



Ernest Gordon Rupp (1910–1986): Historian of Spiritual Experience

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Abstract: It was in 1945 that Rupp came to public notice when he wrote to challenge the allegation – made in a widely-distributed pamphlet by Peter F. Wiener – that Martin Luther was the spiritual ancestor of Hitler. Rupp's reputation as a Reformation scholar was immediately established. He undertook a great deal of work on Luther, but his writing ranged much more widely. This study has a particular focus on the way in which Rupp's historical work traced aspects of spiritual experience. For him this was a crucial theme. However, so far no essay on Rupp has had his engagement with spirituality as its subject. Although Rupp's own experience could be looked at more closely, and his career is sketched in this article, an examination of his work as a Methodist minister and leader has not been the purpose here. Rather, it is his extensive writing which has been utilised. While further research has developed his topics, his work remains significant.

Keywords: *Gordon Rupp • reformation • luther • spiritual experience • history*

Introduction

Ernest Gordon Rupp was born in London in 1910, the son of John Henry and Sarah Rupp. He attended Owen's School in Islington and then worked in commerce and banking before studying history at King's College London, under Norman Sykes, with a view to becoming a teacher. However, a sense of call to Methodist ministry grew out of his experience as a Methodist local preacher, with Donald Soper's preaching being an influence, and he trained from 1933 to 1937 at Wesley House, Cambridge, gaining first-class honours in theology.¹ A year was spent as a Finch Scholar in Strasbourg and in Basel, where Karl Barth was Professor of Theology. Gordon married Marjorie Edith Hibbard in 1938. They had one son, Martin. For eight years – which included World War II – he was a Methodist minister at Chislehurst in Kent, followed by a year as President's Assistant to R. Newton Flew at Wesley House. It was in 1945 that Rupp came to public notice when he wrote to challenge the allegation – made in a widely-distributed pamphlet by Peter F. Wiener – that Martin Luther was the spiritual ancestor of Hitler.² As Peter Brooks put it, 'Rupp's reputation as a Reformation scholar was established almost overnight'.³ A *Festschrift* produced in 1975, on the occasion of Rupp's 65th birthday, was entitled *Christian Spirituality*. Introducing these essays Brooks, who was University Lecturer in Church History (Reformation Studies) at Cambridge – Rupp had been his mentor – wrote that behind the writers stood 'a veritable throng of well-wishers – academic admirers, satisfied students and grateful

¹ I am indebted to Richard Davis, Wesley House Vice-Principal, for his help with the archives held at Wesley House, and I was glad to have the opportunity to present some of the material in a Wesley House seminar.

² Peter F. Wiener, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor* (London: Hutchinson, 1945).

³ See Peter Brooks, 'Ernest Gordon Rupp (1910–1986)', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 80 (1993), 493.

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congregations'. All were conscious of 'a deep indefinable debt owed to this remarkable man'.⁴ Much could be written about Rupp's subsequent outstanding contribution to church history, but the focus of this article is a narrower one: Rupp as historian of spiritual experience and the reception of his work in that area.⁵

Understanding Luther's Experience

Gordon Rupp's defence of Luther came at a time, at the end of the Second World War, when in Britain anything German, including Luther, was under suspicion.⁶ But, as was always his way, Rupp was intent on digging deeper. His contention was that Wiener was superficial in his approach, and he wrote: 'Like the hawker of quack medicines in the market place, Mr. Wiener knows that confidence and a loud voice will work wonders, for most of the customers will never dream of submitting his stuff to chemical analysis.'⁷ It was this analysis which energised Rupp. Wiener was a schoolteacher and made clear that he was not a scholar, politician, theologian or professional author. That in itself did not, for Rupp, mean that Wiener was disqualified from writing about Luther. But what was inexcusable in Rupp's view was that Wiener had apparently not read crucial authors such as Karl Holl, Professor of Theology and Church History at Tübingen, and yet Holl's work, *Luther* (1921), which issued from his copious reading of Luther's writings, was a turning point in studies of Luther. Holl argued for the Reformer's moral and spiritual intent.⁸ At the time when Rupp was engaging in this polemic, much by and about Luther was still only available in German.⁹ Rupp suggested that High Anglican scholars in England had too often relied for an understanding of the Reformation on the nineteenth-century 'Catholic idealist' – as Rupp termed him – J. A. Möhler. Rupp even included in his critical comments J.P. Whitney, Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge, whose *Reformation Essays* had appeared in 1939.¹⁰ Whitney did explore the influence of medieval spirituality on Luther, and Rupp acknowledged Whitney's 'extensive knowledge of German historical scholarship', but considered his study of Luther to be limited.¹¹

The publication of Rupp's book had an impact in academic and wider circles. Charles Smyth, church historian and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, writing in *Theology*, found Rupp not only informative but also 'exhilarating', 'devastating' and 'extremely amusing'. In case this implied a lack of serious engagement, Smyth emphasised that Rupp 'knows the meaning of historical scholarship' and specifically in the area of Lutheran investigation 'knows his stuff'. In particular, Smyth enjoyed advising Anglo-Catholic clergymen to read 'the ninety-five pages of his [Rupp's] thesis' before they pronounced on what the 'heretical Luther' believed, said or did.¹² For a more general readership, J.O. Cobham, a contributor to a book *The Church Conflict on the Continent* (SPCK, 1944), welcomed Rupp's writing, which arose from his general study of the Reformation and 'special study of Luther'. It was important, as Cobham saw it, that Rupp had exposed 'Wiener's dependence on secondary and inaccurate sources, his use of the art of select quotation, his failure to explain or even to understand Luther in his historical situation—more, his exploitation of slanders against Luther'. Some had been taken in by Wiener's absurd claims, such as that Luther had said 'I am Christ', but for others the reading of Wiener became tiring 'long before Mr. Rupp has finished with him'.¹³

More scholars now became aware that Rupp was not a newcomer to debate about Luther. In 1942, in an article, 'Luther: The Catholic Caricature', in *Theology*, he dealt in some detail with (for example) Heinrich Denifle's attempt in *Luther und Luthertum* (1904), to portray Luther as a liar, knave and clown.¹⁴ Along with Rupp's main purpose in

⁴ Peter Brooks, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM, 1975), 3.

⁵ For a wider view, see John Munsey Turner, 'Gordon Rupp as Historian', *Epworth Review*, January 1991, 70–82.

⁶ W.R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, viewed Luther as a 'coarse and foul-mouthed leader of a revolution': *Church of England Newspaper*, 4 August 1944.

⁷ Gordon Rupp, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Cause – or Cure?* (London: Lutterworth, 1945), 9.

⁸ For background, see James M. Stayer, *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), especially 'Karl Holl and the Origin of the Luther Renaissance', 18–47. Wiener was still being reprinted in 1999 by the American Atheist Press.

⁹ A later English translation is: Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?*, trans. Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

¹⁰ J.P. Whitney, *Reformation Essays* (London: SPCK, 1939).

¹¹ Rupp, *Hitler's Cause*, 14.

¹² Charles Smyth, 'Review', *Theology*, 49/308 (1948): 53–54.

¹³ J.O. Cobham, 'Luther and Hitler', *The Spectator*, 7 December 1945, 22.

¹⁴ E.G. Rupp, 'Luther: The Catholic Caricature', *Theology*, 45/268 (1942): 197–204.

his article, to dissect the writings of Catholic commentators on Luther, he gave some attention to English scholars who treated Luther and other Protestants 'with a carelessness which is in marked contrast to their handling of the Catholic humanists'. He instanced Maynard Smith, Canon of Gloucester Cathedral, who 'in the course of a fine and sympathetic study of Erasmus', included Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* ('On the Bondage of the Will') and made 'the extraordinary statement' that Luther 'approached the subject from his own experience of an instantaneous conversion'.¹⁵ The quotations Smith adduced in support were not – Rupp observed – from Luther's work 'in the original or in the translation which has been accessible for a century', but from the 1927 Bampton Lectures by N.P. Williams, later Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Oxford. Rupp was robust in response to Williams' idea of Luther's 'instantaneous conversion'; it rested only on a recollection by Martin Luther's son Paul of something he heard at age eleven and 'is contradicted by a deal of evidence, and is accepted by no reputable biographer of Luther, Catholic or Protestant'. Williams had associated, 'from the standpoint of human psychology', Luther's experience with the 'Saul, Saul' of the Damascus Road.¹⁶ Rupp saw such an association as akin to the 'stuff and nonsense' of Alice in Wonderland.¹⁷

Awareness of Rupp's work as an interpreter of Luther led to the Master of Trinity College, G. M. Trevelyan, and the College Fellows, inviting Rupp to Cambridge to deliver – as the 1947 Birkbeck Lectures – a course on Luther. At this point Rupp had been appointed a Tutor at the Methodist Richmond College, London. Trevelyan, who had been Regius Professor of Modern History in the University, could hardly have been prepared for the influence exerted by Rupp through his lectures. The University began to speak about 'the Reformation according to Rupp'. As an integral part of his presentation, Rupp examined key phrases used by Luther. He argued that Luther's concern for how people stood in relation to the presence of God, by the Holy Spirit, lay behind his whole theology and ethic; that the Reformer's expositions of Faith, Law and Gospel, and Justification were built on an experiential foundation; and that contrasts could be made between Luther's approach to experience and those of 'Enthusiasm' on the one hand and 'Scholasticism' on the other. Herbert Butterfield, who was Professor of Modern History in the University and editor of the *Cambridge Historical Journal*, was asked to write an assessment of Rupp's lectures for the *Cambridge Review*. The way in which Rupp had employed humour had been a feature of the attraction of his lectures, but Butterfield wrote that Rupp's investigation of spiritual trial, despair and crisis in Luther (*Anfechtungen*) 'takes us through darker tunnels and thornier paths, into worlds well beyond the frontiers of wise-cracking'.¹⁸ Rupp was seeking to understand and convey Luther's full-orbed spiritual experience.

Exploring experiences: the early English Reformation

Although Rupp's profound interest in Luther would persist, he was also becoming known for ground-breaking work on the English Reformation. In 1947 *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* was published, with the focus being on the reign of Henry VIII.¹⁹ S.L. Greenslade, Lightfoot Professor of Divinity in the University of Durham, was among those who recognised the significance of this book.²⁰ Rupp saw the personal convictions of Protestant Reformers as having been marginalised in favour of political, social and economic factors as explanations of the English Reformation. Greenslade welcomed Rupp's examination of the role 'religious conviction' played in individual experience and noted how few English Reformers had received satisfactory biographies. Rupp wrote about lesser-known Reformers in Cambridge such as Thomas Bilney, John Frith and Robert Barnes. Rupp was not afraid to use what Greenslade described as 'somewhat unfashionable' sources, for example John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (or 'Book of Martyrs'). With his knowledge of Luther to draw from, Rupp discussed Lutheran influences in Henry's reign. He accepted that the evangelical convictions of a small minority of Englishmen had little effect on

¹⁵ H.M. Smith, *Pre-Reformation England* (London: Macmillan, 1938), 501–502.

¹⁶ N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927), 426.

¹⁷ Rupp, 'Luther', 203.

¹⁸ Herbert Butterfield, 'The Birkbeck Lectures on Luther (as given by E. Gordon Rupp)', *Cambridge Review*, 24 May 1947, 490–492. For a Rupp anthology, see John A. Vickers, *Wisdom and Wit* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1993). For the phrase 'Reformation according to Rupp': Brooks, 'Ernest Gordon Rupp', 493.

¹⁹ E. Gordon Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947). Material in some of the chapters had been included in an essay by Rupp 'Reformers and Reformation in England in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI', which was awarded the Archbishop Cranmer Prize in 1940.

²⁰ S.L. Greenslade, 'Review', *Theology*, 51/334 (1948): 159–160.

high policy, but argued they were not to be discounted. A.H. Rees, a High Church Anglican, had contended (in 1939) that English Reformers taught a Catholic, not Lutheran, doctrine of justification.²¹ Rupp deployed sources to refute Rees, and Greenslade found Rupp's case 'devastating'.²²

Alongside his Reformation studies, Rupp was exploring spiritual experience at Holy Communion. Representatives of Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist and Quaker traditions contributed to a symposium on the subject, with a collection of essays published in 1947. Rupp, on the Methodist understanding, noted that John Wesley changed his opinion on various issues but on the duty of 'constant communion' he remained the same. For Wesley, Holy Communion was a converting as well as a confirming ordinance. Rupp also noted Communion hymns by Charles Wesley and others. It was a disappointment to Rupp that in most Methodist chapels the chalice had been replaced by (as he put it) 'little glasses resembling trays of inkwells!' However, this was not Rupp's main point. He wanted to stress that for Methodists Holy Communion had been closely linked with the proclamation of the Word. He wished to call Methodists back to some early Methodist testimony of worship – here he drew from early hymnody – and within that Communion, 'when all the temple flames with God'. The contrast between this and a Methodist who had recently said to a minister at the close of a great Easter celebration that, 'We've had a nice little service', was, for Rupp, staggering. He wrote with some outrage: 'nice!!! little!!!' Rupp's vision, informed by history, was of 'wonder' in the experience of Communion.²³

The probing Rupp was undertaking stimulated discussion in the USA as well as Britain. Rupp's argument in *English Protestant Tradition* – that the English Reformation was 'not wholly to be explained in terms of that conspiracy by which a lustful monarch and predatory gentry combined to plunder the Church and rend the unity of Christendom', but had to do with beliefs²⁴ – was seen by Franklin L. Baumer, at Yale University, as crucial to an understanding of religious experience in the sixteenth century. Baumer was writing on 'Intellectual History and Its Problems'. He was fascinated by Rupp's enumeration of 25 prominent Cantabrigians who suffered martyrdom. Baumer found Thomas Bilney's 'confession' of his conversion to Protestantism, which Rupp highlighted, a remarkable example of someone who, apparently independently of Luther, had a similar religious experience – 'spiritual conflict, despair of salvation by works, illumination and relief'. At this stage Rupp was not widely known in America as a Methodist, and in the *Journal of Religion* Baumer referred to him as an Anglican clergyman, while noting that it was in the classroom of the Reformed theologian Karl Barth that the word Protestantism 'became urgently alive' for Rupp.²⁵ Appreciation for Rupp's work also featured in a review by F.W. Buckler, of the Graduate School at Oberlin College, Ohio. He considered that Rupp had 'soaked himself' in sixteenth-century Protestant literature. With Rupp having brought to the fore a Protestant rather than a Catholic legacy in England, a reply was awaited.²⁶

Questions about Rupp's interpretations might have been expected when a review of *English Protestant Tradition* appeared in the Catholic journal, *Blackfriars*, by a leading Dominican, Ian Hislop, who was himself investigating the broader historical enterprise.²⁷ Far from querying Rupp, however, Hislop found the portrayal of 'the importance of the religious motive in the English Reformation' to be convincing. From the theological point of view, Hislop commented, Rupp's interpretation of Henrician documents was of great value.²⁸ A critical reply to Rupp was also a possibility when Maynard Smith produced his *Henry VIII and the Reformation*.²⁹ Those who followed the debates knew that Rupp had previously had Smith in his sights. A review of *Henry VIII* by Jerald C. Brauer, a scholar of Puritanism who was at the University of Chicago's Federated Theological Faculty and was to become the Dean, considered that Smith wrote in a way that was sympathetic to both Catholic and Protestant development under Henry. But Brauer found it difficult to understand how Luther could be still labelled, by Smith and others, 'as an individualist (unless

²¹ A. H. Rees, *The Doctrine of Justification in the Anglican Reformers* (London: SPCK, 1939).

²² Greenslade, 'Review', 160.

²³ David Cairns and Hugh Martin, eds., *The Holy Communion: A Symposium* (London: SCM, 1947), esp. 125–126.

²⁴ Rupp, *English Protestant Tradition*, xi.

²⁵ Franklin L. Baumer, 'Intellectual History and its Problems', *Journal of Modern History*, 21/3 (1949): 191–203; F.L. Baumer, 'Review', *Journal of Religion*, 29 (1949): 148–149; cf. Rupp, *English Protestant Tradition*, viii.

²⁶ F.W. Buckler, 'Review', *Church History*, 17/3 (1948): 248–250.

²⁷ See Ian Hislop, 'What is History?', *Blackfriars*, 33/392 (1952): 460–462.

²⁸ Ian Hislop, 'Review', *Blackfriars*, 29/342 (1948): 432–433.

²⁹ H. Maynard Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1949).

carefully defined), as antisocial, and as holding a dualism between personal and public morality'. Brauer pointed to Rupp and another Methodist, Philip S. Watson, who produced *Let God be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther*, in 1947. Disappointingly for Brauer, despite the fact that Rupp and Watson had been correcting misinterpretations 'for quite some time', *Henry VIII* was a volume that exhibited 'the usual Anglo-Catholic misrepresentation of Luther'.³⁰

Perhaps the writer who stood out for his critique of Rupp's work was A.G. Dickens, who moved in 1949 from Oxford to be G.F. Grant Professor of History, Hull University. He was to be known for his writing on the English Reformation and in his review of *English Protestant Tradition* he affirmed the importance of Rupp's study of 'the early phases of our continental-inspired Protestantism', which had been 'strangely neglected'. The book's strength, he wrote, lay in its investigation of continuity between German and English Protestantism, while its weakness was 'narrow allegiances'. Rupp, he continued, 'clearly finds no obstacles to a vigorous partisanship', and he observed that it was 'all too easy to live so exclusively with the heroes of a heroic movement that rival sympathies wither'. Rupp's sympathies did broaden over time, as will be seen. A contradiction Dickens found in Rupp was between 'eloquent pleas for historical sympathy' and 'numerous gibes against both the conservative and the mediatory figures of his period'. Strangely, given that Rupp was highlighting spiritual experiences in lesser-known Protestants, Dickens criticised him for neglecting 'some humbler figures' in western and northern provincial society 'whose devotional habits met the shock of Protestantism utterly unprepared'. Whereas Rupp's audiences in Cambridge had revelled in the way he connected the past with contemporary issues, Dickens found the 'hearty' modern parallels in Rupp's writing ill-judged. Rupp's 'brightness', for him, 'obscures clarity'. While others remarked that Rupp drew them into the world of the sixteenth century, Dickens opined that the 'authentic atmosphere' of the period was lost.³¹ Fortunately, Rupp did not abandon his stimulating style.

