

Book Reviews

Jay T. Collier, *Debating Perseverance: The Augustinian Heritage in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Hardcover, 229 pp., \$99.

The Protestant reassessment of the gospel thrust the question of whether or not the saints invariably persevere to glory to the foreground in soteriology. This volume grapples with the question of perseverance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. It is sensitive to post-Reformation readings of Augustine, to the international influence of the Synod of Dort, and to the unfolding nature of debates over the subject in an English context. This is a well-researched and compelling work of historical theology that helps readers understand the importance and development of an important part of Reformed teaching that will help serious students to build on the author's findings.

The author makes the case that debates within the Church of England over the perseverance of the saints focused on Scripture and the other on Augustine. It may surprise some readers as well to learn that even though most Reformed ministers believed in the perseverance of all of the saints, the Reformed confessions did not initially state a position on this issue clearly (196). Collier gives test cases of his narrative by taking representative samples of authors from the period. He develops his theme in seven chapters, stating the question and state of research, and spanning from the Lambeth Articles, the British delegation at the Synod of Dort and the aftermath of the Synod in England, the role of infant baptism in debates over perseverance, and closing with Puritan debates following the English Civil War. His basic contention is that while most Reformed authors believed that elect believers could neither totally nor finally fall away from salvation, some believed that they could fall away totally (though not finally), others

believed that the elect would persevere to the end while not all of the saints would, and still others distinguished between saving and non-saving benefits among church members. This enables Collier to reassess key figures, such as Richard Montagu, who is usually regarded as “the face of English Arminianism” (93). Collier discovers that Montagu, and several key English Reformed authors before and after his time, affirmed Augustinian views of election and predestination, human depravity and grace, the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, and other distinctive Reformed doctrines, while denying the perseverance of the saints in some fashion.

Alternative readings of Augustine loomed large in these discussions as well. While competing readings of Augustine existed among these authors, the general tone of the Church of England was that Dort’s narrow definition of the perseverance of the saints would unnecessarily exclude one of these readings. Collier shows that the tenor of these debates continued well into the mid seventeenth-century as John Owen and George Kendall opposed the Arminian denials of perseverance represented by John Goodwin, while Richard Baxter pressed for greater moderation on the topic in favor of his particular reading of Augustine (163–194). The author thus illustrates that while Augustine was important for all parties involved, even Puritanism did not have a single unified approach to his doctrine of perseverance. This book is neither a complete nor seamless narrative of the debates over perseverance in early modern England, but it does not pretend to be. Instead, the author illustrates his point well through carefully chosen examples, expanding the reader’s understanding of a complex issue that became woven inextricably into the texture of Reformed orthodox theology as time went on.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints affected Reformed piety and practice as well as Reformed thought and confessions. Collier’s study is a superb treatment of the kinds of diversity and development that existed among British Reformed theologians in the Reformed orthodox period. As such, it helps readers better understand the character of this movement as a whole as well as the particular place and self-identity of the Church of England within it. This is a compelling and illuminating read that will grip the interests of all who are interested in Reformed soteriology, British Reformed theology, and post-Reformation uses of the church fathers.

—Ryan M. McGraw, *Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*