

Michael Bush. *The Pilgrims' Complaint: A Study of Popular Thought in the Early Tudor North*.

Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009. xiv + 307 pp. index. append. bibl. \$124.95. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6785-8.

The English Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 is not new territory for Michael Bush, as he has published two previous books on the subject: *Pilgrimage of Grace* (1996) and *Defeat of the Pilgrimage of Grace* (1999). He now aims to top those two off with this work, which ambitiously seeks to understand this elite-led “rising of the commons” on the commons’ own terms.

The first chapter examines the multitude of evidence relating to the Pilgrimage. Although much of the written evidence was produced by the movement’s elites, Bush argues that the necessity of popular support for the Pilgrimage meant that those elites had to be careful to present the peasants’ concerns in terms the peasants could recognize and endorse as their own. Moreover, Bush seeks to balance this evidence with material that has clear popular origins as well as with actions taken by villagers in support of the Pilgrimage’s positions. Bush’s handling of all of this material is both scrupulous and imaginative; while acknowledging the limits of what he has, he does a great deal to persuasively argue his case.

In the next chapter on the religious views of the participants, Bush argues that papal supremacy and the cult of the saints, both under attack by the Henrician reformation in 1536, were not marginal but central to the commons’ concerns for “defense of the faith,” underpinning their alarm about the monastic dissolutions and their concern for their own parish churches. In the following chapter, Bush

places the Pilgrimage's complaints about taxation in multiple contexts, each of which illuminates a different aspect of the Pilgrims' concern. These include an awareness on the part of the Pilgrims of the innovative, apparently unconstitutional nature of some taxes, as well as the taxes' economic impact, the ongoing Tudor project of tax reform, and the success of commons tax revolts, not only in the past but, at least partially, the Pilgrimage of Grace itself.

The next two chapters are, to some degree, interrelated. Bush examines the Pilgrims' understanding of the polity that they saw themselves defending, arguing that their concept of rights and liberties was defined not simply by law but also custom, "the law of God . . . and the principles of the society of orders" (144). This discussion of how the Pilgrims viewed their relationship to the central government sets up the following chapter, in which Bush considers the Pilgrimage as a regional, northern rebellion and demonstrates that, while the Pilgrims certainly had a sense of themselves as "northerners," they were also aware of themselves as Englishmen and members of localities; moreover, Bush argues that these national and parochial concerns triumphed over regional ones.

The last chapter, on agrarian issues, is especially impressive. Here Bush brings to bear a career's worth of scholarship and expertise in order to painstakingly sort out the bewildering assortment of types of landholding, jurisdictions, and financial and other obligations in the North. In doing so, he makes the case that the peasants, for all their religious and social conservatism, were quite open to innovation in order to secure themselves the greatest economic benefit and were also seeking, in the case of tithes, to exert control over the clergy in the face of impending religious change. Bush also argues that the combination of such self-interest with the differing local situations, plus a perhaps inevitable lack of agreement between landlords and peasants on these issues, prevented a real consensus and ultimately doomed the Pilgrimage itself.

Meticulously and exhaustively researched, this last book in what might be called Bush's "Pilgrimage trilogy" is a fitting capstone, eloquently and persuasively elucidating as much as we will no doubt ever be able to ascertain about how the commons themselves understood this "rising of the commons" that was the Pilgrimage of Grace.

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