Hard on the heels of *English Protestant Tradition* came a further study by Rupp in which Luther was the focus: *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms*. Against the view that in Luther's understanding of justification people remained in their sins, Rupp found Luther returning again and again 'to the thought of movement and growth in the Christian life'.³² Owen Chadwick, then a Fellow of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and later Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University, wrote in *Theology* about the way Rupp's book never allowed 'the quick movement of the narrative to be slowed to the ponderous pace of an academic discussion', with Rupp himself portraying his book as an invitation to the 'adventure' of Luther studies. Chadwick saw in Rupp someone who 'understands not only Lutheran scholarship, he understands Luther: and he brings to Luther a sympathy and an affection which is always sane, always fair, and which never degenerates into hagiography or worship'.³³ T. F. Torrance, Professor of Church History and then of Christian Dogmatics at New College, Edinburgh, was similarly appreciative. *Luther's Progress* was 'a masterly little volume which must take first rank among the many works that in recent years have been devoted to a re-discovery of Martin Luther'. German and Scandinavian, Lutheran and Roman commentaries had been carefully sifted, 'and the best fruits of that research are given here, while the author's own brilliant scholarship and pungent language (so often a match even to that of Luther himself) set the matter forth in a way that commands the attention from start to finish'. Torrance saw in Rupp's work 'the inmost, most personal experience of Luther' being interwoven with Luther's 'theological and exegetical discoveries'. Like the Cambridge audiences, Torrance enjoyed Rupp's humour, but for 'the quiet scholar or busy pastor' the book brought a deepened sense of vocation.³⁴

Lecturing and Leading: Cambridge and Manchester

With the notice that was being taken of his work, it was 'no surprise', as Peter Brooks commented, when Rupp was appointed Lecturer in Divinity at Cambridge from Michaelmas 1952. He held this post for four years, 'treating historians and theologians to stimulating classroom expositions covering the whole range of Reformation Studies'.³⁵ Material in these lectures showed Rupp's commitment to understanding spiritual dynamics. Luther was portrayed

³⁰ Jerald C. Brauer, 'Review', *Journal of Religion*, 31/3 (1951): 218–219.

³¹ A.G. Dickens, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 50 (January/April 1949): 106–107.

³² Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms*, (London: SCM, 1951), 41.

³³ Owen Chadwick, 'Review', *Theology*, 54/374 (1951): 314–315; cf. *Luther's Progress*, 8.

³⁴ T. F. Torrance, 'Review', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 5/4 (1952): 427–428.

³⁵ Brooks, 'Ernest Gordon Rupp', 495.

as someone who began to read Augustine at Wittenberg and who displayed ‘the rapture of a younger theologian for his first theological love’. Rupp, as a teacher, was keen that his hearers saw classrooms as places of discovery. Luther, Rupp argued, had to be pictured year after year – with few exceptions – going into a lecture room and addressing successive generations of students. This kind of leadership continued for 30 years, until ‘he could only croak his last lectures’. Rupp spoke of the illumination which opened new vistas for Luther, when he saw ‘the saving intervention of a merciful God displayed in Jesus Christ and freely bestowed on sinners’, as he lectured on the Psalms. The preacher in Rupp can be heard in his contention that faith, for Luther, as in the New Testament, was not one of a list of virtues ‘but a whole dimension of Christian experience’, and with hope and love ‘the fountain from which the Christian life must spring’.³⁶

During this period in Cambridge Rupp’s Birkbeck lectures, suitably extended, were published as *The Righteousness of God*.³⁷ Rupp paid tribute to ‘incredibly learned, detailed, and profound Continental Luther studies’, although for Jaroslav Pelikan, then at the University of Chicago and later a Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale, Rupp’s work combined ‘careful study of the sources with a nimbleness of thought and expression that is so often lacking in German and Scandinavian studies of Luther’.³⁸ It was by no means the case that Rupp affirmed here everything in Luther. He found *De Servo Arbitrio* ‘most exasperating’, at least in part because Rupp was a self-proclaimed ‘disciple of John and Charles Wesley’ and was not convinced that Luther had the correct balance. However, Rupp was clear that sin was pervasive and he opposed modern Protestants who had made the Reformation an excuse for their ‘individualistic and humanistic perversions of the Gospel’; some of these perversions which proclaimed personal independence were for Rupp almost exactly what Luther intended by ‘Original Sin’.³⁹ James Atkinson, whose doctorate at the University of Münster was on ‘Luther and the Gospel of St. John’, and who would become an influential Luther scholar, highlighted Rupp’s contribution, which he stated was ‘not found elsewhere in English, both on the subject of the English reaction to Luther and on the present state of Luther research’.⁴⁰

Along with his primary interest, the Reformation, Rupp began in the 1950s to address other topics. An example was his *Principalities and Powers: Studies in the Christian Conflict in History*, based on four talks broadcast by the BBC. This was not about conflict between Christians, but about how Christians might gain fresh confidence. He drew attention to the early Christians, and moved through the Methodist Revival to the ‘resilient courage which nerved the great Christians of the nineteenth century to their victorious assault upon evil’. The key was for Christians to see ‘one like the Son of Man, their Conqueror and their King’.⁴¹ This period saw Rupp examining Methodist history in more detail. In 1954 he gave a lecture to the Wesley Historical Society on Thomas Jackson (1783–1873), who with little formal education became a Methodist scholar, tutor and apologist. In looking at this ‘Methodist Patriarch’, as he called him, Rupp noted that on being appointed a tutor Jackson dreaded questions that might be fired at him to which he had no answer, but found, as others had done, that this was not the reality.⁴² Another Methodist publication in the same year was *Methodism in relation to Protestant tradition*, a profoundly theological address Rupp had delivered at the eighth Ecumenical Methodist conference, held in Oxford in 1951. He argued that Wesleyan spirituality ‘maintained the Biblical, Protestant diagnosis of the depth of our human tragedy, which we only realize when we confront the Righteousness of God.’ But it set ‘total grace’ against ‘total sinfulness’ and breathed ‘an optimism of Grace which changed the whole mood and temper of English Christianity’.⁴³ In another publication that year, *Prophetic Preaching*, which was a lecture for Overdale College, the Churches of Christ Theological College, Birmingham, he called for prophetic preachers who held together Word and Spirit.⁴⁴

³⁶ The material in this paragraph is to be found in Rupp, *Luther’s Progress*.

³⁷ Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton; New York: Philosophical Library, 1953).

³⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Journal of Theology*, 35/3 (1955): 179–180; cf. Rupp, *Righteousness*, xi.

³⁹ Rupp, *Righteousness*, 270, 281, 312.

⁴⁰ James Atkinson, ‘Review’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 5/2 (1954): 229.

⁴¹ Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers: Studies in the Christian Conflict in History* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 21–22.

⁴² Gordon Rupp, *Thomas Jackson: Methodist Patriarch* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), 28.

