed to that poetic orientation (12). So while the focus on Calvin necessarily braves the waters of critical controversy, this book is refreshingly non-polemical, avoiding narrow concentration on matters doctrinal or ecclesiological. Perhaps the most controversial subjects for the English Reformation, predestination and the sacrament of Holy Communion (or the

Eucharist) are altogether absent from the index. Even the discussion of Herbert's notoriously predestinarian poem "The Water-Course" — which concludes by describing a God "Who gives to man as he sees fit, $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Salvation} \\ \text{Damnation} \end{array} \right.$ " — concentrates more on similar use of water-course imagery in Calvin than on theological niceties, the latter evident only in Doerksen's characterization of such imagery as pertaining equitably to "divine predestination and man's response" (165). As for sacraments, Doerksen observes in Herbert the notion of their "restorative powers" (196), in Calvin the efficacious "force and nature" of Baptism (195), and in a note speculates that the relative treatment of Word and sacrament in Herbert is proportionate to that of Calvin (215).

Equally welcome is Doerksen's attention to Calvin's human concerns, an antidote to descriptions of the reformer's work as that of a dour pessimist gleefully constructing an impersonal and systematic theology founded upon the Augustinian notion of total depravity. Doerksen cites recent scholarship on Calvin's humanist education and high regard for "purely secular learning" (13–14), and — in a significant expansion of the work of Barbara K. Lewalski and other exponents of a Protestant poetics — elucidates in detail his appreciation of the experiential dimensions of religious commitment, emotional and aesthetic. This discussion (chapter 3, 62–68), as preparation for the chapters devoted to close reading of *The Temple* (including one, chapter 4, on the congruity of inner exploration and concern for the greater Christian community), is reminiscent of the purposes of literature according to the classical humanism of Sidney and others: *docere, delectare, and movere* ("to instruct, delight, and move toward virtuous action"). The literary aspect of scripture, for Herbert as for Calvin, is an essential feature of spiritual edification and the tempering of souls for orderly conduct and service, in both this world and the next.

Picturing Religious Experience is the most extensive treatment of Calvin's influence on Herbert to date. Doerksen's command of his material is evident in sustained readings of individual poems informed by relevant parallels in Calvin's readings of scripture, and in effortless summoning of multiple passages from Herbert, scripture, and Calvin in support of a given point. The book is a formidable contribution to the "Calvinist consensus" view of the early-Stuart English church shared by such historians as Patrick Collinson, Peter Lake, Nicholas Tyacke, Kenneth Fincham, and Anthony Milton. But this placing of Herbert and Calvin among the moderates with regard to theology and church polity is secondary to *Picturing's* engagement with the experiential treatment of spiritual conflicts by one of our greatest devotional poets.

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