The Chair of Verity: Political preaching and pulpit censure in eighteenth-century Scotland.
By Ronald Lyndsay Crawford. Pp. vii-446
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In *The Chair of Verity: Political preaching and pulpit censure in eighteenth-century Scotland*, Ronald Lyndsay Crawford has provided a dense compendium of primary source material and commentary on sermonising in Enlightenment Scotland. Composed principally of an introduction and ten chapters organised by theme, the book outlines the many topical issues discussed by Scottish Presbyterian ministers from their pulpits: patronage, profaneness, bribery and corruption, the stage, heresy, reform, patriotism, America, popery and slavery. Historians have investigated clerical engagement with these issues before but here Crawford looks at controversies afresh interpreting sermonising on hot topics of the day as 'pulpit censure'. Crawford maintains that pulpit censure was central to the Scottish Enlightenment but that historians of the sermon have overlooked its importance. Each chapter centres on particular individuals and key sermons. To Crawford's credit, lesser known pulpit orators—including some dissenters and those of the Popular party in the Kirk—find a place alongside more famous names of the Moderate literati, like Hugh Blair. Crawford also uncovers rare and little studied sermons, such as Patrick Grant's *The Spirit of Moderation in Religion Recommended* (1779), only one printed copy of which seems to be extant (pp. 263–267, 391, fn 85). In so doing, Crawford offers something new to the discussion of, in the case of the Grant sermon, anti-Catholicism and the late eighteenth-century debate surrounding Catholic relief. Four appendices of additional extracts and sixty-eight pages of dense endnotes supplement the wealth of evidence from rich source material

provided in the substantive chapters. That many Scottish Presbyterian ministers believed they had an obligation to speak truth to power is beyond doubt.

The book nevertheless has some significant weaknesses. Though the weighty extracts from primary source material might prove useful to students and scholars of this subject, there are rather too many of them—block quotations crowd the pages—in what purports to be a monograph rather than a source book. The book requires a narrative thread connecting each chapter, more signposting and more contextualisation of the source extracts. Why did Crawford select the sermons showcased here and not others? The introduction would have benefitted from some scene-setting for those unfamiliar with the details of eighteenth-century polemics as well as a more extensive section on the scholarly literature and broader European eighteenth-century history of sermonising in order for the reader better to contextualise the Scottish case. Some clarifying definitions of certain concepts in chapter one on 'Patronage and secession' also would have been useful. Terms like 'auld licht' and 'new licht', though familiar to scholars of Scots Presbyterian dissent, might baffle the uninitiated. Crawford might have engaged more critically and more extensively with his book's theme; reflective chapter conclusions are essentially entirely missing from the volume. Interesting material reproduced in chapter three on 'Bribery and corruption', for example, reveals that Samuel Johnson and James Boswell equated the 'liberty of the pulpit' with the 'liberty of the press' and 'liberty of the bar'. Yet Crawford misses an opportunity critically to reflect on the significance of the parallels drawn. Similarly, in chapter two on 'Profaneness', there is limited analytical commentary on what is described as the 'right' to pulpit censure. Crawford tells us that pulpit censure as a duty and right stemmed from Reformation ideas concerning governance, discipline and morality as enshrined in documents like the Kirk's *Confession of Faith* and *Second Book of Discipline*.

Several pages in the introduction are devoted to outlining the importance of sermonising in the days of Knox and Calvin. Yet there is little information on the immediate eighteenth-century politico-religious and intellectual context to sermon-making. Had the notion of pulpit censure evolved by the mid-eighteenth century? Why when censure was seemingly so central to the Enlightenment and to Calvinist Presbyterianism did some ministers reject the notion that they had a duty or a right publicly to rebuke authority? More discussion of these themes would have enhanced the book which, while it aggregates relevant examples of pulpit censure in the eighteenth century, doesn't manage properly to explain why this phenomenon was apparently so central to Enlightenment thinking and practice in Scotland.

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