⁴³ Gordon Rupp, et al., *Methodism in Relation to Protestant Tradition* (London: Epworth Press, 1954); cf. *Proceedings of the Eighth Ecumenical Methodist Conference* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 93–106 (101).

⁴⁴ Gordon Rupp, *Prophetic Preaching* (Birmingham: Berean Press, 1954), 7–8.

In 1955 Rupp gained his Doctorate in Divinity and a year later the University of Manchester invited him to take up the newly-established Chair in Ecclesiastical History. He remained for twelve years, becoming Dean of the Faculty of Theology (1961–1962) and in 1966 Public Orator of the University. Rupp enjoyed working with the Free Church Colleges, and teaching in the History Department, and writing monthly articles over several years for *The Manchester Guardian*.⁴⁵ His *Six Makers of English Religion* came out in 1957. The six were William Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, John Foxe, John Milton, John Bunyan and Isaac Watts, and Rupp noted that three were Church of England and three Nonconformist. In each case he examined their spiritual outlook.⁴⁶ Epworth Press published in 1960 two lectures Rupp gave on 'Protestant Catholicity'. He remarked on the 'fashion' to be interested in Catholic tradition and questioned whether rehearsing the canons of the Patristic age could do justice to such questions as the place of women in the church. For him, Protestantism had merit in being sensitive to movements of the human spirit which called for re-thinking. He saw a sensitiveness towards possibilities as a mark of catholicity.⁴⁷ A more popular book, but still determinedly theological, was published in 1964, based again on lectures. This was *Last Things First*, in which Rupp considered 'verities' to be found at the end of the Apostles' Creed: The Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of Sins; the Resurrection of the Body; and the Life Everlasting. A belief in eternal destiny, he averred, made a difference to how life was lived.⁴⁸

In his last two years in Manchester Rupp's academic output was maintained. In 1965 he was one of the Hibbert Lecturers on 'Christianity in Education'. He spoke of how he approached this topic diffidently, since it was not his field, but he then proceeded to offer elements of his own thinking. Rupp spoke of Jesus as a teacher, who trained disciples and called them friends. Rupp emphasised personal relationships in teaching, something needed in a 'computer age'. In University education, Rupp urged vocational application of learning, thinking especially of theology and philosophy but also more widely. He discerned an uneasiness in Christian consciences through awareness of how Christians had defended the faith. What outsiders saw were ecclesiastical institutions defending their own interests. Rupp's call was for the Church to 'bear the form of a servant in the wider community'.⁴⁹ This period was marked by ongoing commitment on Rupp's part to seeking more understanding of the sixteenth-century Reformation's message for contemporary life. 1966 saw three essays of this kind. In a lecture on 'Thomas Müntzer: Prophet of Radical Christianity', Rupp wrote that in Müntzer, 'as in no other Reformer, we touch that smothered undercurrent of pain and injustice which would one day explode in modern revolutionary man'.⁵⁰ His sympathy for Müntzer was a new development. In other essays, Rupp explored further the role of Luther and of 'Patterns of Salvation' in the Reformation and by 1966 Rupp had made such an impact that Owen Chadwick devoted a journal article to Rupp's historical writing.⁵¹

Spiritual Shaping in Community

The Wesley House community had always meant a great deal to Rupp. He acknowledged his indebtedness to Newton Flew, the Principal when Rupp was a student, for directing him towards Reformation studies. He came to the House as Principal in 1967, as a scholar but above all, with Marjorie, seeking to offer counsel and vision. Leslie Griffiths, who began as a student in 1967, describes how Rupp combined his Principalship with becoming President of the Methodist Conference for 1968–1969, a year before the narrow failure of the scheme to unite the Church of England with Methodism. Rupp spent his presidential year 'visiting every corner of the country urging people to support that scheme'. He enlisted several students, including Griffiths, to accompany him so that the matter could be put from a 'young minister's' point of view. Rupp's dejection when it all failed was palpable.⁵² Nationally and locally,

⁴⁵ There are many extracts from his article in Vickers, *Wisdom and Wit*.

⁴⁶ Gordon Rupp, *Six Makers of English Religion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957). Lectures given to students at Westfield College, University of London.

⁴⁷ Gordon Rupp, *Protestant Catholicity* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 51–52.

⁴⁸ Gordon Rupp, *Last Things First* (London: SCM, 1964), 7.

⁴⁹ Gordon Rupp, 'Christian Learning – the Great Tradition', in F.H. Hilliard, et. al., *The Hibbert Lectures* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 66.

⁵⁰ Gordon Rupp, 'Thomas Müntzer: Prophet of Radical Christianity', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1966), 467–487 (487).

⁵¹ Gordon Rupp, 'Luther and the Reformation', in *The Reformation Crisis*, ed., Joel Hurstfield (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Gordon Rupp, 'Patterns of Salvation in the First Age of the Reformation', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 57 (1966): 52–61; O. Chadwick, 'Historical Writing of Professor Gordon Rupp', *Drew Gateway*, 36 (1966): 52–66.

⁵² Leslie Griffiths to Ian Randall, email, 26 May 2024. Leslie Griffiths served as President of the Methodist Conference, 1994–1995, was Superintendent Minister at Wesley's Chapel, London, and since 2004 has been a member of the House of Lords.

Rupp preached many sermons that combined wit with profound spiritual wisdom. His ecumenical involvement was deepening in the 1960s. He was a fascinated observer at the Second Vatican Council. Along with his principalship, in 1968 Rupp was appointed Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge – the first non-Anglican to hold the chair – and a Fellow at Emmanuel College. A lecture he gave that year in Coventry Cathedral on St. Benedict highlighted Rupp's concern to see in the gift of Christian experience – he highlighted the Psalms in Christian worship – 'the imbalance and extravagance of a love letter' rather than 'the formal precision of a notice board'.⁵³

Leslie Griffiths, as a student, encountered ongoing discussion in Cambridge of John Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963), followed by his *The New Reformation?* (1965), both published by SCM. David Edwards, the SCM editor, was one of Griffiths' church history tutors. Rupp took up the cudgels in lectures that compared the 'new' and 'old' reformation, and Griffiths imagined the scene in the Cambridge Divinity School as Robinson gave his lectures on the 'new' to a couple of dozen students while Rupp attracted hundreds on the 'old'.⁵⁴ Rupp's material, which included lectures in Canada, found its way into a book in 1967, *The Old Reformation and the New*. He argued that among crucial features of reformation were communication and spirituality and that Cranmer was well known for having achieved services in the vernacular, but was anticipated by Thomas Müntzer: Rupp broke new ground in showing Müntzer's spiritual significance. He also contended that among leading Protestant Reformers and the Anabaptists there were many illustrations of belief in and practice of the life of prayer. He accepted, however, that some Protestant Reformers might have reacted against Catholic inward religion. Regarding the 'new reformation', commenting on Robinson's suggestion that there was a parallel between himself and Luther in terms of a publicity explosion, Rupp's view was that to be aligned with Luther, Robinson needed: to be unfrocked and condemned for high treason, to translate the Bible and compose a hymn book, and to produce around 100 folio volumes which 400 years later would concern scholars all over the world.⁵⁵

