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REVIEW ARTICLE

Transatlantic Puritanism and American Singularities

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Hartford Puritanism. Thomas Hooker, Samuel Stone, and their terrifying God. By Baird Tipson. (Oxford Studies in Historical Theology.) Pp. xvii + 476. New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. £47.99. 978 0 19 021252 0

Sympathetic Puritans. Calvinist fellow feeling in early New England. By Abram C. Van Engen. (Religion in America.) Pp. xii + 311. New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. £47.99. 978 0 19 937963 7

Inventing Eden. Primitivism, millennialism, and the making of New England. By Zachary McLeod Hutchins. Pp. x + 329. New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. $78. 978 0 19 999814 2

Lay empowerment and the development of Puritanism. By Francis J. Bremer. (Christianities in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–1800.) Pp. viii + 239. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. £60. 978 1 137 35288 0

The lively experiment. Religious toleration in American from Roger Williams to the present. Edited by Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Grenda (foreword Jon Butler) Pp. xv + 342. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2015. £39.95. 978 1 4422 4872 4

The taunting question posed in the 1820s by the English critic Sidney Smith, 'Who reads an American book?', has long since tumbled into the dustbin of literary history. Yet it continues to reverberate in how Americanists describe the workings of Puritanism in their own country, its presence felt in two respects. One of these is resentment at the indifference to their own work of historians of the Puritan movement in Britain.

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Another is the assumption among Americanists that the Puritanism of the colonists who arrived in the early seventeenth century was singular in certain respects, be it their sense of 'errand', their modifications of Reformed orthodoxy, or perhaps their daring experiment with a congregation-centred polity, the 'New England Way'. Whenever historians turn to the larger project of Church and State in colonial and modern America, assertions of singularity dominate the telling of our religious history. Do these endeavours warrant returning to Sidney Smith's question and rephrasing it to ask whether Americanists are making the most of European studies of Reformed theology, Puritanism in Britain, and conformity or dissent?

This question provides a point of entry to Baird Tipson's magisterial *Hartford Puritanism: Thomas Hooker, Samuel Stone, and their terrifying God*. The first word in this title, an allusion to the Connecticut town which Stone and Hooker served as ministers, may mislead readers on both sides of the Atlantic, for this book is largely about Hooker in his English context. And rightly so, for Hooker was nearly fifty when he emigrated in 1633, a date that explains why the great majority of the sermons on which Tipson depends were preached or written in England, which is also where everything Hooker published during his lifetime (he died in 1647) was printed. Samuel Stone, his younger colleague in Hartford, participated in the trans-Atlantic debate of mid-century about the merits of the New England Way but never published any of his sermons. He appears alongside Hooker because, long after arriving in New England, he wrote a manuscript 'whole body of Divinity in a Catechicall way' that Tipson is the first to analyse. But it is the *English* Hooker with whom this powerful book is mainly concerned, a Hooker liberated from a sequence of misrepresentations that continue to this day, be it Hooker as advocate of 'democracy' or, more commonly, Hooker as 'preparationist' who fathered either a lenient or an excessively legalistic version of Reformed theology. Arguments of this kind descend from an essay of 1943 by Perry Miller on 'preparation for salvation' and more generally from the 'Calvin versus the Calvinists' paradigm that dogs three generations of scholarship, arguments others have challenged, most notably W. G. B. Stoever in '*A faire and easie way to heaven': covenant theology and Antinomianism in early Massachusetts* (1978) and Richard A. Muller in a host of publications. To their critiques *Hartford Puritanism* adds a lucid reading of Hooker's English sermons of the 1620s, a reading as important to historians of 'godly' Protestantism in early modern England as it is to Americanists, all of whom will discover that Hooker was participating in an 'ongoing … theological conversation' (p. 21) about the substance of 'Augustinianism' in which his main 'antagonists' were 'Jesuits and their Arminian imitators' and his principal ally, William Perkins. More daringly, Tipson places Hooker in the context of what the French historian Jean Delumeau has

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termed 'surculpabilisation', his name for 'an intense feeling of guilt' (p. 22) that emerged within early modern Christianity, including Catholicism.

In this book, however, the master term for Hooker's theology is 'extreme Augustinianism', a phrase derived in part from a passing comment by Peter Brown. In the course of mapping the substance of this Augustinianism, Tipson revisits seven classic topics in early modern theological, social and intellectual history: predestination (ch. vi), the uses of Ramism (ch. vii), the nature and meaning of 'conversion' (chs ix and x, and an appendix), 'preparation for salvation' and assurance of salvation (ch. xi), the meaning and purpose of preaching within the framework of the practical divinity (ch. viii), the 'reformation of manners' as imagined and attempted by Hooker and his allies in Chelmsford, England (ch. iii) and churchmanship and social ethics in New-World Hartford (chs viii and xii). Concerning conversion, Tipson rejects the argument – enshrined in American scholarship – that Hooker and his contemporaries regarded it as arranged around a sequence of stages. Nor does Tipson agree with what is said about conversion as 'experience'. In an essay published in 1975, he argued that form or model dictated experience, not the other way around, an argument filled out in these pages, where conversion is represented as a life-long process. Just as telling is his critique of the 'preparation-as-crypto-Pelagianism' thesis that descends from Miller. Hooker was most certainly a preparationist, but in his hands this phase of the Christian journey never acquired any overtones of efficacy. Instead, Hooker and, arguably, another of his mentors, John Rogers, imagined preparation (or 'humiliation' and 'contrition') as an acutely difficult prelude to 'authentic' faith (p. 289). Hooker took for granted that those who repented in a deeper way were already of the elect, although still having to undergo an 'agonizing recognition of one's sinfulness' (p. 289). Preparation thus served to forestall 'easy' claims to being saved. Otherwise, Hooker's Augustinianism involved original sin, double predestination (saved and reprobate alike), a limited atonement, perseverance of the saints and an overriding emphasis on human inability (p. 113). Although never directly engaging with Dutch-style Arminianism, Hooker was 'unwavering' (p. 184) in his criticism of any version thereof, Catholic or Protestant. The 'terrifying' aspects of Hooker's sermons also emerge from rhetorical strategies that he may have inherited from Rogers, strategies that include his description of the sinner who, lying 'panting upon his sick-bed, if he do but close his eyes together to sleep, his dreams terrifie him, . . and he … rises up and Raves … I must go to Hell, Satan is sent from God to fetch me' (p. 193).

The intelligence and depth of reading that mark every page of *Hartford Puritanism* place it in the company of other theologically informed books on Puritan figures or the Puritan movement on both sides of the Atlantic

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by such American scholars as Stoever, E. Brooks Holifield, Dewey Wallace, John von Rohr, Theodore D. Bozeman, Timothy George, Charles L. Cohen, Paul C. H. Lim and Mark E. Dever. Well informed, yes, but not compatible; Cohen and Dever emphasise divine love, and Tipson and Bozeman the 'extreme' and 'terrifying'. Has Tipson's master theme got out of hand? And, in either the American or the English context, we may wonder who were Hooker's heirs. What became of his 'terrifying God' over time? In any appraisal of the practical divinity, a place must also be made for the assertion by Perkins, John Preston and a host of others that this framework was deeply comforting – unsettling to the sinner, but providing the faithful Christian with the 'certainty' of divine election and the intimate presence of a loving Christ who wanted everyone to be touched by the Gospel. That Hooker abandoned these assumptions seems unlikely, just as it seems unlikely that the townspeople in Chelmsford, Essex and Hartford suffered in any significant way from spiritual despair; I looked everywhere for stories of this kind as I was writing *Worlds of wonder, days of judgment: popular religious belief in early New England* (1989), but found very few. Let me suggest, therefore, that the kind of preaching that Tipson describes must be juxtaposed with devotional practice and the distinctive sociability that it provided, a sociability sketched in a helpful description of 'conferencing' about spiritual experience. Indeed, a case can be made for devotion and its close kin, worship, learning a catechism, or what might termed 'lived' theology, as the principal modes of religious formation, just as a case can also be made for 'edification' as a central theme of the practical divinity.

Does it matter that close readings of theology have little or no counterpart in British scholarship, a point borne out by the predominantly American affiliations of the contributors to *Drawn into controversie: reformed theological diversity and debates within seventeenth-century British Puritanism* (2011), which opens with a sharply critical essay by Muller on the good and the bad in studies of Reformed theology? American-style these studies of theology may be, but the implications of *Hartford Puritanism* are just as significant for the English side of the movement as they are for the American. Consider, for example, the relationship between preaching and how social identities were formed. According to Tipson, the town of Chelmsford, where Hooker served for several years as a lecturer, was divided between a community fashioned around his preaching and another that resisted his message. But was the latter an imaginative consequence of his rhetoric, something that he delighted in pillorying from the pulpit? Sermons seem to be the sole source for this argument, as they also are for the suggestion that spiritual despair overcame some of Hooker's auditors. The alternative, which may not have been available, is a mixture of social, cultural and political history of the kind that characterises David Underdown's *Fire from heaven: life of an English town in the seventeenth*

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century (1982). In New-World Hartford, which included groups from different parts of England and a church that, not long after Hooker's death, experienced a serious rupture, Hooker and Stone became known for rejecting the test of a 'relation' and emphasising the 'judgment of charity' in deciding who could become members of a 'gathered' congregation. Hartford is intriguing for another reason, the fact that Samuel Stone may have preached in a different key. Did lay people pick and choose between the messages that they were hearing or translate these into a stock of truisms, a possibility for the practical divinity as a whole and for Hooker in particular, as suggested by a layman's notation in response to his English preaching: 'Encouragement & Light came … by a Doctrine of famous Mr Hooker about Gods Drawing a Soul unto Christ that makes the Soul come unto him.'[1] And I wonder how the emphasis on the 'terrifying' might change were Tipson to acknowledge the tumultuous world of cheap print, where 'terror' was a much-employed rhetorical strategy.

Abram Van Engen's *Sympathetic Puritans* belongs in the company of *Hartford Puritanism*, a marvellously lucid book that adds to our understanding of seventeenth-century Puritanism. It does so by a simple act of close reading that restores the significance of the terms 'sympathy' and 'love of the brethren' in texts such as John Winthrop's well-known 'Charitie discourse' (1630), the documents of the Antinomian controversy of 1636–7, and the 'Eliot tracts' which publicised the missionary outreach to Native Americans. Acknowledging, in his introduction, the recent emphasis among his fellow Americanists on a Puritanism riven with differences and diversities of various kinds, Van Engen insists on its coherence as a culture, albeit a culture charged with 'tensions'. His wise argument to this effect gives way to a careful reading of Winthrop's 'discourse' (not a shipboard sermon, we now know), followed by a remarkable chapter in which he recovers the significance of 1 John iii.14 for the debates of around 1636–7 in New England about assurance of salvation. Here, after parsing John Cotton's argument that an 'immediate witness' of the Spirit was the crux of assurance, Van Engen rehabilitates the many other ministers who, in keeping with Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century, validated 'sanctification' as serviceable evidence of justification. Taking issue with how sanctification is construed in the interpretive tradition that descends from Perry Miller, Van Engen reclaims its affective or 'inward' aspects – specifically, the 'love of the brethren' (1 John iii.14), a passage cited by Cotton's critics and evoked in the testimonies of lay colonists. Hence his conclusion: 'what the elders [a term borrowed from the documents of the controversy] defended were not primarily deeds or discipline, but rather a certain kind of experience' (p. 67). Not only does this chapter

[1] Clifford K. Shipton, 'The autobiographical memoranda of John Brock, 1636–1659', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* liii (1943), 97.

