

downplays the fact that this event was indeed a proto-Presbyterian meeting organised to discuss plans for revising the polity of the Church of England? Perhaps Patterson's suggestion that Perkins attended the meeting because he was 'asked ... to give his opinion on' the Book of Discipline (p. 46) overlooks the possibility that Perkins genuinely may have wanted to alter the established Church's polity? Indeed, Patterson's central argument – that Perkins 'considered the established Church sound in its liturgy, polity, and doctrinal standards' (p. 62) – may slightly devalue other evidence of Perkins's reforming tendencies and give the impression that Perkins was entirely content with the established Church's doctrine and discipline. Patterson appears somewhat reluctant to engage with the arguments of Patrick Collinson and Peter Lake about moderate Puritanism, despite the fact that his contentions strike at the heart of the debate about whether we can actually identify Puritans. Nevertheless, these points should not in any way detract from the fact that Patterson's work is a model for biographical study and an admirably rich and definitive account of Perkins's life and works. Undoubtedly, it will provoke further thinking about how we understand and define Puritanism and Protestantism in early modern England.

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*Practical predestinarians in England, c. 1590–1640.* By Leif Dixon. (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History.) Pp. viii + 389. Farnham–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014. £80. 978 1 4094 6386 3  
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A colleague of mine, after our brief conversation in my office, noticed – and misread – the title of the book under review as *Practical pedestrians* and exclaimed: 'What a strange title for a book!' Upon discovering that her statement was based on a misreading, and being shown the actual title, all she could say was, 'Wow, even stranger title for a book!' In contemporary intellectual *zeitgeist*, the idea of predestination could, in no circumstance, be practical. This colleague's comment, in an ironic way, encapsulates the perplexity that many historians might have toward the doctrine of predestination. And the primary authorial intention of Leif Dixon is precisely to show how this strange doctrine was indeed practically-grounded, pastorally-orientated, and – strangest of all – comfort- and assurance-fostering. Dixon is acutely aware of that fact, and thus opens his introduction with the statement that 'The belief in the doctrine of double predestination ... represents an extremely interesting cultural quandary.' As he surveys the religio-intellectual context of England between 1590 and 1640, Dixon raises a penetrating query: 'Why did this doctrine become so important at the time that it did, when it never had been so popular before, and has largely been derided ever since?' (p. 2).

In answering this crucial question, Dixon has, in this reviewer's view, convincingly demonstrated the significance and genuine explanatory power of this doctrine, which has been avoided by historians because it is viewed as 'too abstract and technical', and has been engaged by theologians, albeit in ways that 'artificially separates it from culture' (p. 4). One of the salutary historiographical contributions

that Dixon makes in *Practical predestinarians* is to excoriate the Weberian thesis for falsely illuminating the connection between the Protestant – viz., Calvinist for Max Weber – ethic and the spirit of capitalism. For Dixon, Weber has oversimplified and thus falsified the putatively incessant preoccupation among the predestinarians about assurance and the idea that all ministers pushed their parishioners between the two extreme modalities of spiritual being: presumption and despair, the ultimate upshot of which was only to exacerbate the very problem that they sought to resolve.

In seven richly documented and robustly argued chapters, Dixon puts Weber's thesis to rest, and along with it another popular – but equally misdirected – thesis, that propounded by R. T. Kendall. Kendall had argued in *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford 1981) that there is a distinction between 'experimental' and 'creedal' predestinarians, the former being the betrayers of the spirit of Calvin in that they constantly urged their flock to seek assurance of salvation through their personal experience and evidentiary presence of works, whereas the latter was a group of pastors who, in the true spirit of Calvin, made little attempt to drill the doctrine of predestination into their flock, although they certainly and creedally affirmed it. The main thesis in explaining the meteoric rise and fall of the doctrine of predestination as a cultural presence, if not phenomenon, was that it was a concrete, theological, pastoral response to a broader 'crisis of certainty in late medieval thought' (p. 15).