It was inevitable that someone as diminutive as Rupp in the Dixie chair would be referred to as the 'pixie' professor. However, his lectures were far from small-scale in their effect. He was a moving orator and he invited people to share in the task of searching for divine reality. The Reformation, as well as other periods in the story of the church, underlined for him the spiritual nourishment that came in time of change. Substantial work on Reformation themes continued in the Wesley House years. In *Patterns of Reformation*, for example, he welcomed the fact that Luther left room for the 'dimension of beauty to be used in the service of God'.⁵⁶ Sermons by Rupp were also being published. Among topics in one sermon series were 'Discoveries in old age', which for him meant 'growing younger', while also recognising illness and pain, and death, 'the last friend'.⁵⁷ His monthly sermons to the small congregation in Barnwell, a disadvantaged area of Cambridge, were much appreciated. In preaching and lecturing his desire for Christian unity was consistently evident. Preaching in 1970 in Westminster Cathedral during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, he described himself as both a William Tyndale and a Thomas More man, and in the same year he delivered a lecture in Cambridge on F.J.A. Hort, part of the trio of Anglican scholars – with Westcott and Lightfoot – in nineteenth-century Cambridge. Rupp found in Hort someone who recognised the importance in history of what others regarded as trifles.⁵⁸ This was the investigative outlook that marked Rupp. In the same spirit of looking beyond his own tradition, Rupp preached the third annual Gerard Manley Hopkins sermon in 1971, examining Hopkins' theology of the Cross. Rupp, Peter Walker and Leslie Griffiths used to meet regularly to read and muse over the poetry of Hopkins.⁵⁹

During the 1970s Rupp became increasingly an apologist for the broad sweep of church history and for its role in fostering wider understanding. His ecumenical involvement included being a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. In a volume in 1971 on 'Christian Studies', Rupp wrote reflectively on the study

⁵³ Gordon Rupp, 'St Benedict: Patron of Europe'. Lecture in Coventry Cathedral, Church Quarterly, July 1968, 17.

⁵⁴ Leslie Griffiths to Ian Randall, 26 May 2024.

⁵⁵ Gordon Rupp, *The Old Reformation and the New* (London: Epworth Press, 1967), 51.

⁵⁶ Gordon Rupp, *Patterns of Reformation* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 104. See also Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Western Press, Philadelphia, 1969).

⁵⁷ Sermons by Rupp are in the Wesley House archive, M202 RUP1. These include a sermon preached at Wesley's Chapel in 1968 and 'The Sixty Plus and other Sermons' (1978).

⁵⁸ Gordon Rupp, *Hort and the Cambridge Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 10.

⁵⁹ Gordon Rupp, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the 'Theology of the Cross'* (London: The Hopkins Society, 1971).

of church history.⁶⁰ He argued that historical study required imagination, but also scepticism. Without scepticism, imagination could lead to romanticism, but without imagination history was 'dehydrated', offering only dates and names that were meaningless, boring and irrelevant. This approach played into the hands of those who saw no point in considering the story of the church, which was believed to be irrelevant. In contrast to that, Rupp wanted to bring out what was formative in the early centuries of church history, the powerful influence of the medieval period, and the 'great, long deferred, ecclesiastical explosion' that was the Protestant Reformation. Rupp drew attention to how more recent editing and publishing of many documents concerning the Anabaptists had directed attention to the radicals of the Reformation and produced a partial re-appraisal of judgements about them. In addition, Rupp was keen to go beyond Europe. If the history of Christianity was told in a way that privileged Europe, he believed it was narrow. Rupp welcomed the fact that in Africa and India more attention was being paid by scholars to their own Christian history. All of this, for Rupp, had a spiritual basis. The people of God were 'a remembering people', and alongside that churches of all generations were 'contemporary with God in Christ and so with one another'.⁶¹ A year later, in an article on 'Protestant Spirituality' Rupp wrote about 'spirituality' as 'a catholic word'.⁶²

At Wesley House, Rupp established a close working relationship with Peter Walker, Principal of the Anglican Westcott House, on the other side of Jesus Lane. After the failure of the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme, the two Principals were determined that their communities should share as fully as possible in training priests and ministers. They were also drawn together through their admiration for Bishop George Bell, well known for his passion for reconciliation in Europe and his ecumenism. Walker, as a young man, had been befriended by Bell, and, after the Second World War, Bell and Rupp were British members of a delegation to Germany from the nascent World Council of Churches. The devastation Rupp witnessed horrified him. He never forgot those impressions. A meeting with German Church leaders, held in Stuttgart, resulted in the Declaration in which German Churches accused themselves of having failed to act against Hitler's aggression. In 1972, Rupp gave a lecture which was published as '*I seek my brethren: Bishop George Bell and the German Churches*', and was dedicated to Walker. Rupp saw the Stuttgart Declaration, which he considered as a powerfully prophetic document, as 'having opened a new way for the new solidarity of hope within the fellowship of the ecumenical movement'.⁶³ Ridley Hall, another Anglican College, joined with Wesley and Westcott in 1972 to form the Federation of Theological Colleges. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, presided at an inaugural Eucharist, and Rupp preached: from Psalm 118, 'This is the Lord's doing: and it is marvellous in our eyes.' Rupp saw in the Federation those from differing traditions learning and teaching together, and pronounced: 'Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, here are our deep roots'.⁶⁴

