

Whether this book succeeds in its stated aim of shifting the emphasis of ecclesiastical historians of the nineteenth century I will leave for others and time to judge. For this reviewer it provides a valuable source of well-researched material of a period of Church history, which does not seem so far away from current concerns as may be thought. The forty-six pages of bibliography are in themselves a tribute to the energy and scholarship of its author and I am sure will provide future students with many directions for study.

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*KING JAMES VI AND I AND THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM* edited by W.B. PATTERSON, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp xvi + 409 (Hardback £65, paperback £15.95 ) ISBN 0-521-41805-4 and 0-521-793-858.

James I appears destined forever to suffer an ambiguous reputation. It may no longer be fashionable to call him 'the wisest fool in Christendom'; however, rarely are his more favourable contemporary nicknames of 'British Solomon' or *Rex Pacificus* cited without at least a touch of irony. It would take a bold and independent-minded historian, and perhaps also an outsider to British history, to analyse James VI and I's religious and diplomatic objectives from a sympathetic perspective. This W. Brown Patterson has now done.

At one level, the book reviews James's dealings, both literary and diplomatic, with the papacy, the major Catholic powers, domestic Catholics, and with the reformed Churches of continental Europe. It also explores James's dealings with a range of religious migrants and vagrants who settled in England, hoping to find in the Church of England the embodiment of their own religious aspirations. The apparently disparate nature of the materials reviewed is explained by their connection to the work's linking theme. James was not just a 'peacemaker' in the sense of an astute politician who realised that warfare would bankrupt his already impecunious government. He sought accommodation, reconciliation, moderation in the key religious controversies of the age. Dominating his thought was the ideal of a wholly free and genuinely ecumenical Church Council, presided over by secular rulers rather than the papacy, at which a *modus vivendi* could be arrived at between the Churches on the basis of their shared beliefs. Anyone who espoused or developed similar views and aspirations, such as the moderate Huguenot Pierre du Moulin, was assured of an enthusiastic hearing. Brown Patterson interprets this ruling principle of James's policy with a sympathy which borders on admiration.

There are some distinct advantages to Brown Patterson's perspective. He makes much better sense than usual of James's conduct in regard to the religious conferences which did take place, especially the Hampton Court Conference and the Synod of Dort. He also renders the tortuous negotiations towards the Spanish marriage in 1623, conducted against the backdrop of the invasion of the Palatinate and the despoliation of James's son-in-law, much more comprehensible. Where he has to intervene in a current historical dispute, for example over the nature of English 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism' in the early 1620s, his verdicts are judicious and convincing.

On the other hand, two concerns arise. First, his coverage of James's policies could be regarded as partial and selective; secondly, not all the projects so exhaustively discussed in this book appear equally important. The impression of selectivity is height-

ened by the portrayal of James as a somewhat isolated figure, conversing learnedly with selected ecclesiastics while he dined. There is little sense in this book that policy in James's reign may have been affected by the ebb and flow of court politics: that George Abbot was a political courtier as well as a vigorous Protestant archbishop, or that Catholic sympathisers within the government played a destructive role in the politics of the 1610s. While the Parliament of 1624 is analysed in detail, Conrad Russell's analysis of strife between king and prince spilling on to the floor of the Commons is not discussed or engaged with. The second worry, that some of these projects were pie-in-the-sky ecumenism proposed by enthusiasts with little support or influence, is briefly addressed; but the very fact that so much space is devoted to characters like Marco Antonio de Dominis (ch 7) inevitably suggests that there was more power behind religious reconciliation than was formerly assumed.

When these quibbles have been registered, this remains a highly scholarly and independent-minded analysis of the most intelligent and religiously informed monarch of his age. It may well be that we have heard enough of James's sexual tastes or his political maladroitness with the impossibly factious House of Commons. Brown Patterson's book redresses the balance by focusing on those things which James I himself most cared for. They show him in a light more rational, moderate and, it must be said, more congenial to the modern mind.

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