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alter how we understand the controversy, its endnotes include a review of other scholarship, much of it deemed problematic for reasons that parallel Tipson's critique. For the moment, therefore, chapter ii and its complement in chapter iii, where Van Engen surveys the meaning of community or communal sanctification, become authoritative. The chapters that follow, although less compelling, are also important. Chapter iv touches on the colonists' assertions of sympathy for their fellow godly in England and sermon techniques for eliciting an affective spirituality, a chapter that indirectly modifies Tipson's portrait of a Hooker bent on terrifying his audience. Chapter v covers the Eliot tracts and the affective aspects of Native American piety as taught or supported by John Eliot and others. In chapter vi, Mary Rowland's captivity narrative becomes the point of entry into sympathy as practised or felt in family settings or the charged context of captivity. *Sympathetic Puritans* benefits from Van Engen's sensitivity to literary structure and literary language and their roots in Scripture and the Christian tradition. What may seem its modest focus is deceptive. He models ways of interpretation tied to close readings of Scripture from which historians of Puritanism in England can also benefit, for the mid seventeenth-century polemics in Britain about 'Antinomianism' parallel what was being said in 1630s Massachusetts to the point of referencing 1 John iii.14, as the Scottish theologian George Gillespie did in his assault on home-grown Antinomians.

Zachary Hutchins's *Inventing Eden* is an ambitious book that, like the proverbial plum pudding, has something for everyone: political theory, natural history, the seventeenth-century quest for a universal language, the Baconian method in the flamboyant version known as the 'great instauration', the foundational premises of anti-slavery, the substance of conversion as variously understood and transformed between Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* and the mid eighteenth-century theologising of Jonathan Edwards. Breadth of this kind is one of the virtues of *Inventing Eden*, a breadth that at some moments is transatlantic. Noting the attempts of his fellow 'early Americanists' to adopt a 'hemispheric' approach, Hutchinson sides with those who have underscored the importance of 'Anglophone linguistic connections' (p. 7), a premise that allows him to roam widely within the English Renaissance and beyond for contexts that illuminate the meaning of the natural world (ch. ii), 'humoral self-fashioning' as a project of reform (ch. ii), the influence of Baconianism (chs iv–v), the quest among translators of the Psalms for an ideal language that led them back to Hebrew (also chapter v), and changing frameworks for conversion (ch. vi), which culminates with Jonathan Edwards. Hemispheric at the outset or by self-designation, *Inventing Eden* is really about a singular newness in the form of an imagined restoration or recovery – in this instance, the newness of Eden. Hence the close attention to early American texts and a concluding riff on the edenic as it figured in

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nineteenth-century America. To say this differently, the case studies are designed to support the argument that the trope or figure of the Garden of Eden/Adamic perfection, together with the hope of recovering something of that perfection, had a much larger place in the mental world of the colonists than we have recognised.

But how large a place? In and of itself this argument cannot account for the central themes either of Puritanism in its English setting or the major projects of the colonists in early New England, be it the making of their scheme of church order, their sharply reformist code of laws, the substance of theological debate, or their determination to implement the two-kingdom understanding of Church and State. Much of what has been said over the years about the colonists' errand has erred in one direction or another, usually by exaggerating its 'millennial' aspects. Current wisdom (with which I concur) frames that errand as a fresh version of what Elizabethan reformers wanted, a 'thorough reformation' that restored the 'primitive perfection' of the visible Church. Inheriting this ambition, the colonists also inherited the vision of the Church as a new 'Sion' coming ever closer to approximating the kingdom of Christ, a project impossible to associate with the Garden of Eden. Perhaps because Hutchins never acknowledges 'Sion', despite its centrality to one of the texts that he is using, readers may sense that he regards edenic discourse as more important than, say, Christian primitivism, when a more modest appraisal of its significance may be in order. Perhaps the best way of approaching his book, therefore, is as a series of case studies, none of them entirely persuasive. Was Francis Bacon's really a 'Puritan' project? Whatever was said by Charles Webster along these lines in the 1970s no longer coincides with current understandings of the term Puritan. And the interesting if somewhat laboured survey of word use in translations of the Psalms bypasses the attempts in 1640s and 1650s England and Scotland to recover the 'language of Canaan' (not Eden) using Francis Rous's translation as a starting point. The least satisfactory chapter deals with conversion. To my eye, Hutchins misreads the Cambridge, Massachusetts, 'relations' on which he lingers, and he regards Edwards's 'Personal narrative' as a story of conversion when, in point of fact, it shows none of the marks of that genre; as George Marsden has pointed out in his magisterial biography of Edwards, we know nothing of when or in what manner Edwards experienced this stage, which he presumably underwent in keeping with his father's sermons on the subject. The tears shed by Native American converts (as described by their spiritual teachers) were nothing unusual in the context of Anglo-American practical divinity; tears feature in Samuel Rutherford's letters (1630s) of spiritual counsel just as abundantly. Hutchins reports, more or less correctly, that the practical divinity lingered on the never-ending and never perfectionist stage of sanctification. But so did Jonathan Edwards in *A treatise concerning religious affections* (1746), a