Christian Spirituality

In 1975, to mark Rupp's retirement from Wesley House, the *Festschrift* was produced. In the Preface, Peter Brooks wrote that 'E.G.R.'s many-sided achievements and interests effectively mirror his depth of character and pastoral genius... the generous forbearance and lively humour of the Dixie Professor both counter the tyranny of the trivial and guarantee the enduring respect of his many friends'.⁶⁵ Among the contributors were several from the University of Cambridge (in the order in which their chapters appeared): G.W. Lampe, Regius Professor of Divinity, M.D. Knowles, Emeritus Regius Professor of Modern History, R.L. Williams, a Research Fellow, Downing College, Owen Chadwick, by then Regius Professor of Modern History, and Brooks himself. Other contributors who shared Rupp's historical interests included A.G. Dickens, then Director of the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, R.H. Bainton, Emeritus Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Yale University, and John Walsh, Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford. Surprisingly, few of the authors engaged directly with Rupp's work. The exceptions were Brooks, who took up Rupp's appreciation of Luther's pastoral commitment, and Williams, who examined Rupp's portrayal of Tyndale. Given the title of the *Festschrift*, more might have been expected on spirituality. This was central in two chapters: one by D.H. Newsome, Head Master of Christ's College, Horsham, and the other by R.E. Davies, formerly

⁶⁰ Gordon Rupp, 'Church History', in F.G. Healey, *Preface to Christian Studies* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1971), 107–121.

⁶¹ Rupp, 'Church History', 108, 116–119.

⁶² Gordon Rupp, 'Protestant Spirituality in the First Age of the Reformation', *Studies in Church History*, 8 (London: Nelson, 1972): 155–170 (155).

⁶³ Gordon Rupp, '*I seek my brethren: Bishop George Bell and the German Churches*' (London: Epworth Press, 1974), 27. The lecture (1972) was the MacIntosh Lecture, delivered at the University of East Anglia.

⁶⁴ Mary Tanner and Ian Randall, *The Cambridge Theological Federation: A Journey in Ecumenical Learning*, (Cambridge: CTF, 2022).

⁶⁵ Brooks, ed., *Christian Spirituality*, 6.

Principal of Wesley College, Bristol, who wrote on 'The Spirituality of Ecumenism'. Rupp cooperated with Davies in the production of the 3-volume history of Methodism in Britain.⁶⁶

Rupp retired as Dixie Professor in 1977. He was recognised through honorary doctorates – Aberdeen, Manchester and Paris – and fellowships, and retirement could have been expected to be a time of further productivity. Brooks indicates that this hope was not fulfilled.⁶⁷ However, his output did continue. In the year of his retirement, Epworth Press produced *Just Men*, which drew together talks on various occasions. Rupp was delighted that as a Methodist he had been invited by Anglicans to speak about Matthew Parker; by the Church of Scotland to talk about John Knox; and by Catholics to give a lecture on John Henry Newman. This for Rupp was a proof of authentic ecumenical progress. Others addressed included Francis of Assisi and St. Benedict, with Rupp commenting in typically wry fashion that he had turned for comfort to the Rule of St. Benedict which stated that if a brother was commanded to do impossible things (in this case speak on St. Benedict) and it was beyond his strength, then he was to know 'that it is expedient for him'.⁶⁸ Also in 1977, he produced an essay on 'A Rapture of Devotion in English Puritanism', within a volume in honour of the Congregational historian, Geoffrey Nuttall (who had contributed to Rupp's *Festschrift*). Here Rupp showed himself to be an early advocate of a connection between environment and prayer, anticipating that exploration would take place of 'the relation between spirituality and geography'. On his main topic, Puritanism, he found too little attention being paid 'to their spirituality, to what they have to say of Christian experience, of their devotion to Christ, and about the joy of the Christian religion'.⁶⁹ Continuing the focus on ecumenical spirituality, in the following year, to mark 500 years since Thomas More's birth, Rupp produced a more popular book, lavishly illustrated, on the man whom he now presented as 'the King's Good Servant'.⁷⁰

The new decade began with Rupp leading a field of twelve authors in a volume produced in honour of A.G. Dickens. Rupp engaged in fresh analysis of 'the ferment of ideas', as he put it, in the beginning of the Reformation.⁷¹ In 1982 he was on familiar ground giving a lecture to the Friends of Wesley's Chapel in which he argued that despite John Wesley's differences with William Law, Wesley's debt to Law's writing for shaping the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection was 'deep and permanent'. Where there was acceptance of mediocrity, Law wanted perfection, and it became, Rupp affirmed, the 'grand deposition' of the people called Methodist.⁷² He also turned to the question of Martin Luther and the Jews. After noting some friendly statements in Luther about receiving Jews to work and trade among others in society, Rupp went on to describe the 'terrible tract' by Luther from the last period of his life, *On the Jews and their Lies*, a tract which Rupp commented was 'fortunately a worst seller'. Rupp's own question was whether Jews and Christians might explore together in penitence and compassion the gifts and calling of God.⁷³ In 1984, Rupp returned to 'the people called Methodist' in a chapter he wrote in a volume with that title. In covering John Wesley, he brought to the fore the dimension of spirituality, describing how Wesley spent several days each year in London, Bristol and elsewhere, going over the lists of Methodist members, and praying over each one in the light of the reports of the class leaders. Rupp also drew attention to the correspondence Wesley had with scores of Methodist ladies, viewed by Rupp as 'a spiritual elite'.⁷⁴ The last *Festschrift* contribution by Rupp was to a volume in honour of Owen Chadwick. It was classic Rupp: on Luther and Thomas Müntzer.⁷⁵

The final 'big book' Rupp wrote, put into his hands a few weeks before his death in December 1986, was *Religion in England, 1688–1791*. On Nonconformists, he called for work to be done on Baptist spirituality and highlighted Benjamin Keach, a Baptist whose spiritual allegories 'for a time ran ahead of Bunyan in popularity';

⁶⁶ A. Raymond George, Rupert E Davies, Gordon Rupp, eds., *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1965, 1978, 1983).

⁶⁷ Brooks, 'Ernest Gordon Rupp', 497.

⁶⁸ Gordon Rupp, *Just Men: Historical Pieces* (London: Epworth Press, 1977).

⁶⁹ Gordon Rupp, 'A Rapture of Devotion in English Puritanism', in R. Buick Knox, ed., *Reformation, Conformity, and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall* (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 115–31 (see 115 and 119).

⁷⁰ Gordon Rupp, *Thomas More: The King's Good Servant* (London: Collins, 1978).

⁷¹ Gordon Rupp, 'The Battle of the Books: The Ferment of Ideas and the Beginning of the Reformation', in Peter Brooks, ed., *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honour of A.G. Dickens* (London: Scolar Press, 1980).