After offering a thoroughly contextualised continental account, with particular emphasis on Calvin's views on predestination, Dixon proceeds to chronicle in compelling ways the predestinarian pastoral and polemical theologies of William Perkins (chapter ii); Richard Greenham and Richard Rogers (chapter iii); Thomas Wilson's predestinarian *volte face* in his career (chapter iv); Robert Sanderson's serving of God and the times (chapter v); and variegated genres of preaching predestination (chapters vi and vii). For this reviewer, chapters iv and vii were particularly illuminating.

Whereas Perkins, Greenham, Rogers and even to a certain extent Sanderson were not surprising early modern English pastor-theologians to be included in *Practical predestinarians*, Wilson was a surprising inclusion, and that to very salutary effect indeed. What was particularly intriguing about Wilson's pastoral career, especially *vis-à-vis* the doctrine of predestination, was that he experienced a considerable change of perspective on how this thorny and mysterious doctrine functioned in his pulpit ministry. Dixon notes that initially and for most of Wilson's career, he indefatigably taught that 'saving faith was inherently assuring', thereby regarding as irrelevant and unnecessary the manifold 'crises over assurance', and portraying the saint as a self-assured and ever-progressing individual, with little or no need for contorted navel-gazing over whether she/he had it altogether figured out (p. 176). With remarkable economy of words, Dixon encapsulates the distinctive elements in Wilson's views in that he was 'extremely unusual in that he used the category of the afflicted conscience neither as a hermeneutic device nor as a means of regulating anxiety. In fact, Wilson was virtually unique because he denied ... that the afflicted conscience existed' (p. 190). Yet something happened for Wilson such that 'at the age of 57', he 'discovered empathy' (p. 197). In crystalline and nearly catechetical prose, Dixon offers a highly

compressed comparison of divergent pastoral strategies regarding predestinarian matters: 'Where Greenham's saints were afflicted and Rogers' focused forever on sin, Wilson paints a picture of an elect who try hard, do well and never fear. Within the careful balance that was required between the opposition of grace and sin, Wilson's glass was always half full' (p. 183). This serves as a remarkable example of a rhetorical, theological and historical Ockham's razor.

The last chapter is perhaps the strongest and most innovative in terms of expanding the historiographical context for understanding predestinarian pastoral theology, in this instance by considering the preaching of predestination as a case study of early modern English Protestant *ars moriendi*. Dixon carefully notes the tension points between Catholic *praxis* of *ars moriendi*, and the initial Puritan dis-ease with offering any panegyric for the dead, for some hard-line Puritans were strongly antiseptic toward funeral sermons for fear of them being misconstrued as prayers for the dead, or as he notes with pungency: '*ars moriendi* was not a natural bedfellow of the predestinarian metaphysic' (p. 324). But, as Dixon demonstrates clearly, since predestination was seen as 'the backbone around which life's uncertainties were cohered into a meaningful process', including the saint's death, English Puritans explored, indeed exploited the genre of funeral sermons to good pastoral effect, although – as Dixon adds with a dry sense of humour – such intentions did not exclude the unanticipated consequences of riots occurring after such sermonic exercise, as was the case for Emmanuel Utie (p. 303).

As superbly as Dixon presents the case for the predestinarian historiographical lens to be used as a perspective through which to view the Tudor-Stuart politics of religion, there still remain two *desiderata*. Since Dixon notes the quest for certainty amid much political, cultural and religious uncertainty in Reformation- and post-Reformation England, a more robust interaction with Susan Schreiner's equally superb monograph, *Are you alone wise? The search for certainty in the early modern era* (Oxford 2011) would have strengthened Dixon's case considerably more. To be sure, Dixon does interact with Schreiner in chapter i, but a more sustained attention to and interaction with her argument would have been welcome. Then, the structure of the book, particularly the absence of conclusion, is a concern. Dixon offers a rather hurried concluding postscript as a part of chapter vii, yet a separate chapter would have helped the reader better to remember the kernels of this otherwise excellent monograph. These quibbles notwithstanding, *Practical predestinarians* will remain as a first resort for anyone seeking to understand both this doctrine in the English context and the half-century of its heyday. For my money, I would find a book on 'practical predestinarians' to be far more scintillating read than one on 'practical pedestrians'.

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