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treatise that relies on Thomas Shepard's defence of this very feature of the practical divinity at the time of the Antinomian Controversy. The real break in how conversion was modelled occurred not with Edwards but with the 'Methodism' of the Wesleys and George Whitefield. Tipson's critical reflections on the category of conversion were not available to Hutchins, but also point in a different direction from what he argues.

Francis C. Bremer's *Lay empowerment and the development of Puritanism* follows the lead of Patrick Collinson, Stephen Foster and many others in arguing that lay people provided crucial support for sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century attempts to reform the Church of England, a theme to which he adds an emphasis on Spirit-inflected religious experience. The work of a historian familiar with seventeenth-century Puritanism on both sides of the Atlantic, *Lay empowerment* evokes a number of situations in England in which lay people make an appearance before the scene shifts to early New England, where the narrative focuses on a handful of episodes that include the Antinomian controversy, the founding of a gathered Church in Salem in 1629, and the controversial decision in 1662 that made it easier for parents to have their children baptised. Other chapters, all of them necessarily brief, touch on the Civil War period in England and what happened after 1660. In a sidebar, as it were, Bremer revisits the procedures for becoming a church member in the gathered congregations of early Massachusetts. Ministers figure substantially in the book, especially John Davenport, whose life story in England, the Netherlands and New England Bremer has recounted in a recent biography. Readers who know little about early New England may benefit from his resumé of arguments by other historians and his second thoughts about church membership. What this book overlooks, no doubt intentionally, are the many eddies that swirl around the theme of popular religion in early modern England and New England. From Keith Thomas and Margaret Spufford to Paul Seaver and, more recently, Alexander Walsham, Christopher Haigh and Arnold Hunt, studies of every-day or popular religion – even when this category is being questioned – have taught us a great deal about appropriations of the practical divinity as preached or printed. 'Did the godly do as they were told', to quote the late Patrick Collinson, is a question that does not yield an obvious answer. For my money, Hunt's *The art of hearing: English preachers and their audiences, 1590–1640* (2010), together with essays that he has written on sacramental practice, have set a new standard for understanding lay people. Commendable for what it covers, *Lay empowerment* is essentially an overview that recapitulates some of Bremer's scholarship while reporting on what others have accomplished.

The lively experiment is the outcome of a conference held to mark the 350th anniversary of the royal charter that the government of Charles II granted the colony of Rhode Island in 1663. Acknowledging the colony's practice of religious liberty, this document guaranteed that liberty for a

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'clearly Protestant' version of Christianity 'without explicitly favouring any particular church' (p. 23). Of the nineteen essays that this book contains, three and part of a fourth focus on the near mythic figure of Roger Williams. The rest range across eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century American history, with three exceptions: Evan Haefeli's useful exercise in comparative history, 'How special was Rhode Island? The global context of the 1663 charter', a second by Scott Sowerby on the religious politics of Restoration England, and a third by Christopher C. Jones on the hostility among planters in the late eighteenth-century Caribbean to Methodist missionaries and the bi-racial churches that they were creating. Any hopes of a general argument emerging from the essays as a whole disappear almost at once, as toleration mutates into 'religious liberty', the 'separation of Church and State', 'tolerance', 'religious rights', religion as 'private', and the like. In all, something close to a dozen terms of this kind are put in play by the contributors, who never glance sideways at what others are saying or recognise that 'separation of Church and State' is a different project from acknowledging (or insisting upon) the 'free exercise of religion', to quote the First Amendment. But perhaps this laxness is in keeping with the assumption that being 'lively' is good, and especially good because, almost from day one, a 'lively experiment' is what our country has enjoyed.