⁷² Gordon Rupp, *The Plant of Salvation: A lecture to the Friends of Wesley's Chapel, May 27th, 1982 at Wesley's Chapel* (London: Friends of Wesley's Chapel, 1982).

⁷³ Gordon Rupp, 'Martin Luther and the Jews in the Context of his life and times', *Face to Face*, 10 (1983): 4–10.

⁷⁴ Gordon Rupp, 'John Wesley, the Man', in *People called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1984), 8.

⁷⁵ Gordon Rupp, '"True History": Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer', in Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best, eds., *History, Society and the Churches: Essays in honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), 77–88.

saw Quaker spirituality as marked by depth; noted that Isaac Watts, the Independent minister and hymnwriter, brought new life through his hymns into what had been ‘dull’ aspects of Nonconformist worship; and commended Philip Doddridge, another Independent, for embracing the wholeness of human life in Christian experience. Rupp’s relaxation included the reading of many crime novels. In the eighteenth-century period he was studying, Rupp was struck by the influence of Catholic devotional material from the Continent on the spiritual outlook of English churches, although he wished that more attention had been given to Teresa of Avila rather than to Madame Guyon. He praised the Moravians for their devotion to hymns and to the Scriptures, and for the *Losungswort* (Watchword), an enduring gift to the church used by many members of the German Confessing Church imprisoned during the Third Reich. John Wesley was, naturally, given space, as was William Law, with references to some moving writing of Wesley’s and to the way Wesley ended his account of Christian perfection with the Church of England ‘Collect for Purity’. Given the words in that Collect, Rupp commented, asking for hearts to be cleansed by the Holy Spirit, to perfectly love God and worthily magnify his holy name, it was clear to him that it would ‘be blasphemy to suppose they mean nothing at all’.⁷⁶ Wesley’s approach to spirituality, for Rupp, had the last word.

Further words were, however, spoken by those who reviewed *Religion in England*, V.H.H. Green, Rector of Lincoln College Oxford, made points echoed in other reviews. Green saw Rupp as ‘the doyen of English ecclesiastical historians’ and described his last work as having ‘all the virtues which we have come to associate with him: deep but unpretentious learning, readability, religious insight, and a judicious understanding of the historical process’. At the same time, he found ‘an analysis in depth of what was happening in religion in response to a rapidly changing society’ to be lacking. Rupp’s characteristic contemporary allusions were, for Green, not always apt. Nonetheless, the essays were ‘full of insight and scholarship’.⁷⁷ An extended review by Geoffrey Nuttall saw in Rupp’s book ‘a series of soundings’, but little of a ‘sense of the ocean floor’. There were many cross-references to Wesley and even more to William Law, who was ‘the subject of a luminous chapter and in some ways the book’s centrepiece’. For Nuttall, there was little theology (‘in the strict sense’), but what ‘set Gordon Rupp alight’ was ‘Christian Spirituality’. In a long chapter on ‘The English Catholics’, papers by Eamon Duffy, later Professor of the History of Christianity, University of Cambridge, had been ‘put to good use’. Rupp had been co-supervisor of Duffy’s doctoral thesis. Nuttall was disappointed at the number of errors in the book, which might mislead readers ‘attracted by the slang and high spirited allusiveness of parts of the book that perhaps go back to scintillating lectures’. However, readers of Rupp would ‘be left in no doubt that ecclesiastical history need never be dull and that Rupp’s gallery of rogues and saints are genuine human beings’. Readers could also hardly fail to be touched ‘by Rupp’s own humanity and tenderness’ and by ‘the feeling for the eternities that pervades the book’.⁷⁸

Conclusion

This study has had a particular focus on the way in which Rupp’s historical work traced aspects of spiritual experience. His historical coverage went far beyond that theme, but it was for him a crucial one. However, so far no essay on Rupp has had his engagement with spirituality as its subject. Although Rupp’s own experience could be looked at more closely, that has not been the purpose here. Rather, it is his writing which has been utilised. While further research has developed his topics, his work remains significant.

Diarmaid MacCulloch, in 2017, viewed Rupp as one of the ‘great figures’ in Cambridge’s Divinity Faculty, whose early book, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition*, was ‘still well worth reading’, and whose last book, on English religion in the eighteenth century, was ‘a superb volume’.⁷⁹ Among the many who knew and were influenced by Rupp, Leslie Griffiths valued the friendship he had with ‘this extraordinary man’. Griffiths collected all Rupp’s books, and on retirement sent his theological library to a seminary in Fiji, but kept two publications: *Luther’s Progress to the Diet of Worms*, described by Griffiths as scholarly, succinct, profound and inspiring, and *Consideration Reconsidered*, which Griffiths appreciated as a witty, devastating, put-down of J.I. Packer on Church

⁷⁶ Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 427.

⁷⁷ V.H.H. Green, ‘Review’, *The English Historical Review*, 103/407 (1988): 429–431.

⁷⁸ Geoffrey Nuttall, ‘Review’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 38/2 (1987): 574–578.

⁷⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: The Reformation and its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 239.

of England-Methodist unity conversations.⁸⁰ A second minister and writer indebted to Rupp was Peter Howson, who arrived at Wesley House in September 1972. Rupp inspired Howson's interest in post-war Germany, and that was to lead, among other things, to his monograph on *Britain and the German Churches; the work of the Religious Affairs Branch of the Control Commission 1945–1950*.⁸¹ A third was Peter Brooks, who helped to ensure that Rupp's library was kept together. This collection, now in the Westminster College, Cambridge, library, would be of great value to anyone undertaking more extensive work on Rupp.⁸² Brooks noted that where Rupp is buried the headstone merely states: 'Methodist Preacher'. Although seemingly inadequate as a descriptor, Brooks suggests that the epitaph has validity as it 'proclaims the enigma of a remarkable individual in striking yet succinct language'.⁸³ Perhaps when Rupp is viewed as someone who looked for spiritual experience, in history and in ministry, the description becomes less enigmatic.

⁸⁰ Leslie Griffiths, email, 26 May 2024; J.I. Packer, ed., *Church of England and the Methodist Church* (Abingdon: Marcham Manor Press, 1963).

⁸¹ Peter Howson to Ian Randall, email, 19 December 2023; Peter Howson, *Britain and the German Churches, 1945–1950: The work of the Religious Affairs Branch in the British Zone* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021).

⁸² I am grateful to Helen Weller and Margaret Thompson, at Westminster College, for their help.

⁸³ Brooks, 'Ernest Gordon Rupp', 493.

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