

Author: Mutch, Alistair

Title: *Religion and National Identity: Governing Scottish Presbyterianism in the Eighteenth Century*

Pages: xviii + 264 incl. 3 figs and 24 tables

Publisher: Edinburgh University Press

This is an insightful and wonderfully researched book on the development of the practice of accountability in the Church of Scotland. Governance practices in the Kirk – record-keeping, accounting, inspections – have rarely been examined in such depth. Scholarship on the Kirk in the eighteenth century has focused more on its theological and ecclesiological disputations at a national level. Mutch instead has mined the rich treasure trove of session records in the Scottish archives to produce a detailed account of the mundane procedures of Presbyterian governance in local parishes. His microhistorical case studies are penetrating and evocative examinations of the administrative squabbles which arose as a result of the Church's commitment to auditing its members. These practices – outlined in, but which sometimes deviated from, procedural manuals written at the turn of the eighteenth century – were distinctive to Scotland, Mutch argues, and differed to those of the Church of England, whose functionaries seemed to spend more of their time getting drunk in the pub. The book makes some interesting suggestions about the wider impact of these practices on the development of the accounting profession in Scotland and in the United States. I am less impressed, however, by the author's – or publisher's – attempt to package this book as a study of national identity. It is no such thing. For a start, as Mutch himself acknowledges, the book's focus is mainly restricted to five Kirk presbyteries in the Lowlands; it has very little to say on the Highlands or dissenters, and talks only about men. In fact the book has almost nothing to say about national identity (or the voluminous literature concerned with it) as a concept or a construct and spends just over five pages talking about it. The book's conclusions regarding the enduring

impact of governing practices on the Scottish character are slim and speculative. Indeed, the book's contents barely relate at all to the book's title. The book has clearly been marketed in such a way so as to render it appealing to a wide readership. The result is a misleading cover against which it would be unfair to judge the bulk of the book's contents, which are worthwhile in their own right for their insights into the life of the rural Kirk parish.

Valerie Wallace

Victoria University of Wellington