Not really, of course; and the risk that this volume runs is to help perpetuate the anodyne of religious liberty as quintessentially American. Writing about Williams, Teresa M. Bejans wants to remedy a 'studied disinterest' in Williams's commitment to most aspects of Reformed theology and the debates that he entered into on behalf of religious truth, debates that she construes as a version of religious liberty. In the first of two essays on nineteenth-century Catholicism, Nicholas Pellegrino uncovers Catholic leaders in the early republic who represented their faith as compatible with religious liberty, referencing, as they did so, the Catholic-initiated 'Act concerning Religion' (1649) in Maryland – a gesture of reason of state, since Catholics in the new colony were outnumbered by Protestants, who eventually took over the government and repealed the act, and a posture at odds with what Catholics at mid-century and beyond felt about the American scene. Far more telling is an essay by Shawn Francis Peters on the violence experienced before and during the Second World War by Jehovah's Witnesses, who had a principled objection to practices such as saluting the American flag. In one year alone (1940), this sect suffered 335 episodes of 'anti-Witness violence' (p. 245). The Witnesses turned the other cheek in some respects, but not in others. Seeking redress through the courts, they carried their case for religious freedom to the United States Supreme Court, which decided some thirty Witness-related cases between 1938 and 1946, the most significant of them, arguably, Cantwell *vs.* Connecticut (1940), which recognised certain formal protections for religious conduct.

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By paying careful attention to what the Supreme Court had said about religion toward the end of the nineteenth century and noting its confusion well into the twentieth, Peters captures some of the rawness of the American situation. Instead of endorsing the rosy glow of a 'lively experiment', the better essays – in particular, what Jones has to say about evangelism in the Caribbean – teach us that legal frameworks or imperial regulations that seem to guarantee religious liberty shrink or expand in response to political and social circumstances. Wars and the patriotism that they engender trump religious freedom; what happened to the Jehovah's Witnesses replayed the violence inflicted on German Pietists in wonderfully tolerant Pennsylvania at the time of the American Revolution. Moral imperatives, be it policing the Sunday Sabbath, prohibition, preventing abortion, suppressing 'obscene' books, or halting polygamy can prompt spasms of disciplinary interventions by some of the most determined advocates of disestablishment. As with laws that guarantee racial equality, so in these essays as a whole, deep-seated cultural and social norms make their presence felt in ways that affect how the First Amendment clauses on religion and those in state constitutions have been interpreted as well as what has happened on the ground. No brief essay can do more than glance at these interactions. But what about the interaction between recent work on toleration and tolerance in early modern Europe and what Americanists are doing? Only in two of the essays do citations occur to the transformative work of Alexandra Walsham and Benjamin Kaplan; and John Coffey's carefully nuanced account of England as a 'persecuting society' is noted but once. Ignorance is not bliss, ignorance either of theological frameworks (no one seems to understand the two-kingdom framework) or of religious 'diversity' on the other side of the Atlantic. But the real failure of this book is how it occludes any possibility of knowing which versions, if any, of tolerance or the free exercise of religion had long-lasting consequences. Not, for sure, the tolerant Catholics of about 1800, nor the Roger Williams who, in Denise Spellberg's acutely presentist reading, was modestly sympathetic toward Islam, and not Williams at all given the peculiarities of his eschatology. All the more reason, then, for appreciating Tipson, Van Engen and Bremer, each of them aware of the complex history of Protestantism in England and beyond, and each refusing to be distracted by the lodestar of the strange new world that became 'America'.

That Tipson bends the arc of Puritan studies in one direction and Van Engen in another is reassuring evidence that American-style Puritan studies remains attentive to complexities or tensions that defy the simplifying mantra of 'diversity'. On the whole, British work is spared this particular Americanism, which is reason to hope that theology-centred scholarship can become a fully transatlantic project.

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