[Review of:] The Protestant Evangelical Awakening / W. R. Ward

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Professor Ward's is a highly specialized and, I am afraid to say, a rather dry account of the early history of the eighteenth-century Protestant revival movements from the perspective of European and not simply Anglo-American currents. This is a most worthwhile project but Ward's prose is insufficiently lively to convey any real enthusiasm for what is, after all, a subject of limited appeal. Yet this book embodies scholarship of the very highest calibre and the historical narrative is presented in all its detail. Herein lies its limitation, for Professor Ward assumes a great deal of prior knowledge and as a result his book will be of greater interest to specialists in this field of ecclesiastical history than to Americanists in general.

Only one chapter is devoted to revival in the American colonies. Ward begins by giving account of the Dutch Reformed in what became New York State, and proceeds to discuss the situation of the German-language settlers, the Pennsylvania Germans, the Scots-Irish, the role of the Church of England, and such influential figures as Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg, Johan Philipp Boehm, Michael Schlatter and the Tennent family before moving to the more familiar ground occupied by the Mathers, Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, George Whitefield, James Davenport, and issues such as the Half-Way Covenant and the decline of revivalism in New England.

Perhaps the most interesting point made in this quite extensive discussion of American revival is the effect of migration upon religious groups in the colonies. While sectarians found most of what they wanted through emigration, church members tended to experience through emigration the loss of the religious life they had enjoyed at home. As a consequence, revivalism had a disproportionately significant impact upon the established churches and, in effect, passed the sects by. This is the kind of phenomenon that becomes apparent only from Ward's pan-Protestant perspective. It is to be hoped that other scholars will follow Professor Ward's lead and develop the insights that this book has made possible.

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