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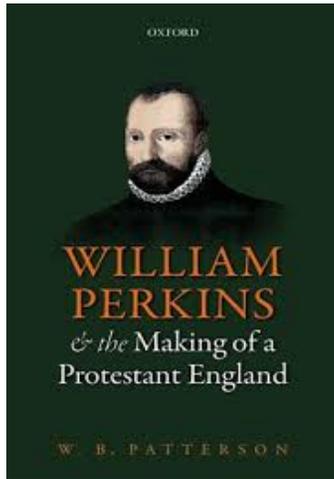
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W. B. Patterson

*William Perkins and the Making of Protestant England*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014

Pp. 288. ISBN: 978-0-19-968152-5. \$105  
[Hardback]. Purchase

Andrew S. Ballitch

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

W. B. Patterson's *William Perkins and the Making of Protestant England* is the fruit of decades of immersion in the world of Early Modern Britain. His book is an introduction to one of the foremost thinkers of the Elizabethan period and a repositioning of the man in the later English Reformation and therefore the formation of England as a Protestant nation.

Patterson's central thesis is that Perkins was not a Puritan, that is, one chafing under the officially prescribed worship forms and authority structures of the Church of England, but one of the most important mainstream English reformers. He defends this thesis by first placing Perkins and his work in the historical context of the Elizabethan Settlement, which he demonstrates was quite unsettled by Roman Catholics without and unsatisfied Protestants within. Perkins was suspected of Puritan sympathies, but these were unfounded according to Patterson. Rather, Perkins was the chief apologist for the

Church of England. Salvation was the most widely discussed theological issue of the time and Perkins was the leading English writer on the topic. His extensive work on the subject was consistent with the Thirty-Nine Articles. Perkins was a pioneer in casuistry, being the first Protestant in England and one of the first Protestants in Europe to publish on issues of conscience. He was a proponent of plain style and his influential preaching manual was the first written in English since the Reformation. Furthermore, his pursuit of social justice emphasized both individual and communal responsibility. Vocation and family, for Perkins, was of lasting importance for English culture.

Perkins was a major figure on the English scene for at least half a century after his untimely death in 1602. This is clear from repeated attacks and defenses of his work. Patterson traces Perkins's legacy through the striking figures for the publication of his books and the generation of English clergy he helped train. His works were not only the most prominent in England, but earned him a place at the European theological table. In sum, Perkins's career as preacher, teacher, and writer "transmitted a vision of the Christian life that was long at the heart of English Protestantism" (p.5).

Patterson persuasively argues that Perkins was loyal to the Church of England. At this point he is affirming the majority position among scholars. Yes, Perkins was a proponent for the established church. Yes, he spurned the term Puritan, which was a derogatory label during Elizabeth's reign. Yes, his two appearances before the authorities for non-conformity are lacking in source material and quickly blew over. Yes, his Calvinism was consistent with the establishment of his time. But do these realities negate his Puritan label? If Puritan is defined strictly as active opposition to the established church, as Patterson defines it, then yes. However, this is not entirely helpful. There were two primary reasons why later

Puritans, non-conformists, and dissenters claimed Perkins as their forefather: his piety and the reality that he would not have fit comfortably in the Church of England under the Stuart monarchs. Further, while Perkins was not an active opponent of the established church, he was an active proponent of further spiritual reformation. Patterson's dichotomy between loyal member of the Church of England and Puritan needs further proof.

Otherwise, Patterson's treatment of Perkins is incredibly valuable. Though several of the chapters were published previously in other forms, the book is held together by a coherent argument. His organization ensures that he addresses both the popular and lesser-known topics within Perkins's corpus. Perkins's writings on predestination and preaching are well known, while his apologetic, conscience, and social justice writings are dealt with less often. Patterson also uniquely incorporates the often-minimized polemics against Perkins after his death by Jacob Arminius and William Bishop. For each of these subjects within Perkins, Patterson draws on a range of the pertinent primary sources and pulls in an extensive amount of secondary material. One significant exception to this is the almost total omission of Perkins's actual sermons, which make up a large portion of his extant material. This absence is apparent even in the chapter on preaching. On the whole, each chapter is extremely well researched.

Part of legitimizing a Protestant England was connecting it with the past and Patterson rightfully emphasizes this. Perkins incorporated Christians from the Middle Ages to show continuity, but the primary battleground was the patristic era. In *A Reformed Catholike*, an apologetic piece, he cites various Church Fathers in defense of Church of England positions. In his systematic exposition of the Apostles Creed, he stresses and attempts to demonstrate that his interpretation is consistent with the orthodox Fathers. Perkins

extensively cites Patristic sources in his defense of predestination. Essentially, to be an effective apologist or theologian during this period, one had to be a patristic scholar. Perkins exhibits his capability in his work *Problema de Romanae fidei ementito Catholicismo*, which dealt with the importance and reliability of the writings of the ancient church.

Patterson's book fills a void as the first major scholarly treatment of Perkins and his thought as a whole. Further, it offers a revision of the commonly held interpretation of Perkins as a Puritan. It is welcomed by students of Early Modern Britain and related fields due to the former, and the latter will likely result in a refreshing of the conversation. It proves accessible, rewarding, and of interest to a variety of non-specialists.

Andrew S. Ballitch  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary